

ADDRESS: 25 S VAN PELT ST

Proposal: Alter facades and construct three-story addition with penthouse and roof deck

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: 25 Van Pelt Real Estate Advisors

Applicant: Christopher Stromberg, S2 Design

History: 1894; Evening Home and Library Association; Westray Ladd, architect; 1939 addition, Big Brothers Association, Magaziner & Eberhard, architects

Individual Designation: None

District Designation: Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District, Contributing, 2/8/1995

Staff Contact: Dan Shachar-Krasnoff, daniel.shachar-krasnoff@phila.gov

BACKGROUND:

Located between Ludlow and Chestnut Streets in the Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District, the property at 25 S. Van Pelt Street features two notable buildings: a Renaissance Revival portion to the south, designed by Westray Ladd and constructed in 1894; and a modern section, designed by Magaziner & Eberhard and constructed in 1939. The 1939 project entailed the rehabilitation of the entire complex, including exterior modifications to and partial demolition of the 1894 building, which was originally twice as wide. The 1939 addition included a large gymnasium, lecture rooms, basement workshops, and a caged-in roof court.

In February 2020, the Historical Commission granted final approval to the conversion of the 1939 addition into three attached townhouses with a one-story addition on the gymnasium roof. The plans did not propose any changes to the 1894 building. That plan was not implemented.

The current proposal, which calls for a four-story addition on the gymnasium with eight apartments, was first submitted for review at the November 2025 Architectural Committee meeting. In response to the staff recommendation, that proposal was withdrawn and has been resubmitted for the January 2026 Architectural Committee meeting. The revised proposal still includes four stories above the former gymnasium. The overbuild is significantly differentiated from the gymnasium with a contemporary glass curtain wall. The revised submission leaves the cornice line of the gymnasium intact. The proposal amends the fenestration pattern on the east and west facades to accommodate the change in program while referencing the previous approval by the Historical Commission. The balconies no longer project, and two garage doors have been added to the west facade. The rooftop would include a common penthouse space and deck. The application proposes the rehabilitation of the 1894 building.

SCOPE OF WORK:

- Cut down/enlarge window openings to create garages and a pedestrian entrance;
- Remove brick to create second-floor windows at the front and rear;
- Alter banded gymnasium windows; and,
- Construct four-story addition with roof deck.

STANDARDS FOR REVIEW:

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines include:

- *Standard 2: The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*

- The application, echoing the previous Historical Commission approval, proposes to remove substantial portions of existing brick, altering the materials and features that characterize the property, and therefore does not comply with Standard 2.
- *Windows Guideline | Not Recommended: Changing the number, location, size, or glazing pattern of windows on primary or highly-visible elevations which will alter the historic character of the building; Cutting new openings on character-defining elevations or cutting new openings that damage or destroy significant features; Adding balconies at existing window openings or new window openings on primary or other highly-visible elevations where balconies never existed and, therefore, would be incompatible with the historic character of the building.*
 - This application, like the plans previously approved by the Historical Commission, proposes to alter the number, location, and size of windows on the primary elevation of the former gymnasium.
 - The Historical Commission previously approved a garage opening and entry doors on the primary first-floor façade; however, the additional garage opening further obscures the original design of the gymnasium addition.
 - The application does not comply with the Windows Guideline.
- *Standard 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*
 - Although the proposed addition is differentiated from the historic building it is incompatible in material and scale.
 - The application does not comply with Standard 9.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Denial, pursuant to Standards 2 and 9 and the Windows Guideline.

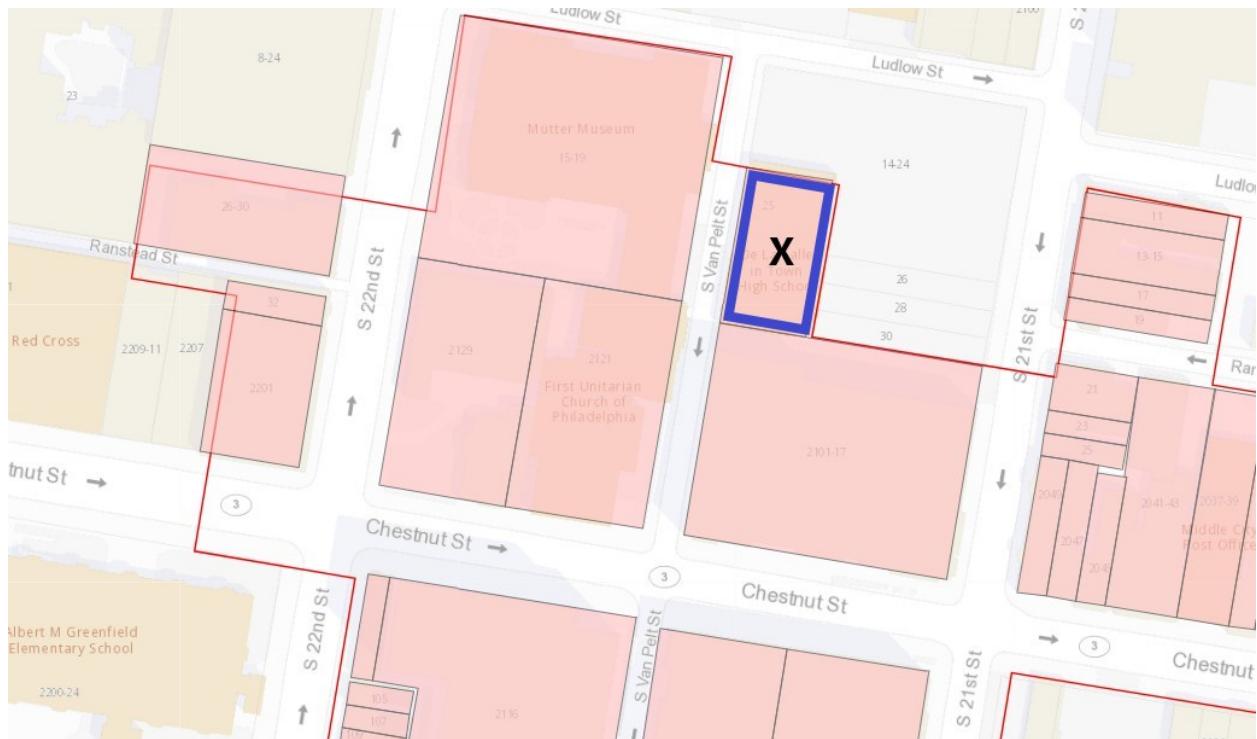


Figure 1. Location of subject property at north end of the Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District. The Historic District boundary is in red.

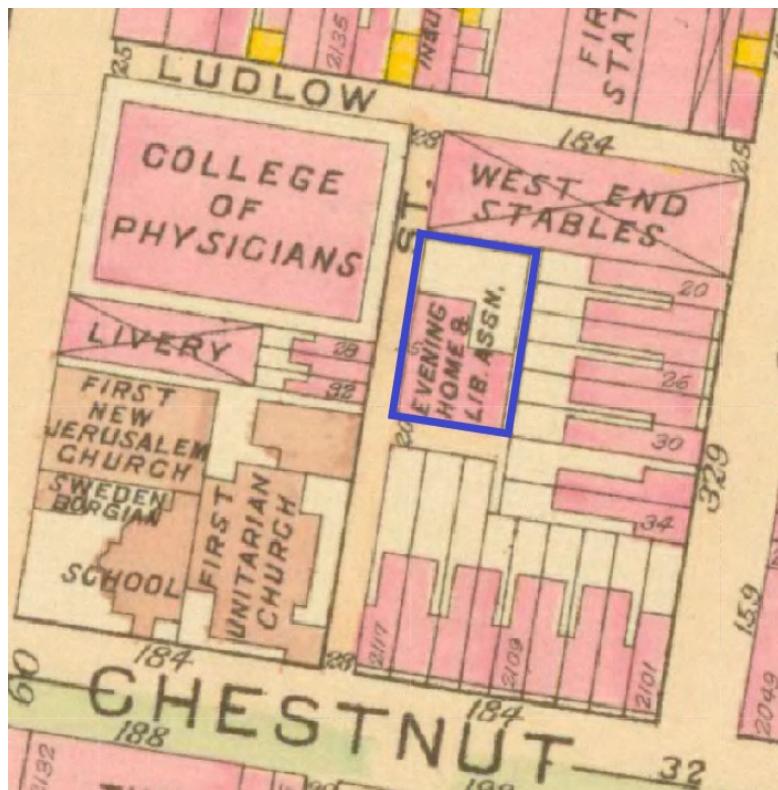


Figure 2. 25 S. Van Pelt St., Evening Home & Library Association, 1910.

Source: G.W. Bromley, *Greater Philadelphia Geo History*.



Figure 3. 25 S. Van Pelt St. West façade (primary), right (altered), Westray & Ladd 1894 and gymnasium addition, Magaziner & Eberhard, 1939 (left), December 2025.



Figure 4. 25 S. Van Pelt St. West façade (primary) gymnasium addition, Magaziner & Eberhard, 1939, December 2025.



Figure 5. 25 S. Van Pelt St. East façade, left (altered), Westray & Ladd, 1894 and gymnasium addition, Magaziner & Eberhard, 1939 (right), December 2025.

January 27, 2026

Original submission: 02.14.2020
Resubmission #1: 10.31.2025
Resubmission #2: 01.27.2026

Philadelphia Historical Commission
Architectural Committee
1515 Arch St. 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

To whom it may concern,

The following REsubmission is for the PHC Archtiectural Committee review related to the proposed changes to the property located at **25-29 S Van Pelt St.** Specifically, our proposal involves modifications and additions to the 1939 portion (by Magaziner and Eberhard), which sits on the north end of the property. Proposed renovations and restorations to the 1894 structure (by Westray Ladd), which sits on the south end of the property, will eventually be part of the overall redevelopment effort. However, we will be seeking a review of that portion of the project at a later date.

Several years ago, our team presented a design proposal for this project to the Historical Commission. That proposal was approved on **February 14, 2020**. We are including a copy of that presentation for your reference. After receiving this approval, our team spent several years further developing those Plans and discussing the scope and viability of the project with various colleagues and agencies. In the end, we felt strongly that revisiting some of the design strategies, as well as expanding the scope, would be beneficial to the overall development without diminishing the integrity of the of the 1939 addition or the original 1894 building. Thus, we are seeking support for the following *amended* design proposal.

To clarify, the main differences between the 02.14.2020 proposal and the current one relate to the number stories proposed above the 1939 building: with the previous design proposing 1 additional story and the latest design proposing 3 additional stories + a “communal” space on the roof. As well, we are proposing a different type of Residential Use for the development: with the previous design proposing 3 SFDs in the 1939 building + a ‘TBD’ Use in the 1894 building and the latest design proposing a Multi-Family Use (total of 8 units) that includes the interior space in the 1894 building.

As we noted in our previous presentation, we took several cues from the 1939 Magaziner and Eberhard design to inform the proportion and detailing of our proposed modifications to the mid-century style façade. In our latest proposal, we are seeking to add some additional fenestrations to both the West and East façades of the existing structure by utilizing and extending many of the ‘lines’ that currently exist within the rhythms of the structural bays. And in regards to the aesthetics of the addition above, we are seeking to differentiate (but complement) the 1939 facade by creating a light, modern façade of mainly curtainwall glass as well as “floating” the addition above the existing cornice. Lastly, our intention is for the footprint of the proposed 3-story addition to directly match the footprint of the 1939 building (i.e. no setbacks).

As discussed at our previous presentations, the program-driven design of the existing 1939 façade offers no exterior access along Van Pelt and presents vast expanses of window-less brick wall at the Second Floor level. As we very much appreciate the proportional relationship formed between the existing areas of brick and the large ribbon window at the Third floor, we are intending to maintain the exact dimensions of the clerestory opening and reglaze the area with a combination of clear and spandrel glass. We have also continued to preserve as much of the existing façade as possible by laying out the interiors at the lower levels in a manner that utilizes existing openings and minimizes the amount of brick removed. A series of centrally-located balconies on floors 2-6, will tie the addition to the existing building as well as separate it from the existing aesthetic. Lastly, we’re planning to clad the north, east, and south facades of the addition (where we are unable to have windows due to the adjacent property lines) in light-colored metal panels in order to distinguish it from the existing brick façade and will utilize the same metal paneling at the infill areas on existing façade, where any existing (and new) openings in the brick occur.

A basic breakdown of revised program is noted below. As such, the overall proposed redevelopment is to include:

Eight (8) Residential Units

- Three (3) units located within the 1894 building
- Two (2) units located within the 1939 building
- Three (3) units located within the proposed addition

Nine (9) Off-Street, Accessory Parking Spaces

- Seven (7) spaces located within the 1939 building (accessed via Two [2] new garage doors)
- Two (2) open-air spaces located in the “side yard” to the south of the 1894 building

Two (2) Residential Entry Points

- One (1) that shall serve the First Floor unit in the 1894 building
- One (1) that shall serve the remaining Seven (7) units

NOTE: There will also be a third access point (egress-only) on the east façade (in the alley)

One (1) Communal Penthouse space & Roof Deck (that serves all of the units)

NOTE: In a departure from the 02.14.20 proposal, in the spirit of the original relationship between the two buildings, our intention is to join the interior spaces of 1894 and the 1939 buildings so they exist as one cohesive (in this case, multi-family) development.

We also wanted to note how we addressed some recent overview/staff recommendations provided by Architectural Committee. Our team decided to take a closer look at the proposed design based on the comments. In particular, we wanted to address the Commission's concerns regarding the West Elevation of the 1939 Magaziner building. Below are bullet points highlighting the changes we've made in relation to preserving the historic character, maintaining glazing patterns, and creating a differentiated but compatible addition:

- We refined the size and location of the proposed openings on the West facade of the 1939 addition in order to be more sensitive and respectful to the original Magaziner design. We are maintaining the exact dimensions of the clerestory “ribbon” window, as suggested by the Historic Commission
- We eliminated the protruding portions of the balconies - at all levels. We feel this is less disruptive to the overall ‘form’ of the clerestory opening in the existing facade and allows a cleaner, more contiguous relationship between the existing facade and the facade of the proposed addition above. As well, we have incorporated “punched” openings for the windows at the 2-floor of the west façade in order to not “compete” with the aesthetic of the ribbon window
- We maintained the cornice line (now uninterrupted) of the 1939 building, thus allowing a more distinct separation of the proposed addition to the original building and articulated the façade of the addition in a way that it “floats” (+/- 2 ft) above the cornice line.
- We incorporated a spandrel element between the windows & terraces on the Second & Third floors of the West facade, thus maintaining the ribbon window that spans across the façade. This in turn highlights the compatible massing and proportions that occurs between the existing building and proposed addition above

The following illustrates some of the reasoning behind our latest revisions:

Even though we believe the existing clerestory window in the gym doesn't necessarily represent a true "ribbon window" in the pure Modernist sense, it's clear that there is still a deep appreciation for it and its connection to mid-century modern aesthetics and, in particular, some of the work coming out of the "Philadelphia School" architects at the time. Thus, we feel our latest iteration respects this affinity and retains the character of the 1939 Magaziner addition and its relationship to the 1894 Ladd building, while also utilizing the three structural bays and existing lower windows openings to provide the necessary building access and create a more inviting street presence along Van Pelt.

As was noted in the Background section of the Commission's overview, this entire site went through some fairly dramatic changes between the 1890's and the 1930's - including demolishing half of Ladd's stunning Italianate structure. As well, we can see from Magaziner's original design drawings, that there was even a proposal to demolish the *entire* Ladd building and construct a larger 5 - 6 story building in its place. Of course, we're all glad that didn't happen! However, based on the massive, oversized concrete columns and beams installed in the 3-story structure that was ultimately built, it seems clear that additional floors were intended to eventually be added to this building someday - possibly when the funding became available. This design idea is even further strengthened by our structural engineering analysis which confirmed that 4 additional stories can indeed be added without modifying the existing structure. Relatedly, given the CMX-4 Zoning of virtually all of the properties in this area - the overall height of the proposed development (existing + addition) still remains well below what is allowable by-right.

The HC also expressed some concern regarding the scale/height of our proposed addition. In addition to the desired program, one of the driving forces behind the proportions of our proposed addition was create a massing that directly related to the proportions of the existing 1939 building...allowing a balanced 'play' between the two massings. As well, we feel a 3-story addition atop this building remains a somewhat modest gesture relative to the scale of the existing (and proposed) structures that are located adjacent to our property as well as the surrounding blocks. We have included a page in our presentation that clearly illustrates that 6-story building with a roof height of roughly 82' will actually be dwarfed by some of the nearby towers. That said, in considering the scale of the addition as it directly related to our building, we would look to the recently-competeted, elegantly designed adaptive-reuse project at 2300 market, where a 5-story addition was added atop an historic 3-story building.

Lastly, although Ladd's 1894 building is not officially part of this particular presentation, we wanted to take this opportunity to state that we feel the meticulous restoration we have planned for this beautiful Italianate gem is really the highlight of this entire redevelopment. And this is certainly not new territory for us as *both* the owner/developer and the architects have won several *Grand Jury* awards from the *Preservation Alliance* on past projects. Of course, as you well know, these types of restorations are extremely costly and labor-intensive and often require other parts of a project to help off-set and balance out those efforts. We are looking forward to working closely with the Historical Commission in the near future to breathe new life into that stately structure and restore it to its original glory.

We look forward to the outcome of the Historical Commission's Administrative Review regarding our proposed changes to this project and we thank you, again, for considering this application.

Sincerely,



Christopher Stromberg
S2 Design



 **S2 DESIGN**
1536 Montrose St
Phila, PA 19146
215.300.5030

Owner:
25 Van Pelt Real Estate Advisors

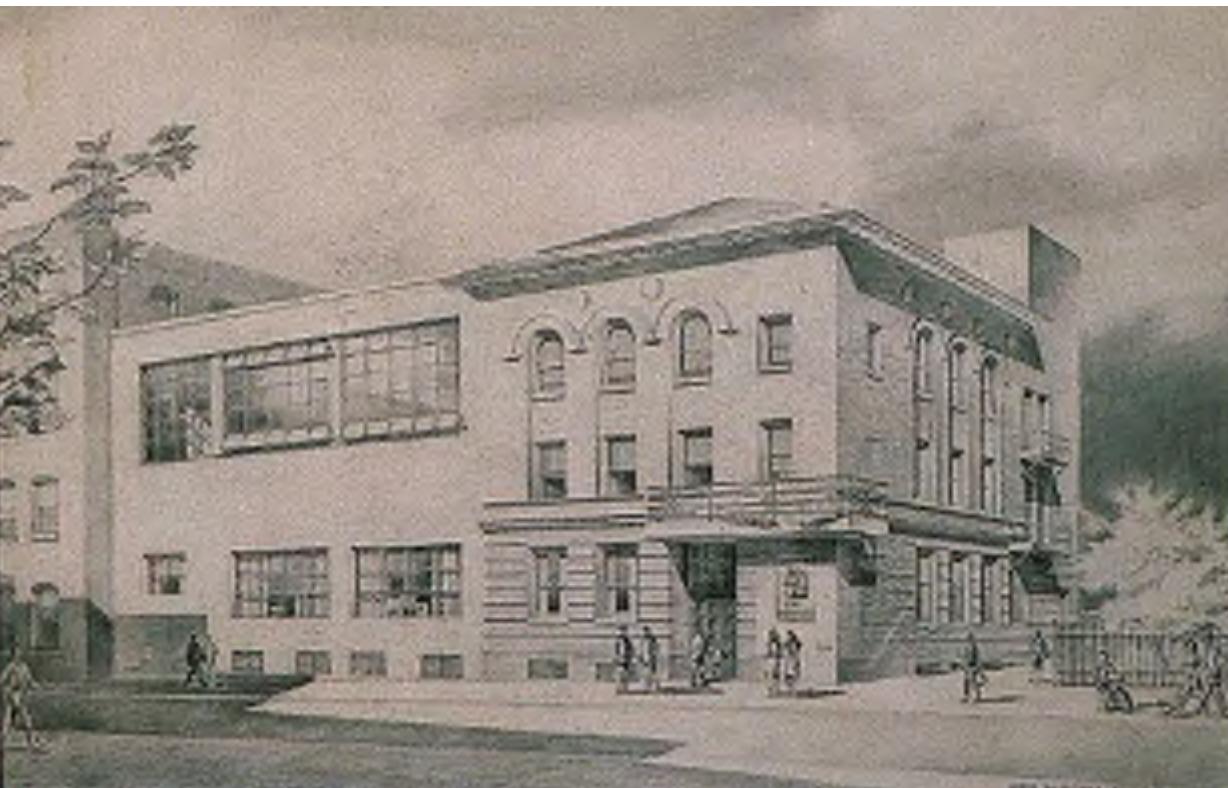
25 S VAN PELT ST

Resubmission to the *Phila Historical Commission's Architectural Committee*

Original submission: 02.14.2020

Resubmission #1: 10.31.2025

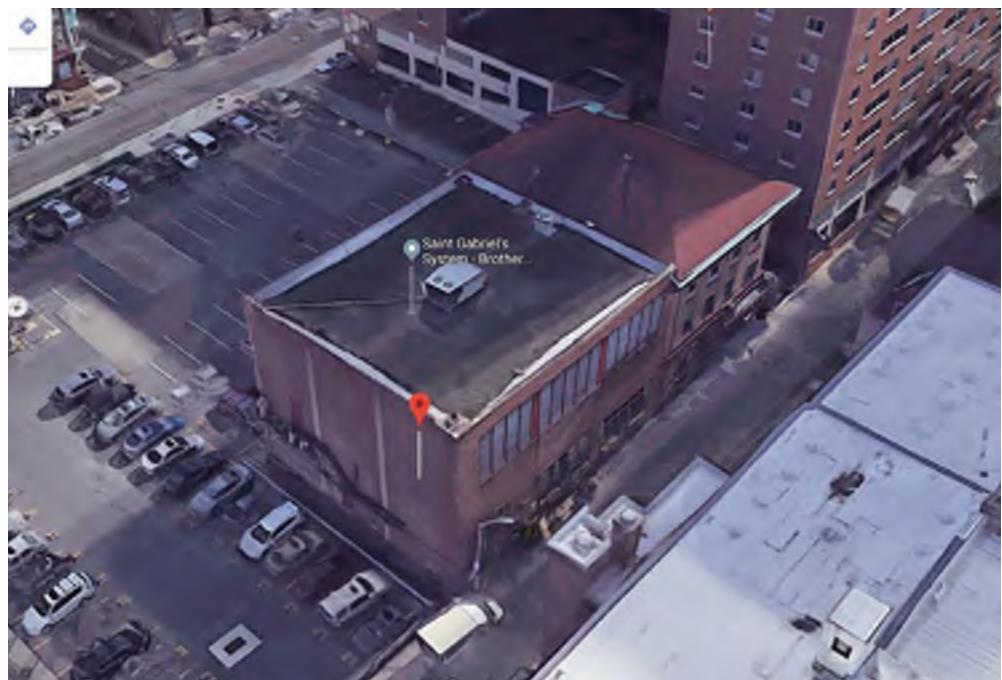
Resubmission #2: 01.27.2026



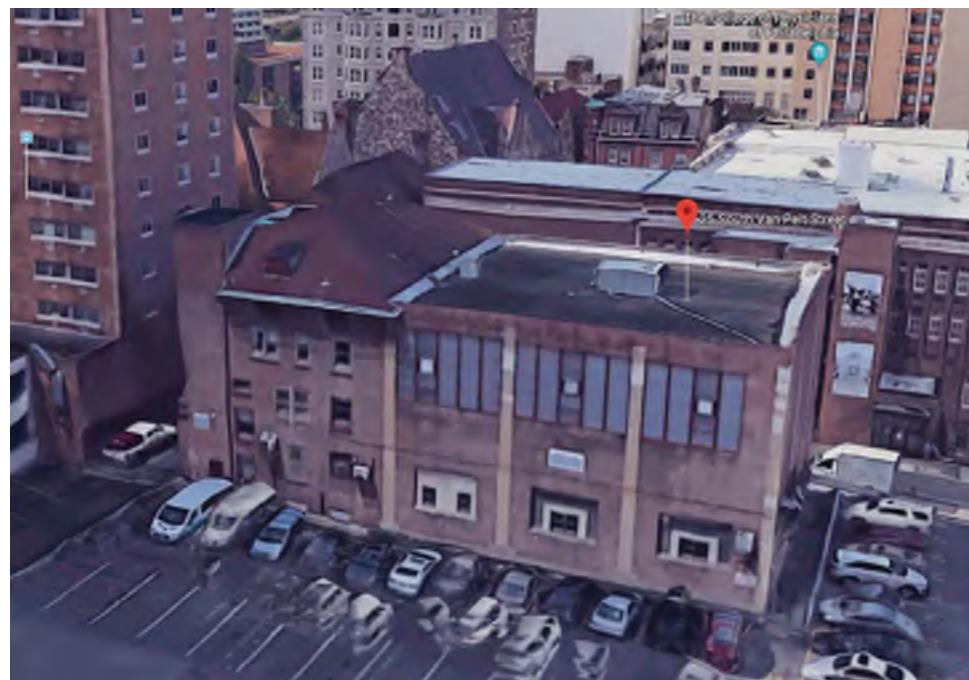
Circa 1939



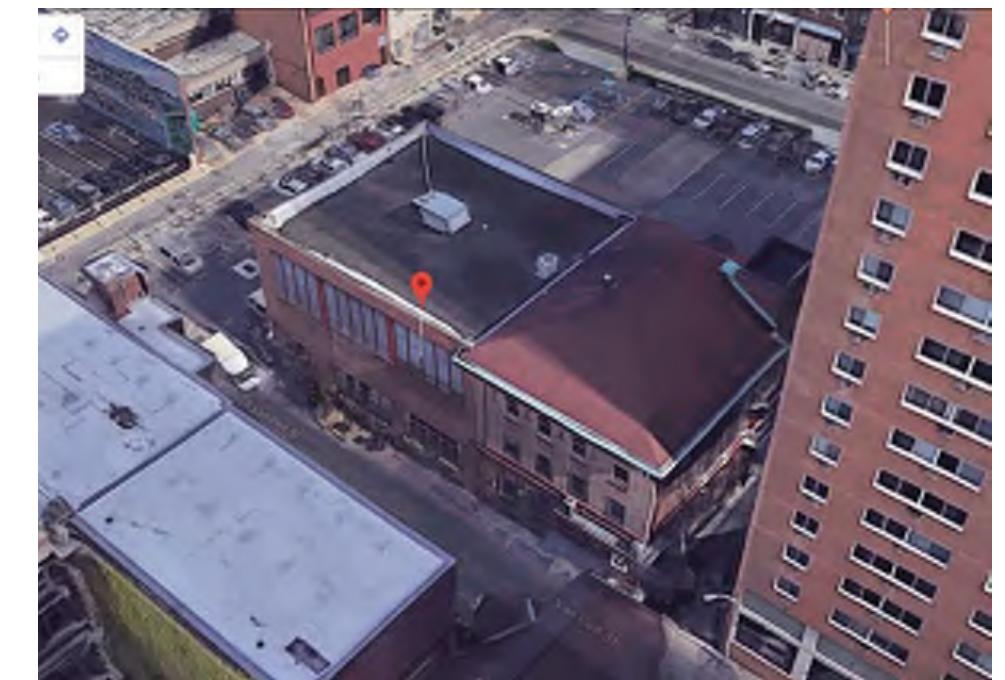
Circa 1918



Aerial View Looking SE



Aerial View Looking West



Aerial View Looking NE



Looking North - S Van Pelt St



Looking NW - First Unitarian Church



Looking NE - River West Parking Garage



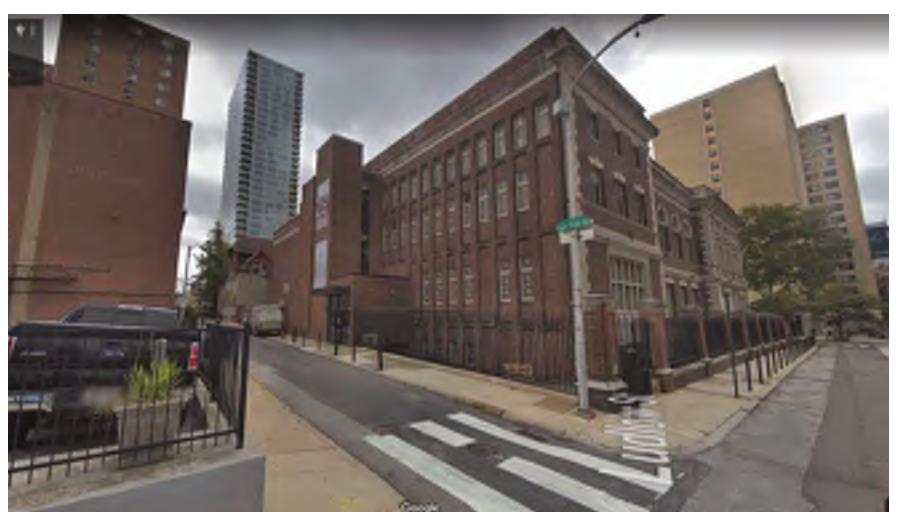
Looking West - Little Miracles Childcare



Looking NW - College of Physicians



Looking SE - College of Physicians Parking



Looking SW - Van Pelt & Ludlow - College of Physicians



Looking South - Parkway Lot



Looking West - Parkway Lot and Precedent



West & South Elevation



North Elevation



West Elevation



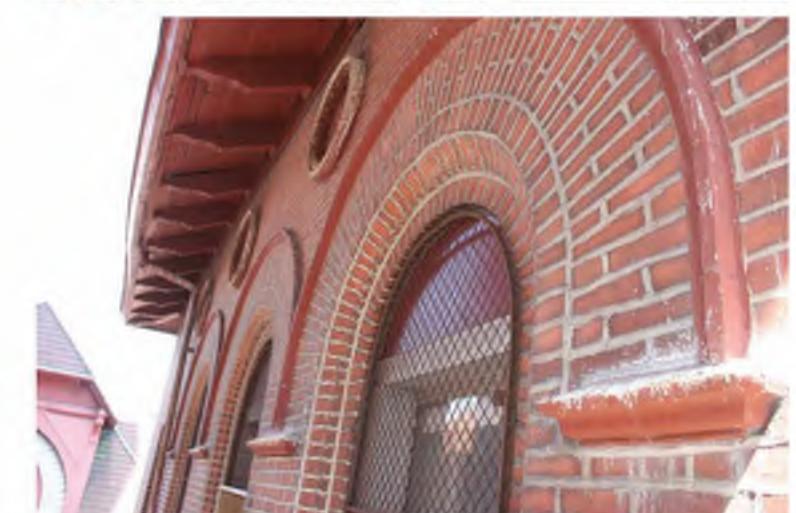
East Elevation



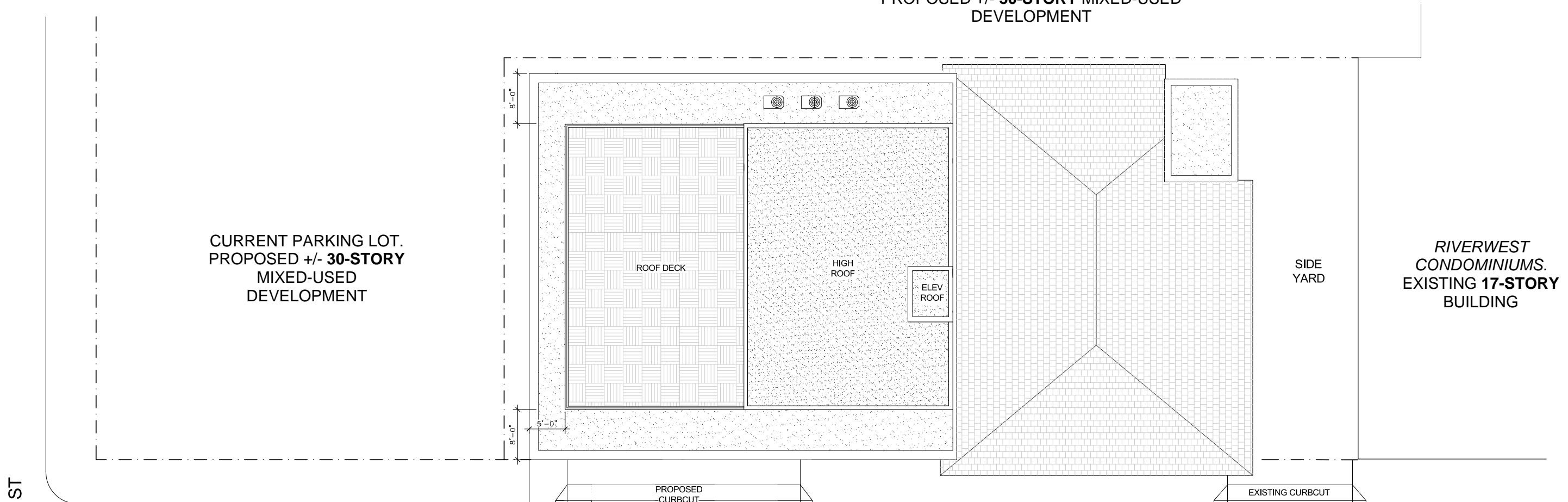
S2 DESIGN
1536 Montrose St
Phila, PA 19146
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EXTERIOR ELEVATIONS

25 S VAN PELT ST
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103



CURRENT PARKING LOT.
PROPOSED +/- 30-STORY MIXED-USED
DEVELOPMENT



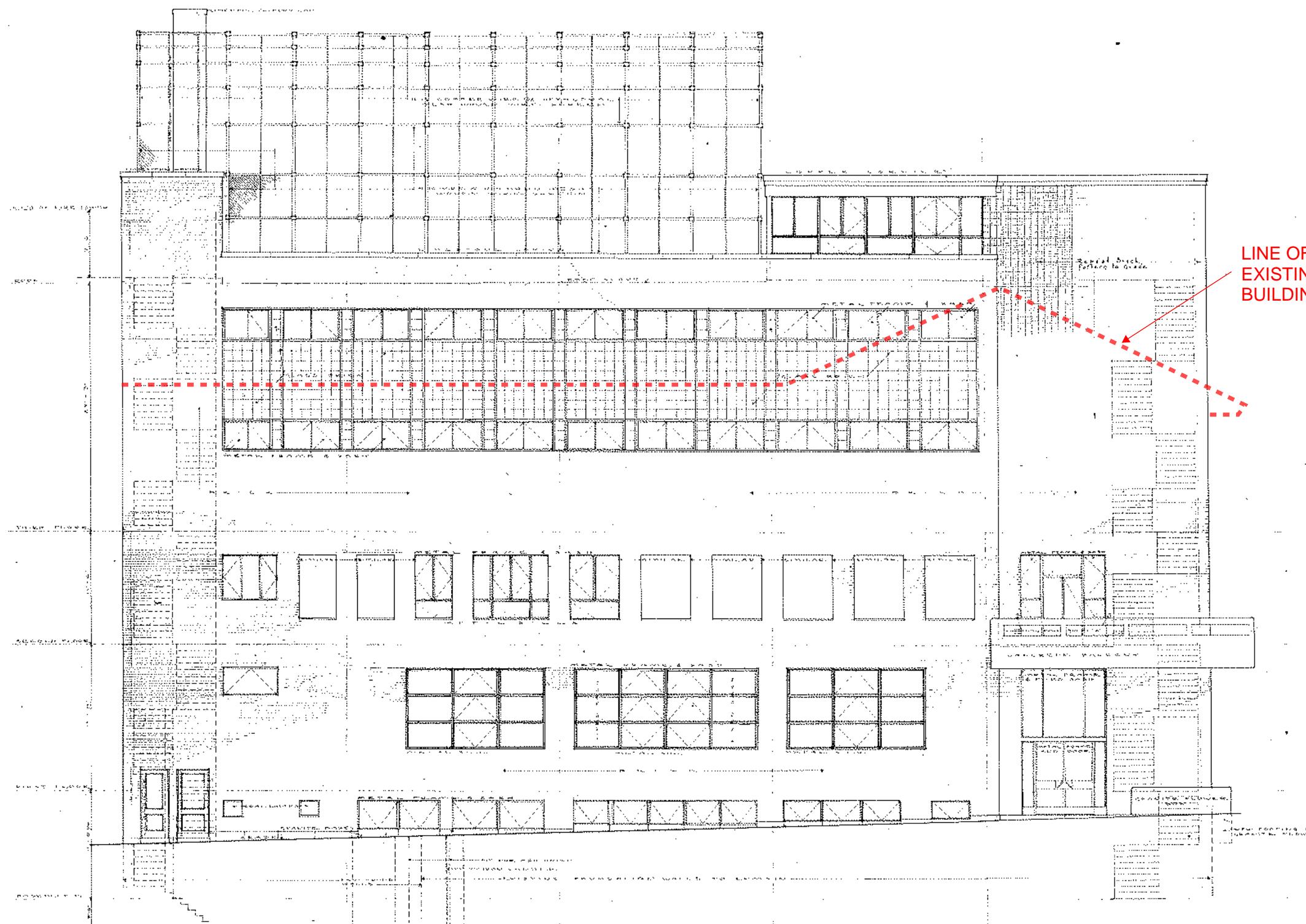
LUDLOW ST

S VAN PELT ST

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS
4-STORY (+/- 50 FT HIGH)
BUILDING

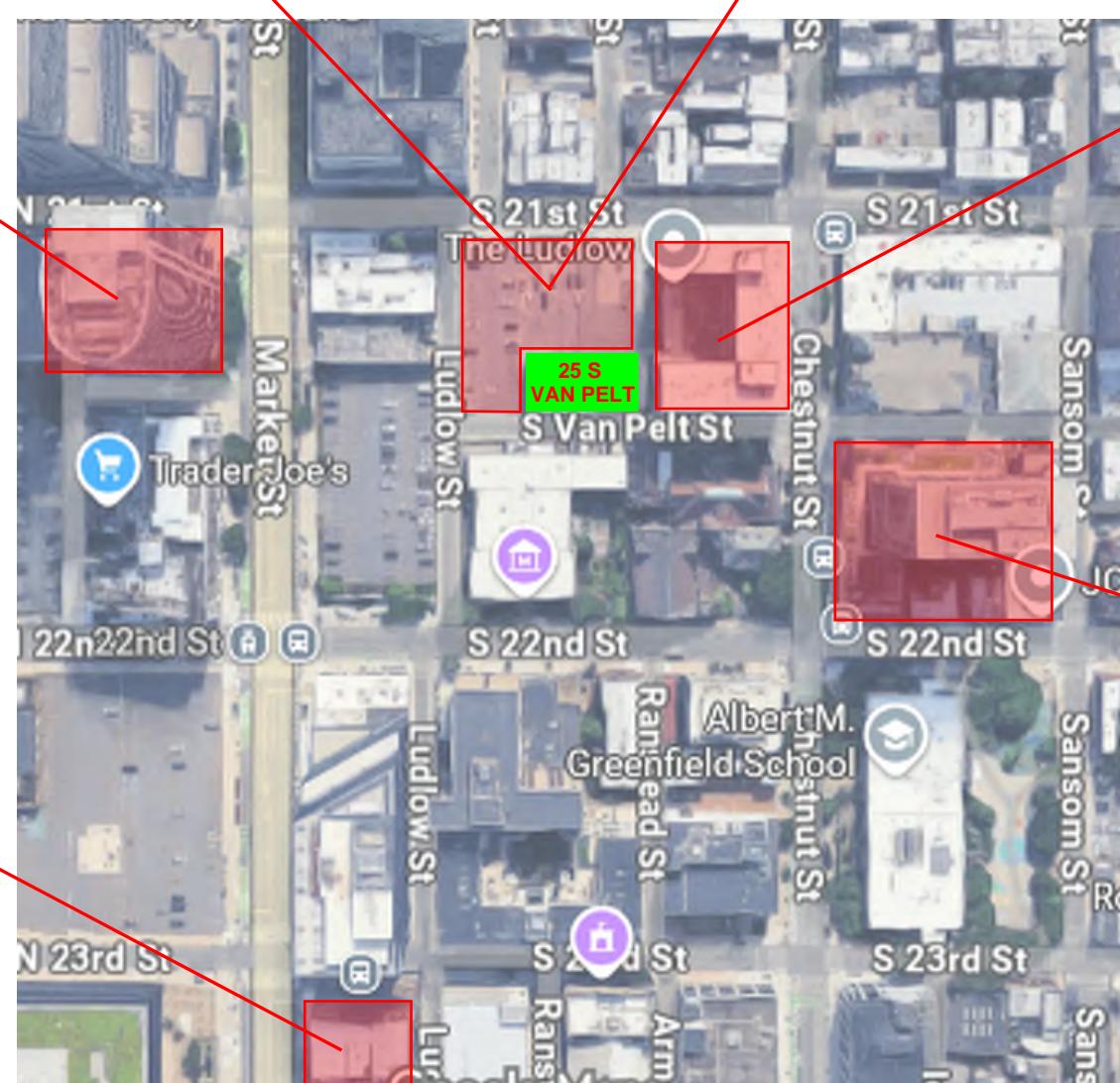
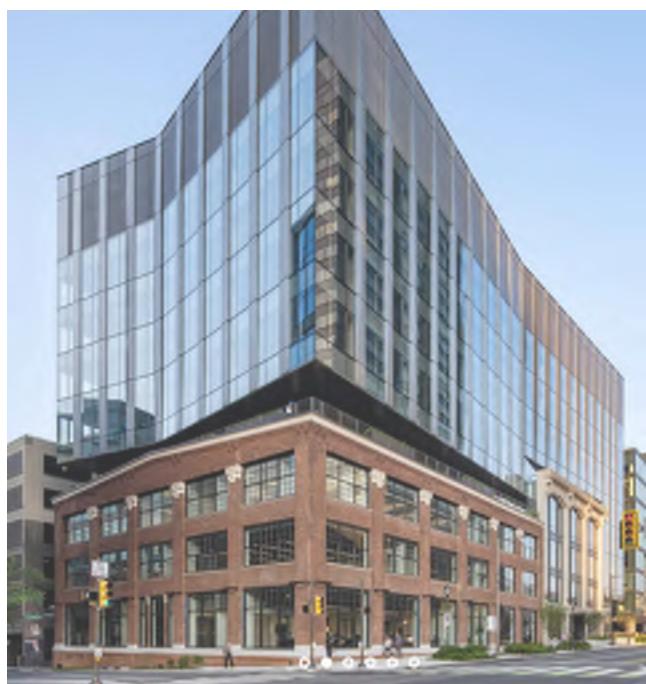
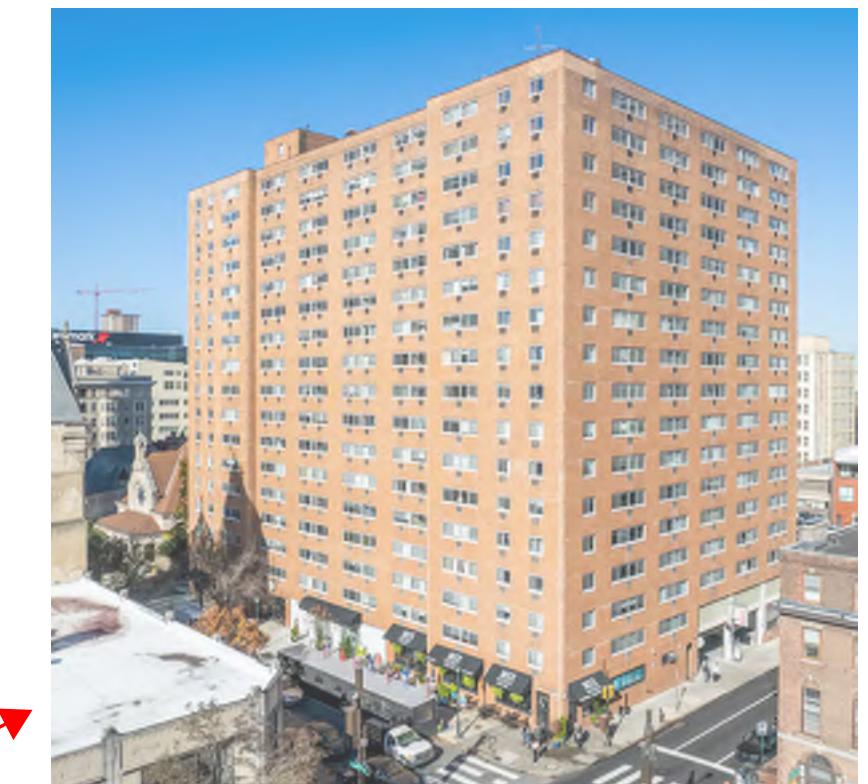
PARKING LOT

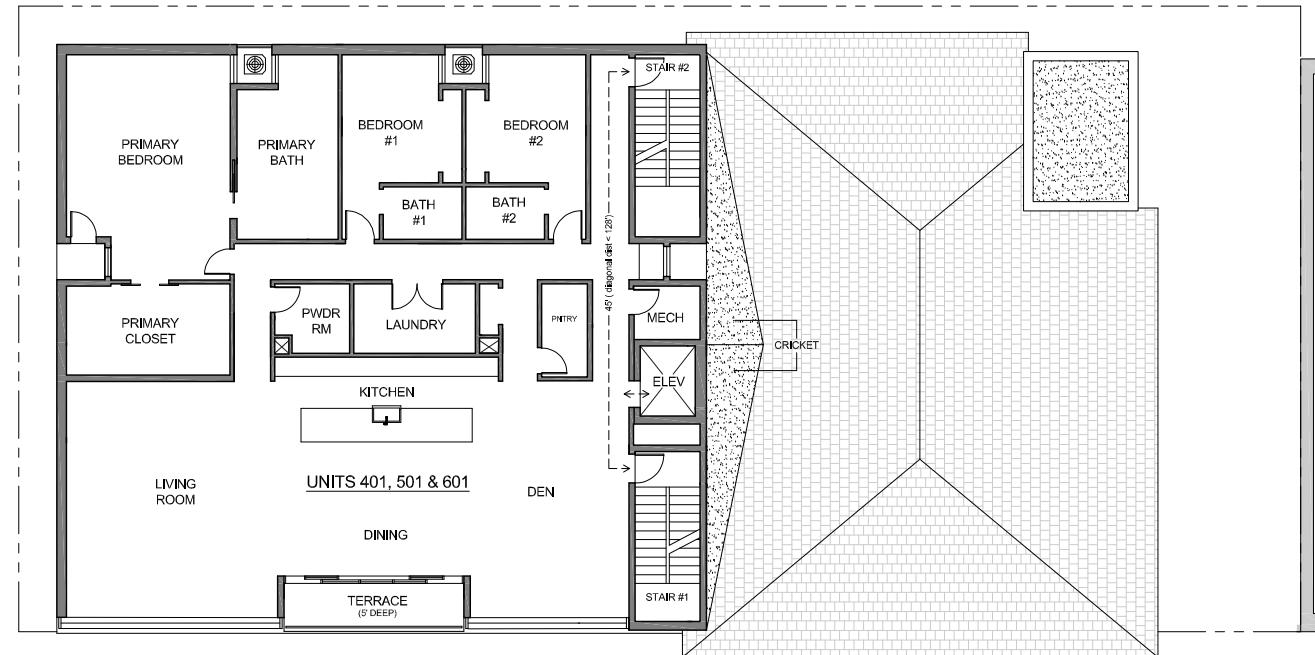
"LITTLE MIRACLES"
CHILD CARE



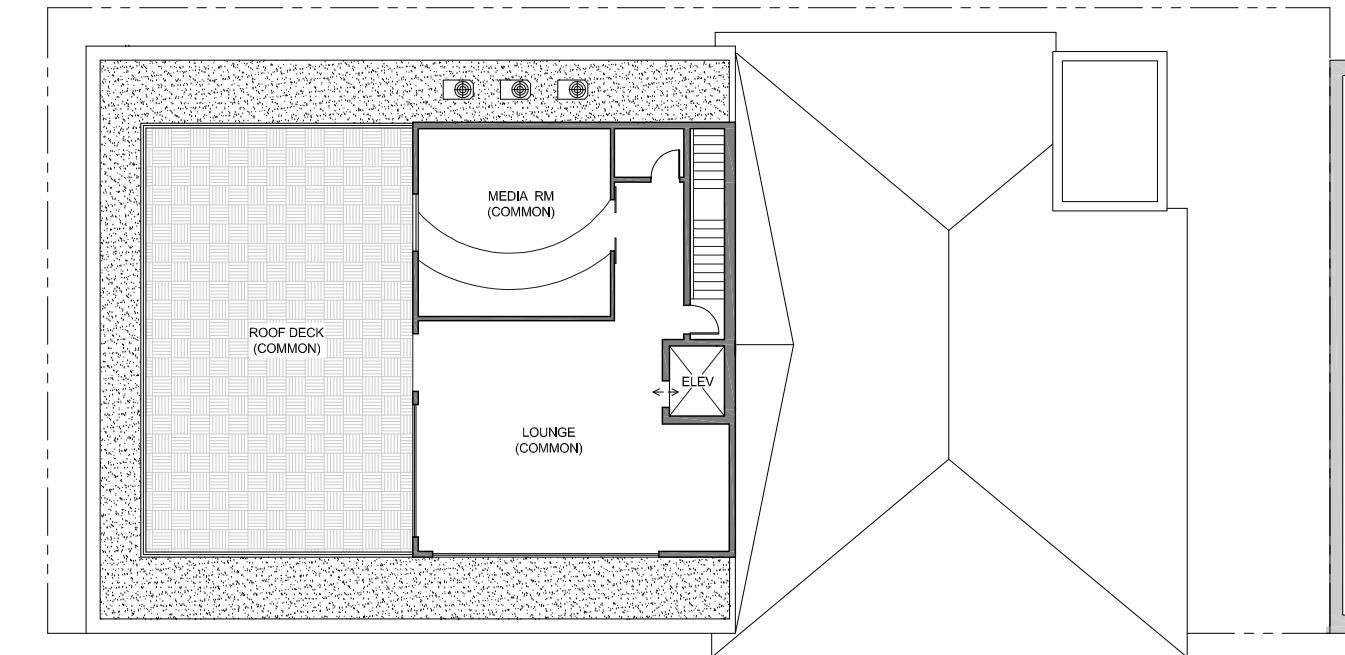
VAN PELT STREET ELEVATION

678 7
10' 0" x 10' 0"
May 11, 1938
CHARLES EDWIN FOX MEMORIAL BLDG
BIG BROTHER ASSOCIATION
25 S. VAN PELT ST. PHILA. PA.

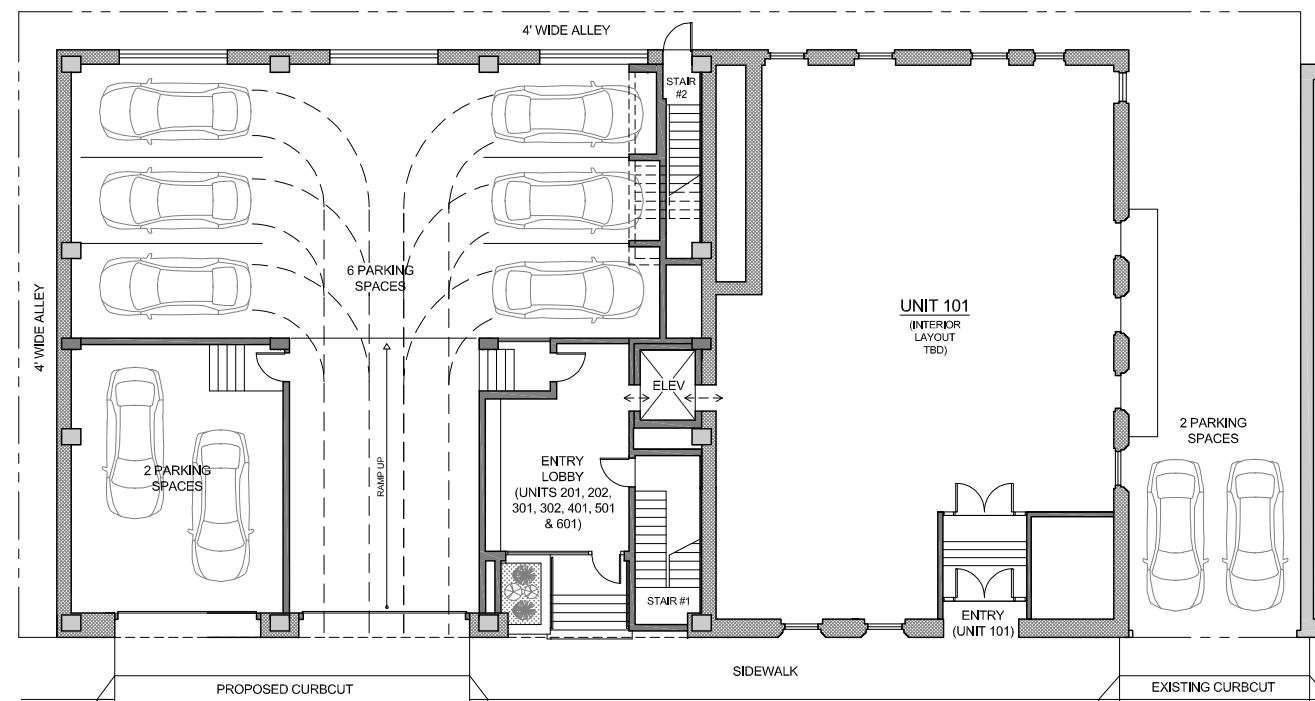




4th, 5th & 6th FLOORS

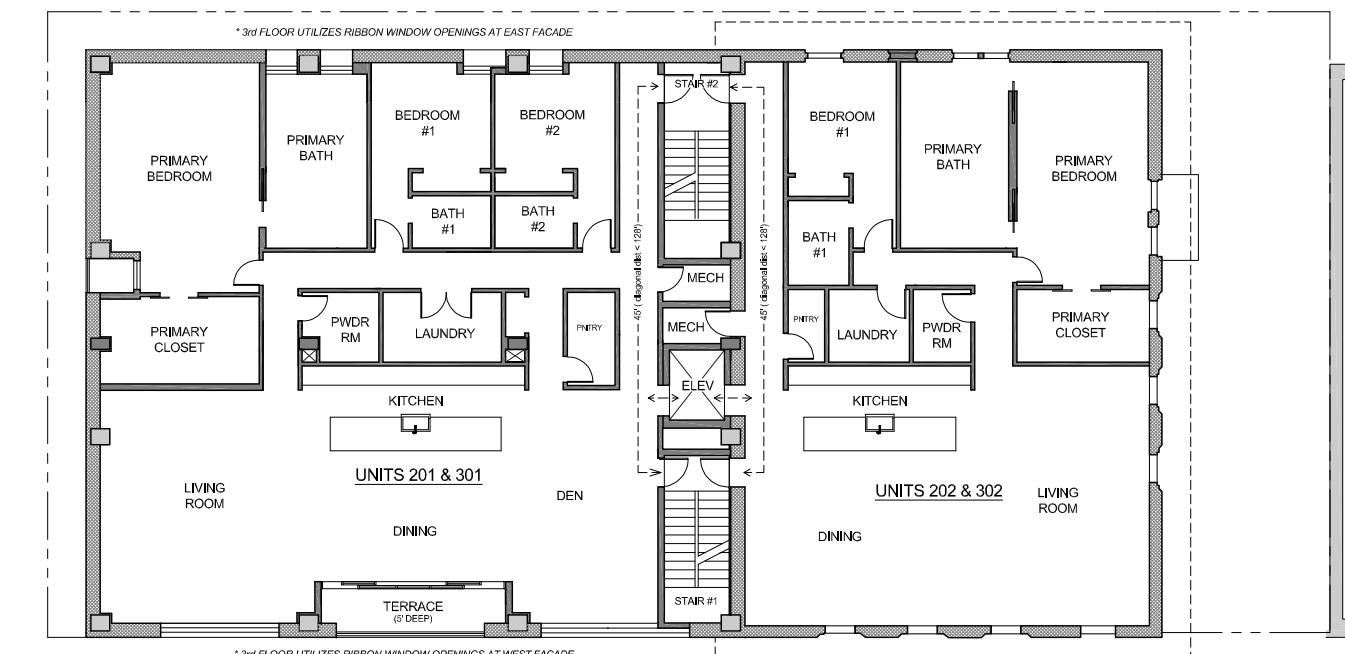


PENTHOUSE / ROOF DECK



1st FLOOR

S VAN PELT ST



2nd & 3rd FLOORS







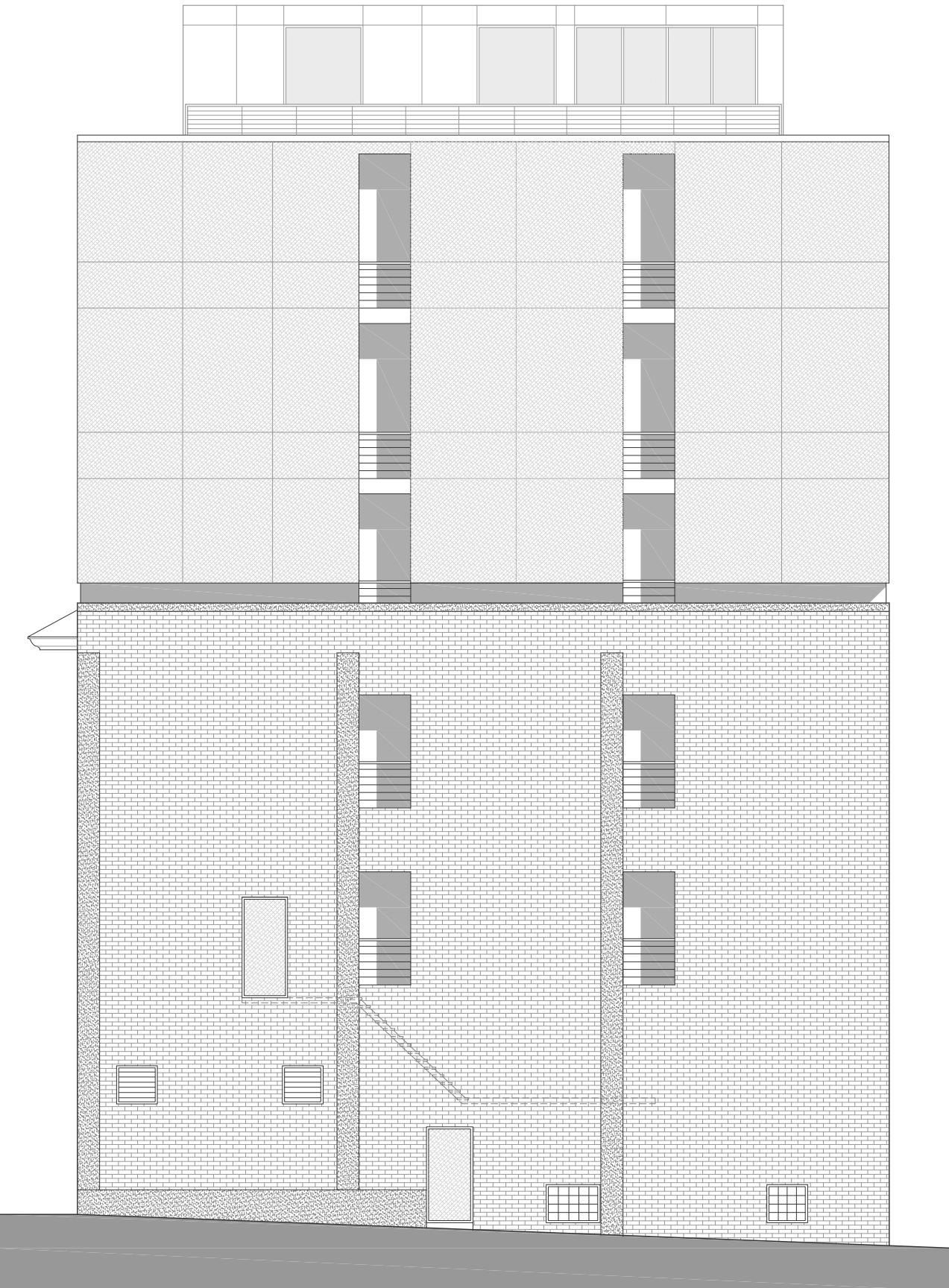
PREVIOUSLY APPROVED
MODIFICATIONS TO 1939 FAÇADE



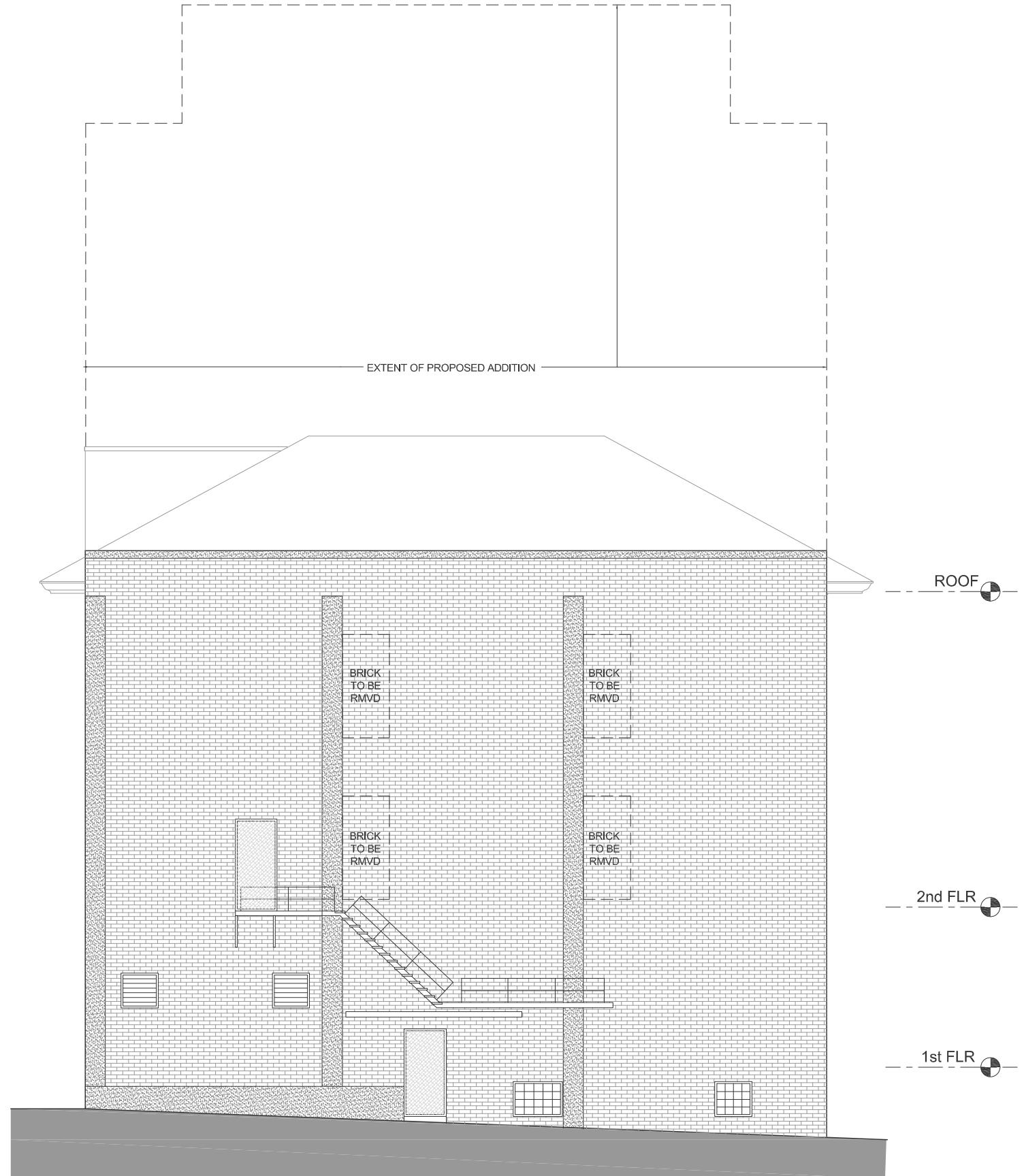
CURRENTLY PROPOSED
MODIFICATIONS TO 1939 FAÇADE



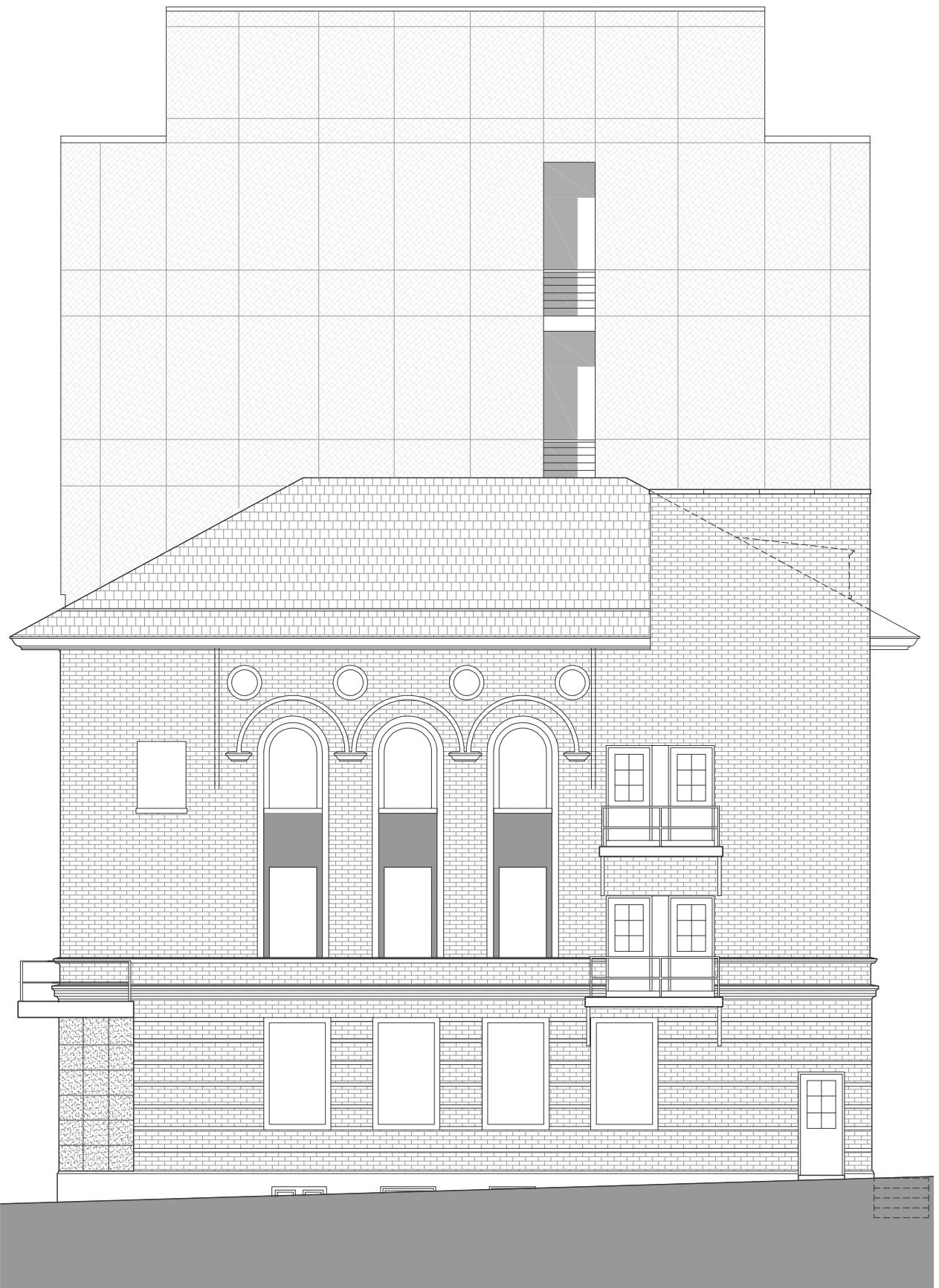




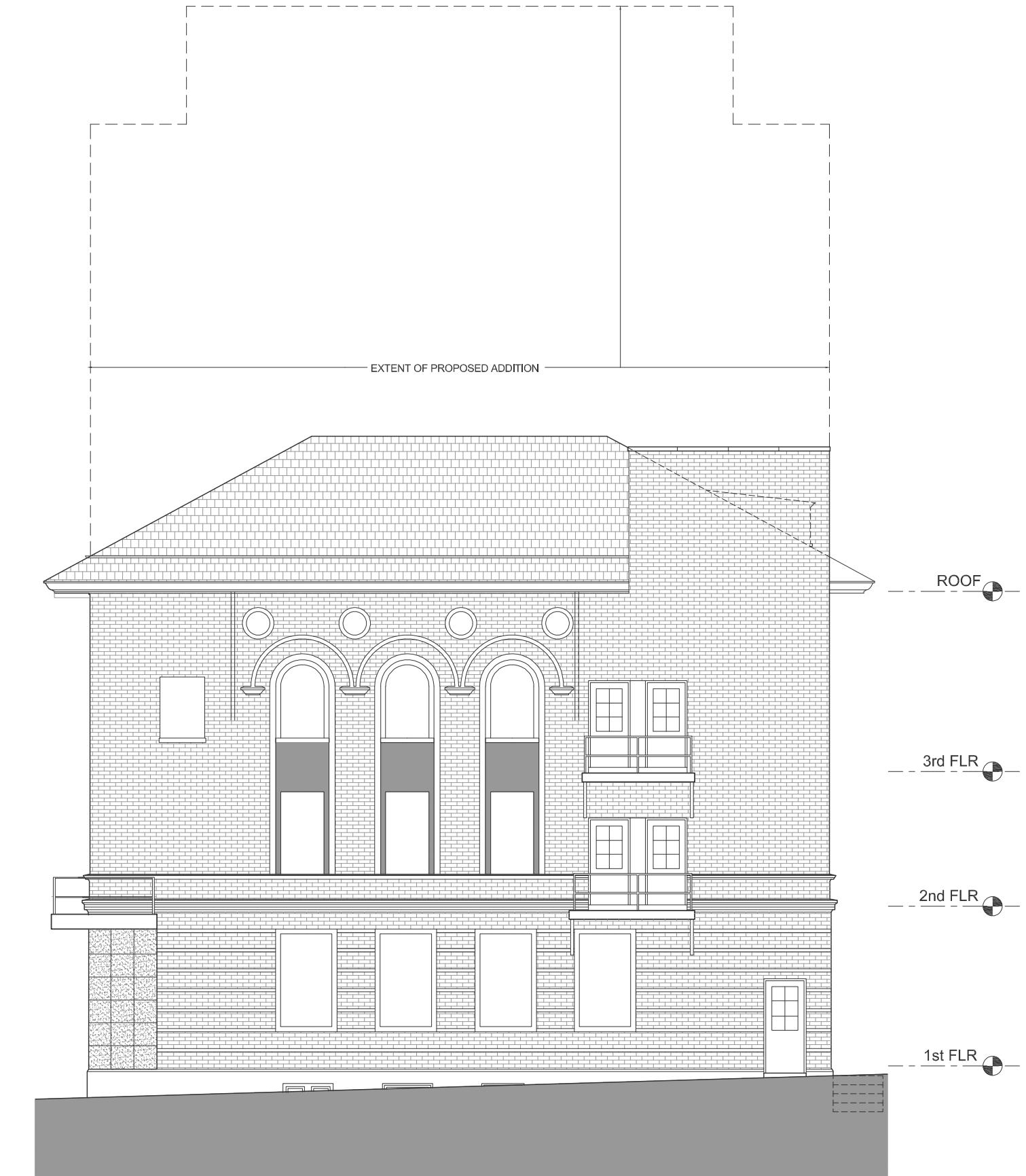
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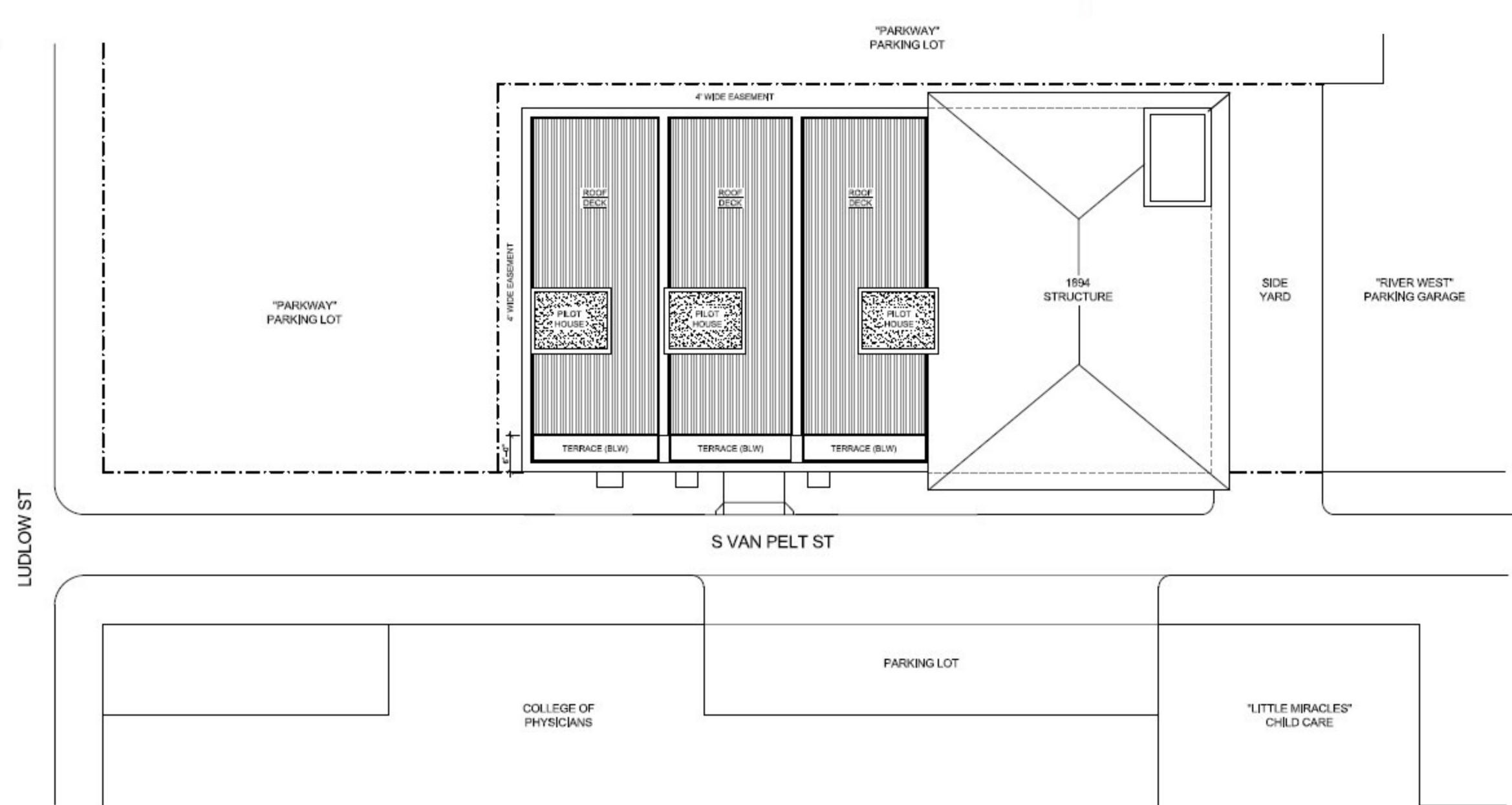


(PROPOSED)



(EXISTING)

APPROVED BY HISTORICAL COMMISSION - FEBRUARY 2020



APPROVED BY HISTORICAL COMMISSION - FEBRUARY 2020



APPROVED BY HISTORICAL COMMISSION - FEBRUARY 2020

