

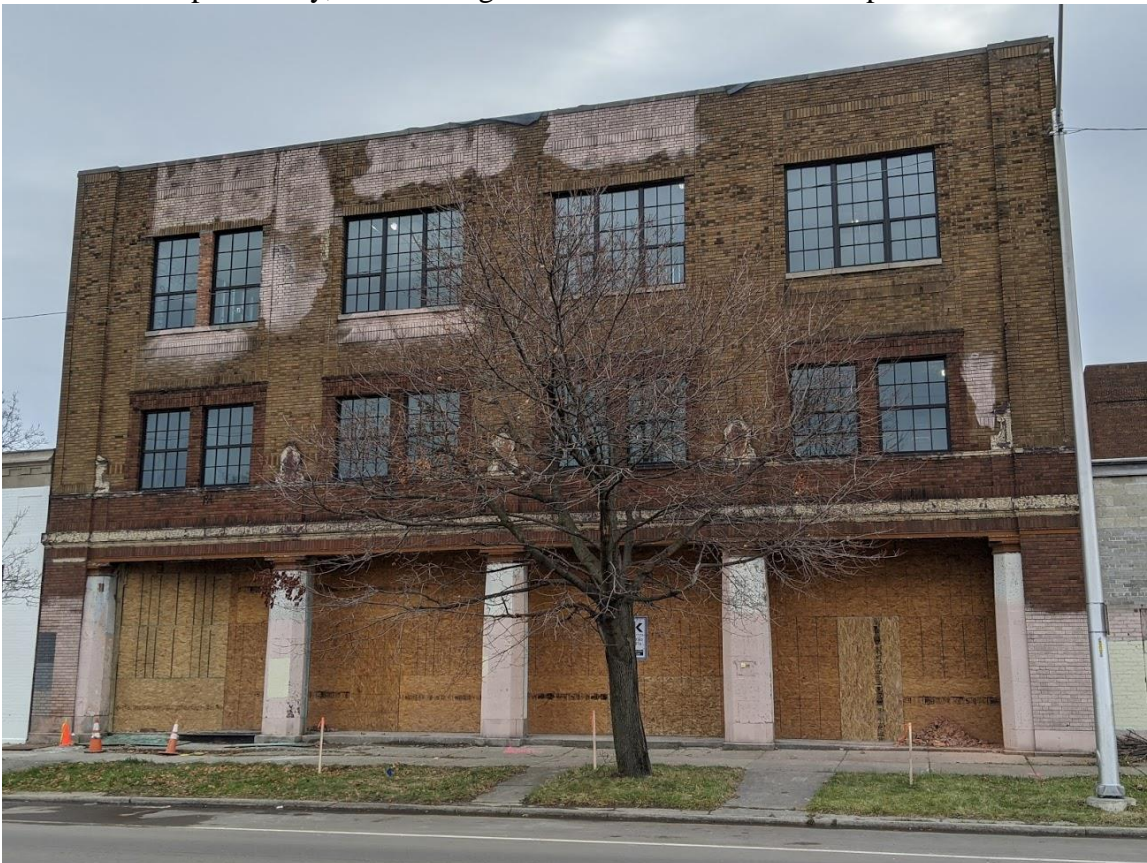
**STAFF REPORT 12-9-2020 MEETING**  
**APPLICATION NUMBER #20-6972**  
**ADDRESS: 2863 E. GRAND BLVD**  
**HISTORIC DISTRICT: JAM HANDY**  
**APPLICANT: ROCKY LALA (OWNER)**  
**DATE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11/24/2020**  
**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 12/4/2020**

**PREPARED BY: J. ROSS**

**SCOPE: PAINT EXTERIOR WALLS**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

As per the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board, the three-story, reinforced concrete building at 2863 E. Grand Boulevard has a street façade composed of red brick at the first floor and brown brick at the upper stories. At regular intervals on the façade there are stucco columns that carry a stone entablature. Marking each column above the entablature is a stone medallion element. Storefront openings on the first floor of the north elevation have been infilled with CMU, stucco, and granite. A non-historic wood shingle awning above the main entry door is located at the primary/north elevation, first story. Many of the building's original windows are missing. Remaining windows are in poor/deteriorated condition. The original windows on the upper floors were steel, multi-pane sash with inset hopper windows, with the exception of the second floor windows on the north elevation, which were paired units outlined in a slightly darker brick, with double- or single-hung, one-over-one steel sash. The Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board noted that Colbertson & Kelley builders constructed this building for Maurice Fox in 1917. Specifically, the building served as motorcar dealership.



**2863 E. Grand Boulevard, current appearance**

## PROPOSAL

The applicant attended the Commission's 9/1/2019 HDC meeting with a proposal to rehabilitate the building, **to include the painting of the entire building**. After a review, the Commission approved the following re: the proposed painting of the building:

- The *only portions of the building that can be painted is the first story/rear elevation and the first story/front elevation, only the portions which were painted at the time*. Note, that staff reviewed the audio from the meeting to confirm the Commission's motion. Specifically, the approval for painting **only includes the columns and the masonry belt course above, and decorative masonry cornice** at the first story, front elevation and the painted **brick at the rear elevation, first story**. *No other surfaces have been approved for painting*. The approved paint color is black.

Because a year has now passed, the applicant is once again seeking the Commission's approval to paint the entire building one uniform color/**Sherwin Williams 7068 Grizzle Gray** as per the attached proposal. The applicant has stated that they are asking the Commission to repaint the building a second time because their contractor was unsuccessful in their attempt to remove the painted graffiti at the building's areas outside of the first story/rear elevation and the first story/front elevation. Per the applicant's **submission**, their contractor employed the following methods in their effort to remove the graffiti from the building's exterior walls:

- CitriStrip paint stripper (no harsh fumes or NMP) was applied to a small test patch, in an area where brick had been painted with graffiti. After sitting for 15 minutes, the contractor used a power washer to attempt to remove the paint. None of the graffiti or paint came off.
- Muriatic Acid was applied to a small test patch of existing brick that had graffiti. After sitting for 15 minutes and power washing, no paint or graffiti were removed. See videos here and here of this process.

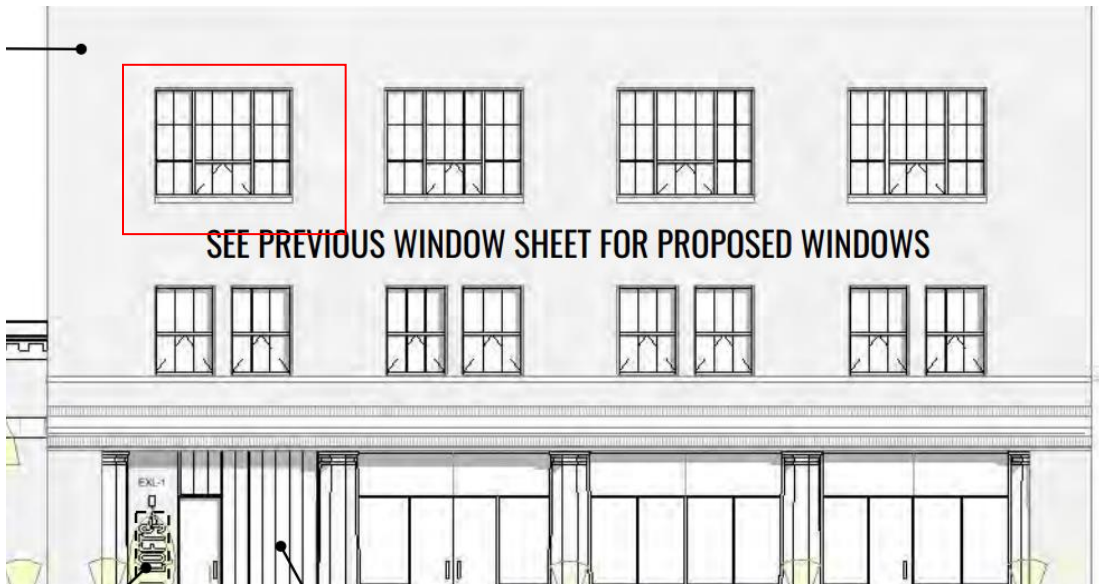
The applicant has therefore concluded that the "...brick cannot be restored to its original condition." They therefore have proposed to paint the entire building "in order to resolve the inconsistencies and damages caused by graffiti."

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

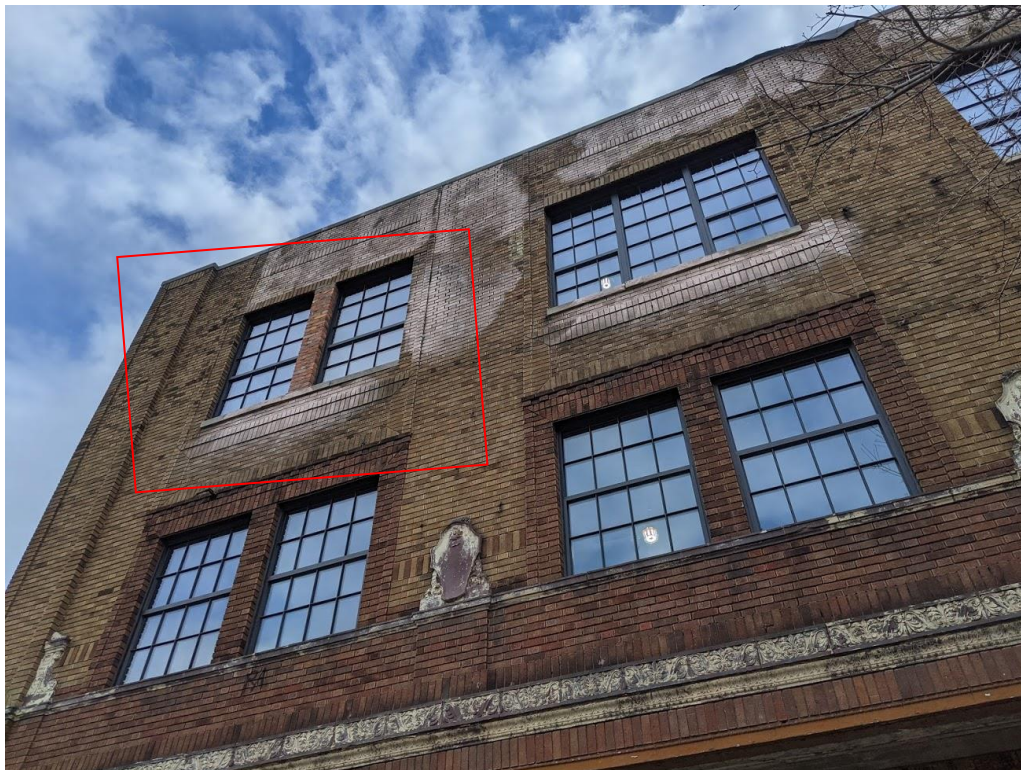
- See the **attached photos**, taken on 12/4/2020. The brick at the building's primary elevation is a mottled, variegated brick appearance which presents many tones of orange, brown, and beige that combine beautifully. Staff feels that the building's brick is a very strong, character-defining feature of this building. Also, the **decorative terracotta detailing at the second and third story** is excellent provides a distinct contrast to the brick.
- HDC Staff reached out to staff with the City of Detroit, General Services Division to seek alternatives to the above-proposed method for removing paint/graffiti from historic brick as they routinely face this issue. Zachary Meers with GSD responded as per the following:
  - We would use a product called **Elephant Snot** or a product called **Taginator** they both have worked well in the past. It is recommended to use this product when it is 60 degrees or warmer and for the surface itself to have had some time to warm up internally, so this time of year is tough when trying to remove graffiti from brick/cinder block/cement etc.
- HDC Staff also posted the question on the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions member discussion group and received a great number of resources and alternatives to the methods the

applicant employed to remove the graffiti at the building exterior walls. Specifically, the following info was provided:

- The owner should review the following National Park Service document, which provides guidance for the removal of graffiti from historic masonry building [Keeping-It-Clean.pdf \(nps.gov\)](#)
- The owner can refer to the following City of Ypsilanti Fact Sheet [YPSILANTI \(cityofypsilanti.com\)](#) which outlines the following products for removing of graffiti from historic brick walls:
  - Peel-Away 6 or Peel Away 7
  - Mostenbocker's Lift Off #4 Graffiti Spray Paint Remover
  - Klean-strip Graffiti Remover
  - Citristrip (the aerosol form is recommended)
  - Goof Off Graffiti Remove
- CitriStrip works on latex and oil-based paints. If you're dealing with spray paint, however, it could also be acrylic-based. Keep testing various products in small areas until you find one that works. And keep the pressure washer on a very low setting so water isn't forced into the masonry units or mortar joints, which will cause more serious issues as the weather gets colder. The owner can refer to the following City of Fredericksburg, Va. Fact Sheet [Graffiti-Removal-Fact-Sheet \(fredericksburgva.gov\)](#) which outlines the following products (in addition to the above listed products) for removing of graffiti from historic brick walls:
  - Ecos Pro Graffiti Remover
  - Smart Strip Pro
- Prosoco has multiple products that can be safe, depending on the conditions.
- Diedrich chemicals tend to work well on softer bricks and stones <http://www.diedrichtechnologies.com/>
- Otherwise lasers are great, but they are very few people to do it. Chicago is the only regional option I know. <http://www.wesaveart.com/laser-cleaning.html>
- Finally, please see the below photo of the new window at the easternmost window at the third story. See the below elevation drawing to the window which the Commission approved for this opening. Note, that the current treatment at the window was not approved by the Commission,



New window as approved by the Commission in 2019.



Current window treatment

## ISSUES

- The applicant proposes to paint unpainted masonry
- Re: the proposed painting of unpainted masonry, see <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/masonry01.htm>, in which the National Park Service does not recommend “applying paint or other coatings such as stucco to masonry that has been historically unpainted or uncoated...” It is therefore staff’s opinion that the painting proposal does not meet the Secretary of the interior Standards for Rehabilitation.
- As evidenced by the above-listed results of staff research efforts, it is possible to remove graffiti from historic-age brick and there are a number of products/methods that can be employed in order

to safely and feasibly complete the task. Any paint removal contractor should first refer to [Preservation Brief 38: Removing Graffiti from Historic Masonry \(nps.gov\)](#) in an effort to develop a plan to safely and effectively remove the existing graffiti at the building.

- Also, if this Body did approve painting unpainted brick, it would be inconsistent with the Commission's established precedent at other unpainted masonry buildings.
- As noted above, it is staff's opinion that the decorative terracotta detailing at the second and third story is excellent and provides a distinct contrast to the brick. The Commission has not approved painting these elements. Although it appears that these elements have been painted in the past, staff recommends that the Commission does not approve repainting them in a manner that blends in with the adjacent brick as it would serve to obscure/flatten these elements.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Commission *deny* the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project because it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation, 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* and 5.) *Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.*