

**STAFF REPORT 12-9-2020 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: 20-6987**

**ADDRESS: 2447 CASS (AKA HOTEL ANSONIA/GRADE 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 to the west of the Cass (primary) facade. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.*

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The Hotel Ansonia (2447 Cass) was erected around 1906, replacing an earlier residential structure. It was designed by the Detroit-based firm of Baxter & O'Dell (Frank E. Baxter and H. Augustus O'Dell) as a luxury apartment building, with only two apartments on each of its four floors, for a total of eight residential units. Originally known as the Grande Apartments, the building was converted to a hotel after World War II, with the addition of a basement dining area and retail store.

The Hotel Ansonia is 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:

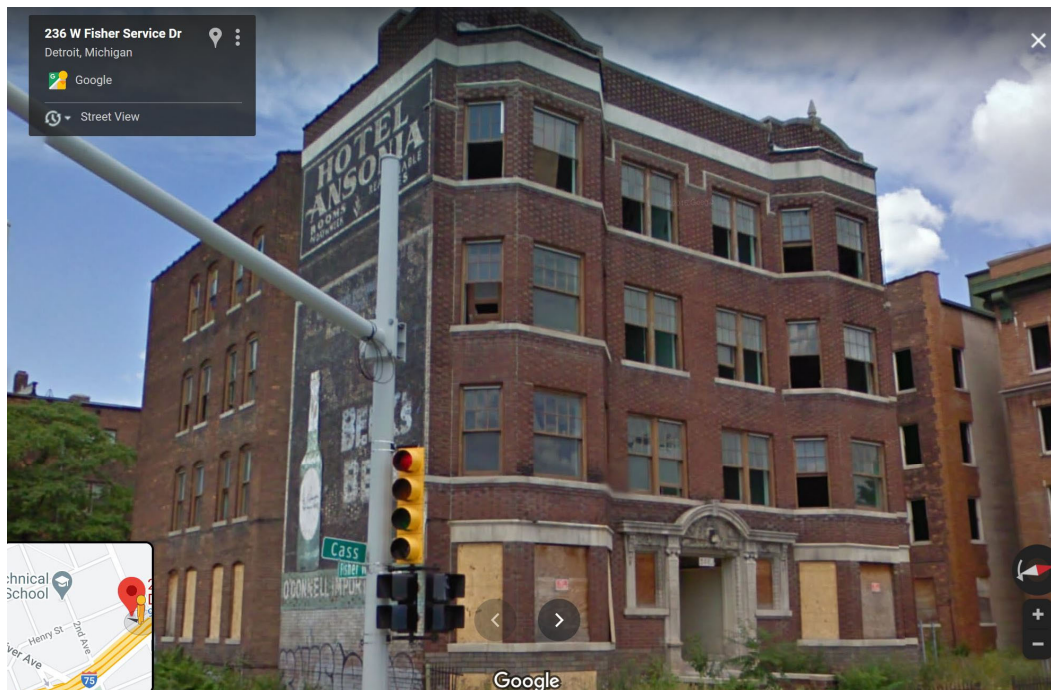
*This four-story, four bay, dark brown brick building features an ornate, carved Italian Renaissance stone entry surround on its front (Cass Avenue) façade. Otherwise, architectural detail is sparse, and includes finials over*

*outer bay windows. Brickwork is Flemish bond...Several generations of faded, hand-painted ghost signs, faintly discernible on a blank wall on the south elevation, advertise Labatt's Ale, Beck's Beer, and the O'Donnell Importing Company, taking advantage of a prominent wall clearly visible from northbound traffic on Cass Avenue....At present, windows have been removed from the building and its entrance has been boarded, but it otherwise appears to be in good condition.*

The Cass entranceway, along with its flanking windows, has been closed up with concrete block and has a plain steel door installed for access. There is an insensitively mounted modern light fixture obscuring part of the ornamental stonework over the door. The rest of the basement and first story window openings (and second story openings along Fisher) are also closed with block; those overhead are boarded. The Flemish bond brick wraps around to the north and south elevations, and transitions to common brick near the midpoint on both sides. Most of the bottom of the building, to include the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and entrance area, has been painted brown, excepting some stone elements along Cass.

The building was already vacant and missing its windows at the time of historic designation. Despite the loss of original windows and alterations made to secure the building and cover graffiti, it continues to retain 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 condition, with some locations of cracking, missing mortar, puncture holes, and missing units. The rear of the building has two brick wing walls which enclose a wooden fire escape, accessed by two doors and two windows at each floor. The columns for this fire escape structure rest on grade and are in poor condition. The building has a flat roof, with EPDM roofing material in fair condition.



*Google Street View (circa 2009) of the building, showing advertising signs and original windows.*



*South (Fisher Service Drive) Elevation today. Note “ghost” advertisement for Labatt’s still visible. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.*



*View of the Hotel Ansonia, view to the southwest. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.*



*Detail view showing main entrance at Cass, note elaborate stone detailing. A new gray door was installed subsequent to the initial staff visit. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.*



*View of rear elevation, looking northeast. Note exterior stairs. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.*

## EXISTING CONDITIONS (DISTRICT)

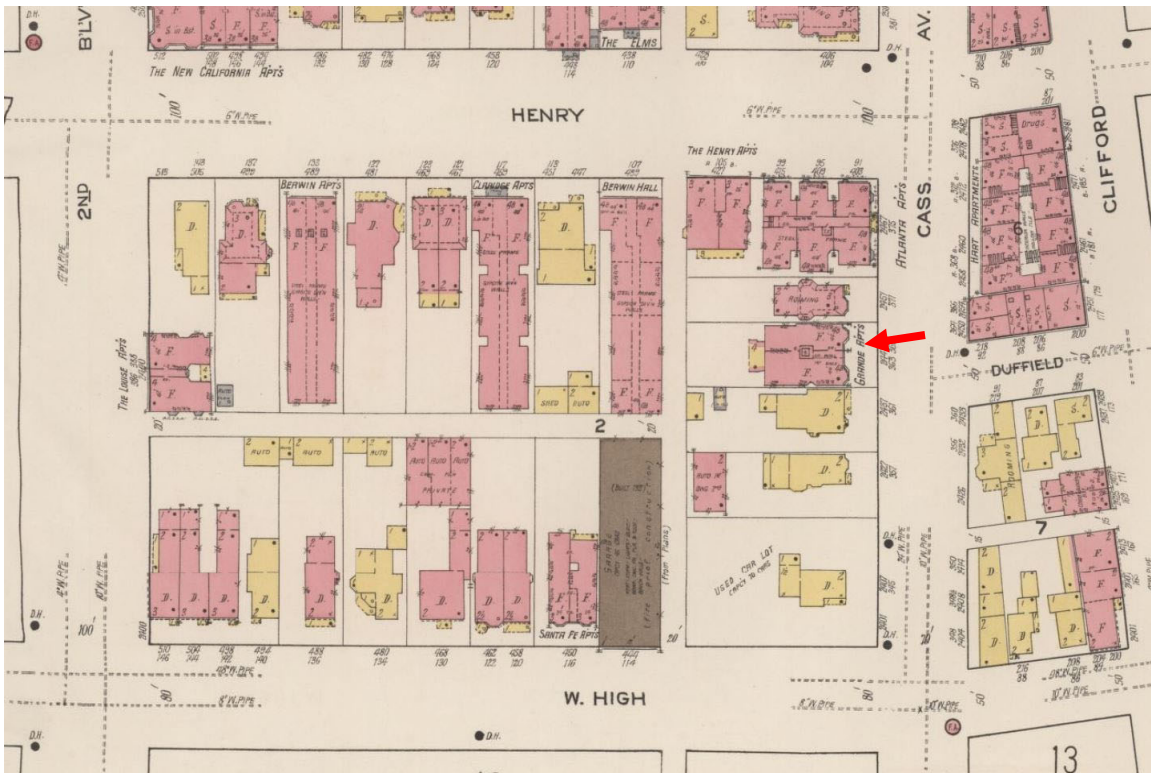


2447 Cass, highlighted in blue, in its current district context. Image from Motor City Mapping.

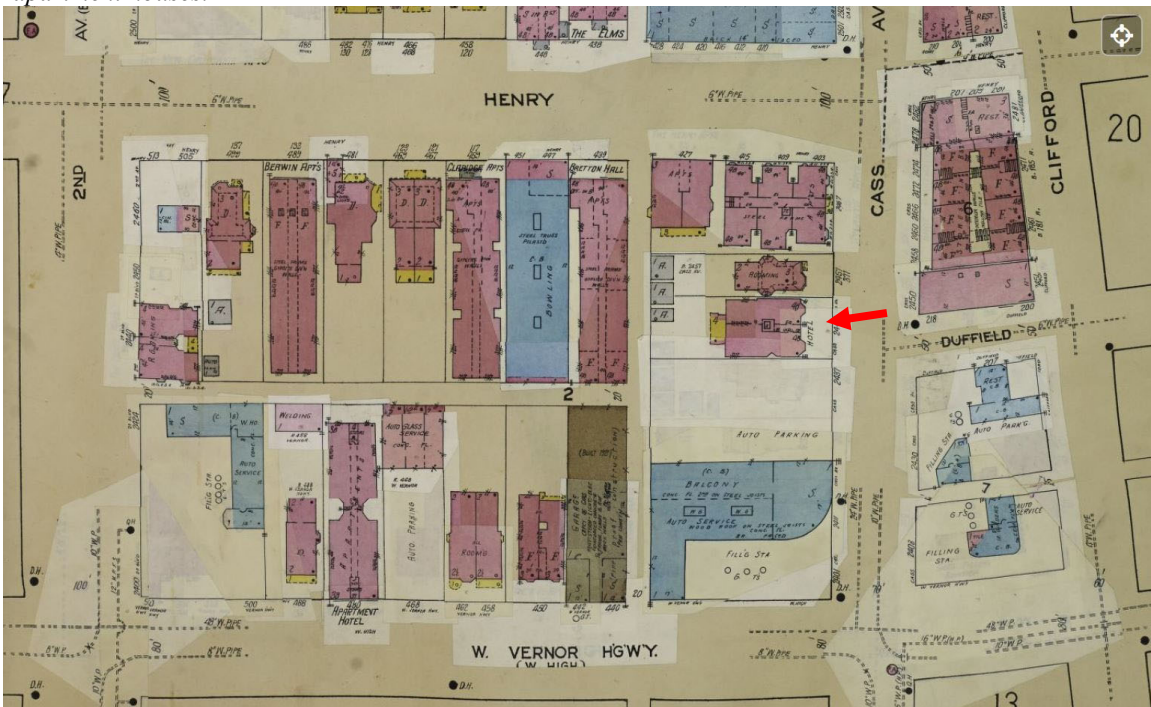
The Hotel Ansonia building is one of seven contributing resources to the Cass-Henry Historic District. The district is significant as the “best remaining depiction of the form, scale, and density that once predominated throughout the area,” per the HDAB report. With the single exception of 447 Henry (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 2447 Cass, here marked as the Grande Apartments. 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 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. 2447 Cass is now marked as the Hotel Ansonia.

## **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* (process not provided)
- *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*

### ***Main entrance and doors***

- *Remove existing concrete masonry units (CMU)*
- *Install a new glazed wood double door compatible with the historic nature of the building (color TBD)*
- *New solid doors in the west elevation at the fire escape (material/design TBD)*
- *ADA lift to be installed on the back of the building to access the first floor fire escape to provide ADA access to the first floor units*

### ***Windows***

- *New historic replica aluminum-clad wood windows throughout: Marvin Ultimate Double Hung G2 per attached data sheet (no extant historic windows, dark color TBD)*
- *On primary (east) façade, first floor, windows will be 2/1 except the two windows flanking the entrance which will be further researched to determine their design*
- *On primary (east) façade, upper floors, windows will be 6/1 on the outer bay window openings and in the two central bays of the building. The center bay window openings will have 8/1 units.*
- *1/1 single hung units will be used on the remaining windows*

### ***Fire Escape and ADA Lift***

- *Wood components of existing fire escape to be removed and replaced with new composite wood material. Connections to the building repaired as necessary to ensure structural stability*

### ***Lighting***

- *Exterior building lighting will be provided and designed to highlight building features*
- *Lighting locations may include up-lights or soffit fixture on the west (Cass) façade*

### ***Signage***

- *Future signage is proposed to be reinstated on either a ground sign or an appropriate location on the front façade. (not specified)*

### ***Roof, rooftop mechanicals, and penthouses***

- *Current EPDM 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*

- *Small skylight in center of roof to be removed and replaced with a contemporary low-profile skylight structure*

*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 7A101 (floor/roof plans) and 7A401, 7A401.1 (elevations)

Additional photographs, renderings, presentation materials, and narrative provided by the applicant in support of this application is appended to this report and posted on the public website for the meeting.



*Detail view of Hotel Ansonia first story, with the Atlanta (2467 Cass) beyond, representing the eastern extents of the Cass-Henry Historic District. Note extent of brown paint. 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.
- In the district's Elements of Design, 2447 Cass is highlighted for its arched parapet walls. The applicant proposes appropriately conservative repairs to the building's brick and stone 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 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). Documented evidence does exist for historic windows of similar type on this building. Staff finds that the proposed replacement product is appropriate.
- The building's original entrance door(s) is no longer extant. Staff finds that the proposed replacement is historically appropriate, though final staff review of the design will be necessary.
- An ADA lift and new entry door is proposed for a location at the rear of the building. 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.

## 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 colors, 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