

STAFF REPORT 12-9-2020 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 20-6986

ADDRESS: 2467 CASS (AKA ATLANTA APARTMENTS)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: CASS-HENRY

APPLICANT: KRAEMER DESIGN GROUP, LLC

OWNER: SORIN ENTERPRISES, LLC/OLYMPIA DEVELOPMENT OF MICHIGAN, LLC

ARCHITECT: NEUMANN/SMITH ARCHITECTURE

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11-20-20

DATES OF STAFF VISITS: 11-24-20, 12-7-20

SCOPE: REHABILITATE APARTMENT BUILDING



View of the Atlanta Apartments, view to the southwest. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Atlanta Apartments (2467 Cass) was erected in 1914 or 1915 by Detroit-based architect Harry S. Angell, who was also the architect of the Newcomb-Endicott department store addition at 1270 Woodward Avenue (demolished), the Church of the Covenant at 740 East Grand Boulevard, and two Indian Village houses, among other commissions. The Atlanta Apartments are identified as a contributing resource in the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board's (HDAB) 2018 designation report for the Cass-Henry Historic District, and is described as such:

This four-story brown-orange brick building sits on a raised basement and faces east onto Cass Avenue. Architectural detail displays Georgian Revival and Arts and Crafts influences. The three-and-a-half story, stacked central porch consists of brick piers supporting Tuscan columns, in turn supporting the upper porch level. Within this porch, projecting consoles adorned with acanthus leaves support a simple entablature above the entrance door; above this entablature sits a panel reading "ATLANTA" in raised serif lettering. Canted bay windows on

the first three floors feature metal spandrels and tabbed stone surrounds, and sit beneath a bracketed hood. Other windows are surrounded by coursed brickwork; upper story windows are accented by keystones. Above, heavy metal consoles support a simple cornice.

The decorative treatment of the front (Cass Avenue) façade extends to the north to create a secondary façade on Henry Street. From this elevation, deep indentations for light and ventilation divide the building into three distinct masses, rendering its twenty-four-unit plan clearly discernible from the street.

The Cass entranceway has been closed up with concrete block, and there are no historic doorways extant. The light courts (indentations) at the south elevation, and the first bay in from Cass, are faced in a lighter colored brick. The west and the remainder of the south elevations are faced in dark brown brick and feature stone sills at the windowless openings. Most of the bottom of the building, to include the 1st floor and entrance area, has been painted brown, excepting some stone elements along Henry.

The building was already vacant and missing its windows at the time of historic designation. Today, the windows are boarded, but the building otherwise appears to be in fair condition and, despite the missing windows and alterations to the entrance, retains its historic integrity, with areas of deterioration visible.

Per the architect, and as confirmed by HDC staff to the extent feasible from the public right-of-way, the brick and stone areas of the building are in fair to good condition, with some locations of cracking, missing mortar, puncture holes, and missing units. The pressed tin cornice and consoles are in fair condition, with some corrosion, flaking paint, and visible damage in some areas. Bracketed hoods over each bay window are in poor condition with corrosion visible. Metal spandrels appear to be in fair condition. The building has a flat membrane roof in poor condition.



Detail view showing conditions at the Cass (primary) facade. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



Detail view showing main entrance at Cass, note "ATLANTA" name above. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



North (Henry Street) elevation. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



View of Cass (east) facade. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



South elevation. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



Detail view of metal detailing at bays and cornice, Cass elevation. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of northwest corner of building along Henry Street, showing furniture hoist beam projecting from Side (west) elevation, and adjacent 427 Henry building. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.

EXISTING CONDITIONS (DISTRICT)

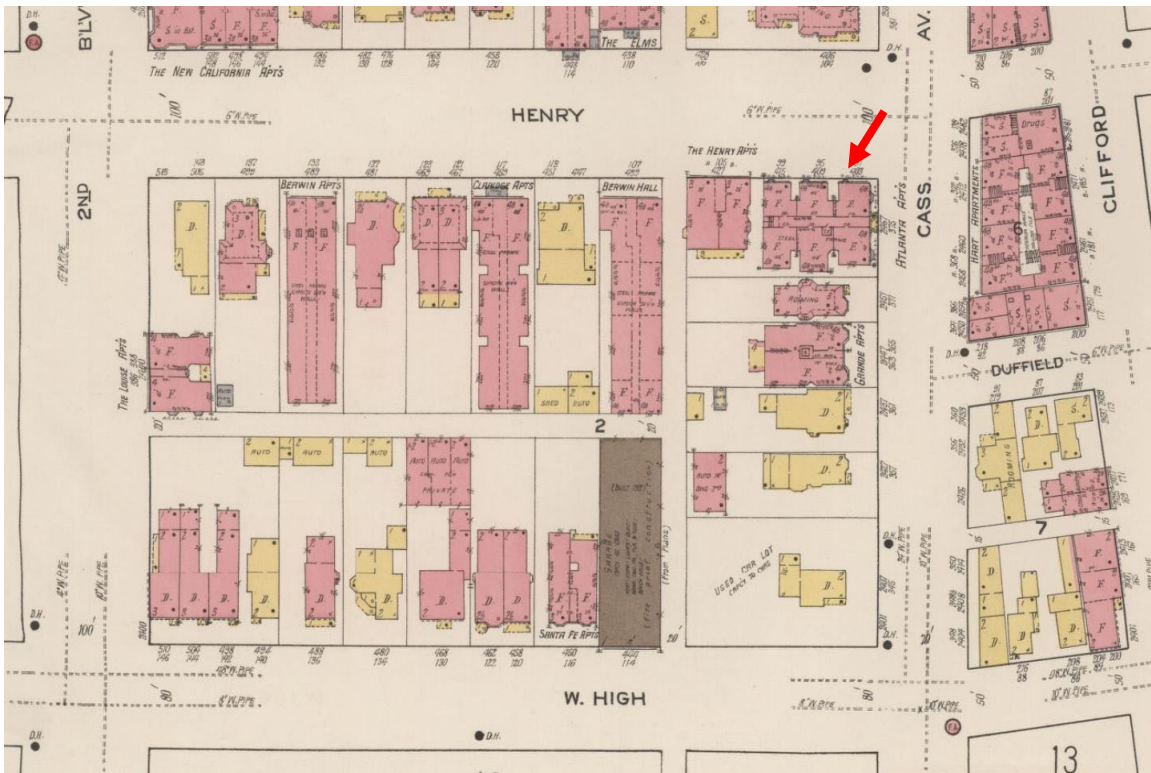


2467 Cass, highlighted in blue, in its current district context. Image from Motor City Mapping.

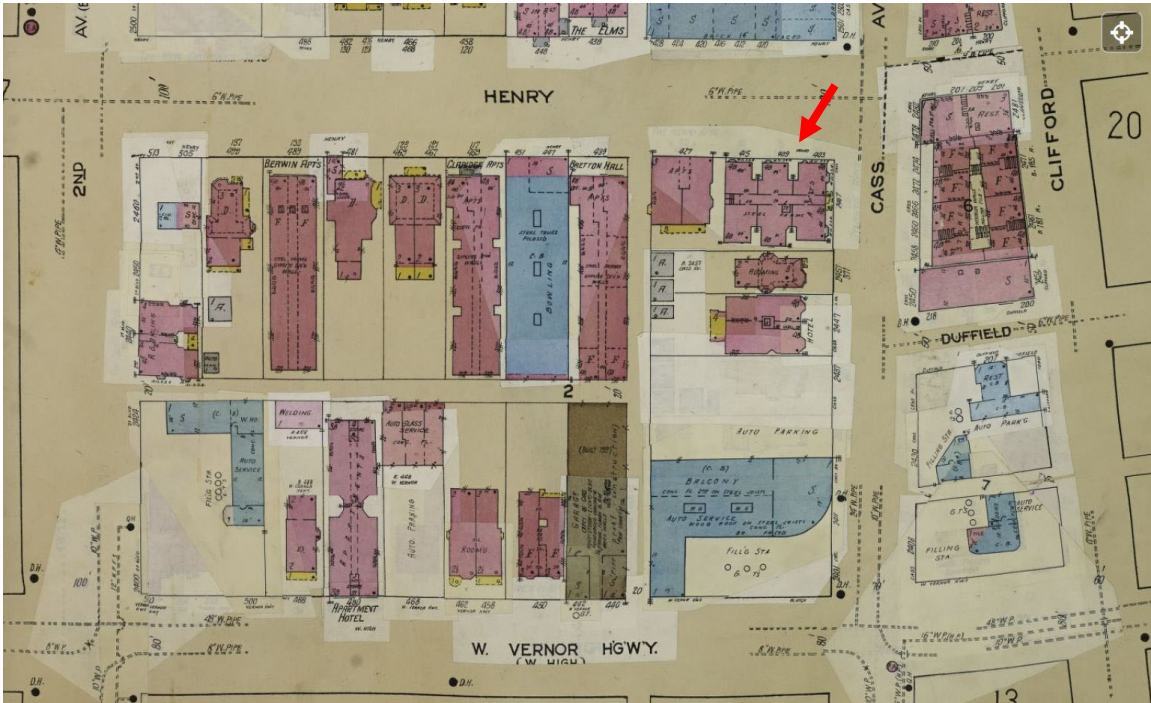
The Atlanta Apartments building is one of seven contributing resources to the Cass-Henry Historic District. The district is significant as the “best remaining depiction of the form, scale, and density that once predominated throughout the area,” per the HDAB report. With the single exception of 447 Henry (the William B. Ralston Garage), all of the buildings in the district are flats or apartment houses, built during a period of significance from 1900 to 1923. Currently only Bretton Hall (439 Henry) and the Berwin Apartments (489 Henry) are occupied. HDAB writes that:

During the period of significance the block covered a greater area than it does today, being bounded by Henry Street, Cass Avenue, High Street, and Second Avenue. However, the footprint of the Fisher Freeway, built through the city in the 1960s, eliminated High Street and the southern half of the block. Late-twentieth century demolitions eliminated apartment buildings at 2457 Cass Avenue, 467-469 Henry Street, and 481 Henry Street (now noncontributing open spaces)...Alterations to the buildings since the period of significance have been minor, consisting of some window replacements and the removal of at least one cornice. Character-defining features of the district primarily include the buildings themselves, though a few mature street trees remain, along with sidewalks and concrete walkways and steps approaching each building. Even where buildings have been razed, walkways, landscaping, and mature street trees remain, helping the district to retain much of its historic residential feeling.

Current district conditions are a mix of well-secured vacant structures juxtaposed with apparently well-maintained, occupied buildings.



Cass-Henry vicinity, 1921 Sanborn map showing original urban density near the end of the Period of Significance. Arrow points to 2467 Cass. Note preponderance of brick (red) buildings, versus frame (yellow) structures. "D" indicates a single-family "dwelling," while "F" indicates rental "flats" or apartment houses.



The updated 1951 Sanborn map shows conditions just prior to construction of Fisher Freeway through High Street/West Vernor. The large footprint of 447 Henry, built of concrete block (blue color), has appeared. All frame structures have been removed.

PROPOSAL

The proposed scope of work required to rehabilitate the exterior of the building is depicted in the attached schematic drawings* for this Body's review and, per the applicant, specifically includes:

Brick and stone

- *Inspected for damage*
- *Brown paint to be removed*
- *Masonry cleaned with a light duty detergent and low pressure water rinse*
- *Brick and stone will be repointed, and loose or displaced units will be reset*
- *Repointed mortar will match the color, texture, compressive strength, joint width, and joint profile of the existing historic mortar*
- *Damaged brick and stone will be repaired as necessary*
- *Any units too badly deteriorated to repair will be replaced, with salvaged brick to be reused where replacements are needed before new units are used*
- *If new units are necessary, they will be selected to match the existing in size, profile, color, and finish*

Metal cornice, metal bay window hoods, and pressed metal spandrels

- *All pressed tin metal work will be retained and repaired and repainted (color TBD)*
- *If any tin work is too damaged to repair, new compatible metal will be used and will be painted to match the adjacent historic material*

Main entrance and doors

- *Remove existing concrete masonry units (CMU)*
- *Install a new glazed panel door compatible with the historic nature of the building (color TBD)*
- *New glazed panel doors at balconies*
- *ADA lift and new entrance door installed in the eastern-most inlet on the north (Henry Street) façade of the building*

Windows

- *New historic replica aluminum-clad wood windows throughout: Marvin Ultimate Double Hung G2 per attached data sheet (no extant historic windows, color TBD)*
- *On east and north (primary, Cass and Henry) facades, 8/1 and 6/1 multiple-light windows to be used in the bay windows*
- *At east (Cass) façade, all window openings with exception of 8/1 windows in bays will receive 6/1 windows*
- *Basement windows will be 1/1 single hung units*
- *On the north (Henry) façade, excepting the bays described above, remainder of windows to be 1/1*
- *Secondary facades (east and south) will receive 1/1 single hung units*

Lighting

- *Exterior building lighting will be provided and designed to highlight building features*
- *Lighting locations may include up-lights on the west (Cass) façade and wall-mounted fixtures flanking the entrance*

Signage

- *Future signage is proposed to be reinstated in the same location as the stone-inscribed "ATLANTA" above the main entry door*
- *Final signage drawings (including size, color, and design) will be submitted for staff approval before installation*

Roof, rooftop mechanicals, and penthouses

- ***Current poor condition membrane roof to be removed and replaced with a new EPDM roof***
- ***Small condensers will be added to the center and western side of the roof with painted metal panel mechanical screens to obscure the condensers***
- ***Existing rooftop penthouses will be rehabilitated and retained***

Landscaping/Site

- ***Proposed landscaping and site interventions for all buildings and areas will be incorporated into the staff reports for the site parcels (i.e., 2457 Cass and 467-469, 481 Henry Street), and formally reviewed as part of those applications***

*specifically, drawings 6A101, 6A102 (floor/roof plans) and 6A401, 6A401.1 (elevations)



View to the southwest showing all Henry Street buildings in the historic district. The Atlanta (2467 Cass) is closest to the observer, followed by 427 Henry (The Henry), 439 Henry (Bretton Hall), 447 Henry (1-story commercial garage), 459 Henry (Claridge), and 489 Henry (Berwin). Staff photo, November 24, 2020.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- After review, staff finds that the proposed scope of work is well-developed and generally proposes appropriate repairs and interventions to the building, and is sensitive to the preservation of its character-defining features.
- The building occupies a key position in the district and the surrounding urban context, anchors the grand historic character of the neighborhood, and is highly visible from great distances. In the district's Elements of Design, 2467 Cass is highlighted for its central placement at the intersection of Henry and Cass, and noted for its two street-facing and richly ornamented facades. The building's monumental stacked front porch, facing Cass, is also specifically mentioned in the district's Elements of Design. The applicant proposes appropriately conservative repairs to these areas, though staff would seek greater specificity in the construction drawings/specifications concerning what constitutes "too damaged/too badly deteriorated to repair" as it relates to the metalwork, masonry, and other similar features, so as to guard against wholesale replacement of such features.
- As the building has no remaining windows, the applicant proposes new historic replica, aluminum-clad wood windows throughout, some with multiple-light upper sash (variously, 8/1 and 6/1). It is not clear from historic documentation of the building as provided by the applicant that the building featured multiple-light sash, but its use would not be inappropriate or falsely historic in a building with Georgian Revival design influences, such as this one. Staff finds that the proposed product is appropriate.
- The building's original entrance door(s) are no longer extant. Staff finds that the proposed replacement is historically appropriate. The building's designation report, excerpted above, does take note of the building's name "Atlanta" as a character-defining feature remaining at the building's entrance. The Elements of Design, under architectural details, specifically notes that "several of the apartment buildings bear their names on the lintels above the entrance." This feature should be preserved. The application suggests that future signage "will be reinstated in the same location."
- An ADA lift and new entry door is proposed for a location in the first court or indentation westward along Henry Street. Staff finds this to be an appropriate intervention.
- Staff has reviewed the comprehensive roof equipment sightline studies submitted by the applicant, and finds the proposed new equipment to be sensitively placed and screened, consistent with the building and district's historic character

ISSUES

- Staff has identified very few issues of concern, and finds that the proposal as presented to the Commission has the potential to yield a high-quality rehabilitation consistent with historic standards and guidelines
- The retention of qualified historic preservation subcontractors and tradespeople, and the criteria they will use to make critical field decisions regarding repair versus replacement of historic character-defining elements, is always a concern in large and complex historic preservation projects. Standards and expectations concerning field assessment for repairs and replacement should be specified in the ultimate contract documents, if not already depicted in the architect's construction drawings for review by staff. Normal evidence of wear and superficial damage should not warrant replacement, per NPS Guidelines and Standards.
- No proposed process is given for removing the brown paint applied at the lower level in recent years. Applicant should submit an appropriate paint removal process for staff review.
- The ultimate design for building signage should ensure retention and display of the stone-carved "ATLANTA" name as a contributing element to the historic character of the building. Staff suggests that, if desired, it would be appropriate to place modestly-scaled additional signage in the landscape in front of the building subject to the Commission's own sign guidelines and staff review.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-73, Certificate of Appropriateness

It is staff's opinion that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). Staff recommends that the Commission approve a COA for the proposed application, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Cass-Henry Historic District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that:

- Staff review of the submitted construction drawings will include the identification of specific standards concerning repair and/or replacement of deteriorated character-defining features, and related standards concerning the qualifications of historic preservation contractors retained to perform the work.
- Staff review of the submitted construction drawings to specifically include review of specifications/cut sheets for lighting, windows, doors, ADA lifts, signage, paint removal, paint color, and other exterior elements/selections not yet finalized, with staff authority to approve if per the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, the district's Elements of Design, and otherwise consistent with Commission intent and guidelines
- The proposed design for 8/1 and 6/1 windows may be replaced by 1/1 windows at the architect's discretion, subject to staff review
- The historic name of the building, set in stone above the entryway, be preserved and remain visible.