

## ORDINANCE NO. 23-11

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**CHAPTER 25**  
**ARTICLE II**  
**TO ESTABLISH THE HISTORIC**  
**DETROIT FINANCIAL DISTRICT AND**  
**TO DEFINE THE ELEMENTS OF**  
**DESIGN FOR THE DISTRICT.**

**AN ORDINANCE to amend Chapter 25, Article II, of the 1984 Detroit City Code by adding Section 25-2-182 to establish the Historic Detroit Financial District and to define the elements of design for the district.**

IT IS HEREBY ORDAINED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE CITY OF DETROIT THAT:

**Section 1.** Chapter 25, Article II, of the 1984 Detroit City Code be amended by adding Section 25-2-182 to read as follows:  
**Sec. 25-2-182. Historic Detroit Financial District.**

(A) A historic district to be known as the Historic Detroit Financial District is established in accordance with the provisions of this article.

(B) This historic district designation is certified as being consistent with the Detroit Master Plan.

(C) The boundaries of the Historic Detroit Financial District are as shown on the map on file in the office of the City Clerk, and are as follows:

Beginning at the intersection of the centerline of Woodward Avenue and the centerline of Jefferson Avenue to the centerline of Congress Street to the centerline of Bates Street to the centerline of Cadillac Square to the centerline of Woodward Avenue to Fort Street to the centerline of Griswold Street to the centerline of Lafayette Boulevard to the westerly line of Lot 17 (extended) of "Re-subdivision of Lot 14," Subdivision to the centerline of the alley south of and parallel to Lafayette Boulevard to the centerline of Shelby Street to the centerline of Lafayette Boulevard to the centerline of Cass Avenue to the centerline of the alley south of and parallel to Lafayette Boulevard to the centerline of Washington Boulevard to the centerline of Larned Street to the centerline of Shelby Street to the centerline of the alley south of and parallel to Congress Street to the centerline of Griswold Street to a line (extended) 50 feet N of the N line of Jefferson Avenue to a line 108 feet W of the W line of Griswold Street to the centerline of Jefferson Avenue to the point of beginning.

(D) The defined elements of design, as provided for in Section 25-2-2 of this code, are as follows:

(1) *Height.* The thirty-six buildings in

the district range in height from two (2) to forty seven (47) stories tall; the average being twelve (12) stories tall. The row of four (4) to five (5) story Victorian buildings on the east side of Woodward Avenue is sandwiched between single, taller buildings on each of its two corners. The prominent skyline-defining buildings on Griswold Street range in height from eighteen (18) to forty-seven (47) stories tall; buildings in the blocks between Shelby Street and Washington Boulevard are ten (10) or fewer stories, with the exception of the Detroit Bank and Trust Tower at 211 West Fort Street, which is twenty-eight (28) stories. In general, there is little uniformity of building heights within the district.

(2) *Proportion of Building's Front Façade.* The proportions of individual front façades vary greatly within the district. Buildings over ten (10) stories tall are significantly taller than wide, and are usually located on corners of blocks or occupy their entire block. Most other buildings in the district are also taller than wide, with notable exceptions of several buildings facing Fort Street, the Detroit Fire Department Headquarters at 250 East Larned Avenue, and a few smaller buildings on Shelby Street, which are wider than tall or proportionally neutral. The non-contributing building at 501 Woodward Avenue and the building at 611 Woodward Avenue are significantly wider than tall. Buildings with front-facing light courts, such as the Dime Building at 719 Griswold Street, appear to have two tall tower projecting upward from a single, multi-story base. The façades of the neo-classical style First National Building at 660 Woodward Avenue follow the irregular footprint of its site, and because of its substantial height, provide a backdrop to the small-scaled buildings adjacent to it on Woodward Avenue. Skyscraper buildings of the Art Deco style have multiple setbacks in their wall surfaces as the buildings rise, with faceted and decorative results. The Detroit Free Press Building at 321 West Lafayette Boulevard is composed of a center tower with two lower wings, neutralizing its proportions. Tall buildings of the International style tend to rise as a single slab. Where buildings that are individually taller than wide either share a party wall or abut each other, they may collectively form a row that is wider than tall, particularly on the east side of Woodward Avenue.

(3) *Proportion of Openings Within the Façades.* The buildings within the Historic Detroit Financial District are each composed of approximately thirty-five percent



(35%) to sixty percent (60%) openings in their front façades. Shapes and sizes of openings generally depend on the style and age of the buildings. Entrances are often centered prominently on the front façades, with revolving doors set back in an arched, covered area of portico. Large openings above the entrance openings, ground floors, and mezzanine levels in the base of the buildings frequently contain subdivided windows rising up through multiple stories. Plate glass storefront and display windows on the ground floors of commercial buildings are commonplace. Above the ornate bases of Neoclassical and Art Deco buildings and simpler Victorian buildings are rows of double-hung sash windows that are twice as tall as wide and are often arranged in pairs or triples, sometimes divided vertically by spandrels. Subdivided glazing is often situated within large, ornate arched, square or rectangular openings in the attic stories. Replacement windows that are fitted to existing openings are common in the district. Some International style buildings with curtain wall construction feature undivided faces of fixed pane glass, or individualized treatments, such as hexagonal shaped window glass in precast concrete frames of One Woodward Avenue.

(4) *Rhythm of Solids to Voids in the Front Façades.* Most buildings in the district are of steel-frame construction, which creates a structure for which windows are inserted in a regular arrangement of columns and rows between the base floor and the attic. The regular rhythm of windows arranged one over the other in a grid pattern prevails throughout the district. The base and attic stories of buildings are varied in architectural treatment, but may feature regular rhythms of arched, square or rectangular openings on first and attic stories. The Detroit Fire Department Headquarters at 250 West Larned Street features double firehouse doors within arched openings on its Washington Boulevard and West Larned Street Façades. The International style building at 611 Woodward Avenue features a checkerboard pattern of window placement, while the Federal Reserve Bank Annex at 160 West Fort Street features alternating horizontal bands of glass and marble panels supported by a stainless steel grid above its all-glass tall first story. In general, the district displays a variety of regularly arranged fenestration patterns.

(5) *Rhythm of Spacing of Buildings on Streets.* Rhythm of spacing on streets is generally determined by setbacks from

the side lot lines. Buildings consistently abut each other throughout the district; public rights-of-ways separates stretches of adjacent buildings when they occupy partial or entire blocks. Where there are parking lots as a result of building demolition, the original rhythm is broken.

(6) *Rhythm of Entrances and/or Porch Projections.* Most primary entrances are prominently centered on their front façades, especially on the classically derived buildings, and are commonly recessed within single or multiple ornamental openings. Some buildings have colonnades or monumental porticos, with their entrances set behind. International style buildings often have entire base stories recessed behind a colonnade of piers. The Guardian Building at 500 Griswold Street has its main entrance at its northwest corner, and Victorian commercial buildings along Woodward tend to have entrances to the sides of storefronts. Some corner buildings have corner entrances. Most entrances are at grade, with the exceptions of the buildings at 611 Woodward Avenue and the west elevation of 211 West Fort Street, which each feature a set of steps that rise with the slope of their sites, and United States District Court at 231 West Lafayette Boulevard, which sits on a high basement and has steps leading to its main entrance.

(7) *Relationship of Materials.* A great variety of building materials exist throughout the district, with concentrations of finished, pressed or glazed brick, limestone, Mankato stone, terra cotta, marble; cast and porcelain enamel and glass facing primary façades. Base stories are commonly faced or partially faced in granite. Materials utilized for window surrounds and frames are cast concrete, steel, aluminum, bronze and wood. Architectural embellishments tend to be in cast and carved stone, glazed terra cotta, Pewabic tile, and red sandstone. Common brick appears on side elevations that were not intended to be visible. Bronze grills, metal fire escapes, and aluminum and steel framing elements are also visible. In general, the district is rich in its varieties and relationships of materials.

(8) *Relationship of Textures.* The smooth surfaces of glazed or painted brick, glazed terra cotta, polished marble, polished granite, and large expanses of glass contrast with the matte finishes of limestone and unpainted brick with mortar joints. Where the basis of buildings are rusticated, they contrast with the smoother wall surfaces above. Repetitive pilasters and ornamental detail in masonry, terra cotta or metal, pri-





marily on belt courses and cornices, and the fluting of columns, contribute significantly to textural interest. Subdivided window sashes and treatments also contribute to textural interest, as do receding windows and wall planes, resulting in textural effects created by light and shade. Where those International style buildings have glass basis, a smooth, transparent textural effect results. In general, the district is extremely rich in textural relationships.

(9) *Relationship of Colors.* Major materials or light colors, such as beige, white, and cream, dominate the district. The natural brick colors of red, orange, and buff are also contrasted with beige or light gray trim elements and details. Painted brick, where it exists on the east side of Woodward Avenue, is in dark red and cream. Granite bases, where they exist, are black, red or gray. Window surrounds and sashes are shades of green, black, cream or white. Window and curtain wall glass is either colorless or tinted in shades of light green, black or gray. Stainless steel and aluminum are silver in tone; grills and grates are green or black. The Guardian Building at 501 Griswold Street is a historic landmark featuring orange brick and colored tile. Light poles tend to be deep green, black or gray. Fire escapes, where they exist, are generally painted black. The original colors of any building, as determined by professional analysis, are always acceptable for that building and may provide guidance for similar buildings.

(10) *Relationship of Architectural Details.* The styles of the buildings comprising the Historic Detroit Financial District range from Victorian commercial to International style; their architectural elements and details relate to their styles. Entrance bays, architraves, base stories, window frames, spandrels and cornices or attics are areas of the façades where architectural detail is concentrated. The small scale Victorian commercial buildings, concentrated on the east side of Woodward, have modified storefronts on their first floors and have lost their cornices and window hoods, greatly simplifying their original appearance. Approximately half of the buildings in the district are derived from classical styles, with an abundance of Neoclassical style buildings, a style well suited to judicial and financial institutions. Those classically inspired buildings are articulated as a base (bottom), shaft (mid-section) and attic (top). The base, often multi-storied, is heavily ornamented around the main entrance with columns, arches, and architectural sculpture.

Several buildings have rusticated stone bases, and some display colossal porticos. The shafts contain regular fenestration with ornamented spandrels, and their attics, including their cornices, are heavily ornamented. Art Deco commercial buildings are concentrated on Griswold Street, and in addition to their embellished entrances, feature setbacks at upper floor levels that are embellished, resulting in dramatic silhouettes that are part of their design. These Art Deco buildings also exhibit decorative tile work, mosaics, and large-scale architectural sculpture. International style buildings of the 1950s and early 1960s are concentrated on the east side of Woodward Avenue through to Griswold Street, and intermingled with classically inspired buildings on West Fort Street. They feature transparent first stories of glass that are visible to the interior, and are set in back of piers supporting the upper stories. Flagpole basis, lighting, and street names integrated with the larger buildings are treated decoratively. In general, the architectural detail on buildings in the district is very rich.

(11) *Relationship of Roof Shapes.* All of the buildings have flat roofs that cannot be seen from the ground. Utility penthouses and/or equipment enclosures are sometimes visible above the roofline, and are sometimes ornamentally treated.

(12) *Walls of Continuity.* Walls of continuity within the district are primarily created by the adjacent buildings with uniform elements, such as setbacks, materials, and styles. Except where broken by vacant lots, the district has a very high degree of continuity. Secondary walls of continuity are created by evenly spaced lighting fixtures, sidewalks and rows of trees along the sidewalks.

(13) *Relationship of Significant Landscape Features and Surface Treatments.* Throughout the district, sidewalks are concrete and roadbeds are asphalt, with the primary exception of brick-paved areas around Campus Martius at the northeast corner of the district. Street furniture is abundant throughout the district; planter boxes for trees are positioned along the public sidewalk on the west side of Woodward Avenue and the north side of West Fort Street, and in-ground trees line the east side of Griswold Street within stylized metal grates reflecting the geometric designs of the Guardian Building at 500 Griswold Street. Wall-mounted lighting fixtures are often integrated with the designs of the buildings and are situated at the tops of first story pilasters to illuminate the pedestrian way. Also sometimes integrated





with the taller buildings is lighting at the upper extremities that identify the buildings from afar, such as the flashing red globe of the Penobscot Building at 645 Griswold Street, the reproduction street lighting along Woodward Avenue consists of a tall steel ornamental, fluted pole carrying a double pendent and lanterns. On Griswold Street, the lighting consists of old metal fluted poles with more recent lanterns. Old ornamental poles exist along Washington Boulevard south of Michigan Avenue; the modern steel pole mounted variety is seen elsewhere. Some buildings have modern spotlights attached to light posts directed at their façade. Slender black, metal kiosks with directional information and a map are strategically placed at some prominent corners. Surface parking lots are few and provide intrusions to the otherwise dense concentration of buildings where they exist. Concrete columns supporting the Detroit People Mover are situated in the public rights-of-way on West Larned Street as well as Cass Avenue. A bronze sculpture is positioned at the plaza in front of 1 Woodward Avenue; another is positioned at the extreme southeast boundary of the district at Woodward Avenue and Jefferson Avenue; another is positioned in the space between 211 and 201 West Fort Street. A plaza with raised planting beds exists in front of the Annex of the Federal Reserve Bank at 160 West Fort Street. The curbed, landscaped median on Woodward Avenue identifies the roadway as Detroit's major thoroughfare.

(14) *Relationship of Open Space to Structures.* In general, the financial district is densely built-up; open space results from interruptions by public streets and alleys, and by a few intrusive surface parking lots. Awnings and canopies commonly extend into the public rights of way throughout the district. Signage bearing the name of the businesses of the Victorian buildings on the east side of Woodward Avenue is situated in a frieze above the first story. Elsewhere in the district the historic name of the building is commonly integrated with its original design while the names of current occupants are displayed on vertically oriented signs hanging at the corners of the buildings above the first story. The building at 611 Woodward Avenue bears its name of the roof penthouse screen. Skywalks connect buildings when their ownership is or was related, connecting One Woodward Avenue with 500 Woodward Avenue, commonly known as the Guardian Building; 151 West Fort Street, commonly known as the State Savings Bank

Building, with 607 West Shelby Street; and 201 West Fort Street with 211 West Fort Street. Wheelchair ramps provide access to an entrance on the Larned Street elevation of the Detroit Fire Department Headquarters at 250 West Larned Street and to an entrance on the Lafayette Boulevard elevation of the Federal Courthouse at 231 West Lafayette Boulevard.

(15) *Scale of Façades and Façade Elements.* The façades range from small in scale to monumental. Small-and-medium scaled buildings that contribute to the continuous streetscapes contrast with the large scale of skyscrapers that define Detroit's skyline. Elements and details are often monumental, such as porticos, colonnades, architectural sculpture, and large openings, and are meant to provide a grand presence when seen from up front and afar.

(16) *Directional Expression of Front Elevation.* The directional expression of individual front façades varies throughout the district, but generally, the expression of buildings on Woodward Avenue tends to be horizontal, with the exception of One Woodward Avenue and the First National Bank Building at 660 Woodward Avenue, which are vertical. On Griswold Street, where several prominent Art Deco skyscrapers exist, the overall directional expression is vertical. However, where buildings share party walls or one another, or are separated by narrow alleyways, the horizontal, or pedestrian, nature of the streetscapes is emphasized.

(17) *Rhythm of Building Setbacks.* Most buildings occupy their entire building parcels, resulting in uniformity of building setbacks. On the west side of Woodward Avenue, the building are set back, allowing for a generous public sidewalk with amenities. The Detroit Fire Department Headquarters at 250 West Larned Street is set back slightly on its two visible elevation to allow the fire trucks space to exit. Wherever a newer building is connected to an older building, particularly on West Fort Street, the newer International style buildings are set back and landscaped plazas are created.

(18) *Relationship of Lot Coverages.* Lot coverage by the buildings in the district is generally one hundred percent (100%), as the vast majority of buildings occupy their entire lots. In the cases where a public outdoor amenity exists, its features are integrated with the design of the building.

(19) *Degree of Complexity Within the Facades.* The district contains façades





with various degrees of complexity, depending on style. The Victorian commercial and Neoclassical buildings are straightforward in their massing, fenestration, and architectural detail. The Art Deco skyscrapers appear more complex in their details and ornamentation, but especially in their massing as the setbacks of the upper stories display different massing and heightened detail. Modern buildings may appear straightforward in their design but are complex in their geometric forms, use of materials, and subtle detail.

(20) *Orientation, Vistas, Overviews.* The Historic Detroit Financial District is a densely built up district of commercial and governmental buildings in Detroit's Central Business District on lower Woodward Avenue and west of Woodward Avenue. Its proximity to Detroit's Civic Center, the Detroit River, the Washington Boulevard and Capitol Park Historic Districts, Cadillac Square, and Campus Martius provide dramatic views and vistas. Detroit's skyline is composed of the silhouettes of the tallest buildings in the district, while West Congress Street provides a cavernous quality to a relatively narrow street.

(21) *Symmetric or Asymmetric Appearance.* While individual buildings display a high degree of symmetry in their major façades, the district on the whole is diverse in its array of quality building designs.

(22) *General Environmental Character.* The Historic Detroit Financial District consists of a dense cluster of major, archi-

tect-designed commercial buildings in an eight-block, grid-plan section of downtown Detroit just north of Hart Plaza and the Detroit River. Its historical importance is emphasized by its number of iconic buildings that make up Detroit's skyline, and its smaller buildings that result in a walkable downtown. The Detroit Department of Transportation-operated bus system and the People Mover provide transportation in and around the district providing ease of access to major sporting events, conventions, and restaurants, in addition to the historic buildings that are destination in and of themselves.

**Section 2.** All ordinances or parts of ordinances, or resolutions, in conflict with this ordinance are repealed.

**Section 3.** This ordinance is declared necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health, safety, and welfare of the people of the City of Detroit.

**Section 4.** If this ordinance is passed by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of City Council members serving, it shall be given immediate effect and shall become effective upon publication in accordance with Section 4-116 of the 1997 Detroit City Charter; otherwise, it shall become effective in accordance with Section 4-115 of the 1997 Detroit City Charter.

(J.C.C. p. ) July 26, 2011  
 Passed: September 20, 2011  
 Approved: September 27, 2011  
 Published: October 31, 2011  
 Effective: October 31, 2011

JANICE M. WINFREY  
 City Clerk



