STAFF REPORT: MAY 10, 2023 MEETING **PREPARED BY**: B. BUCKLEY
APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8327
ADDRESS: 206 EAST GRAND RIVER AVENUE
HISTORIC DISTRICT: BROADWAY AVENUE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
APPLICANT: BRIAN REBAIN, KRAEMER DESIGN GROUP
PROPERTY OWNER: AMELIA PATT ZAMIR, METHOD DEVELOPMENT
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 04/17/2023
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 04/26/2023

SCOPE: RESTORE BUILDING EXTERIOR, REPLACE WINDOWS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

206 East Grand River Avenue, also known as the Merchants Building, is an eight-story commercial building constructed in 1922. The concrete frame building is located on the corner of East Grand River Avenue and Broadway Avenue, and features terra cotta cladding with classically inspired details on the street facing facades. The rear walls consist of common brick and exposed structural concrete beams. The first-floor storefront systems were altered numerous times over the course of the 20th century. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 and became subject to HDC jurisdiction when the Broadway Avenue Local Historic District was designated 2005.

Figure 1: 206 E. Grand River Ave., looking east.

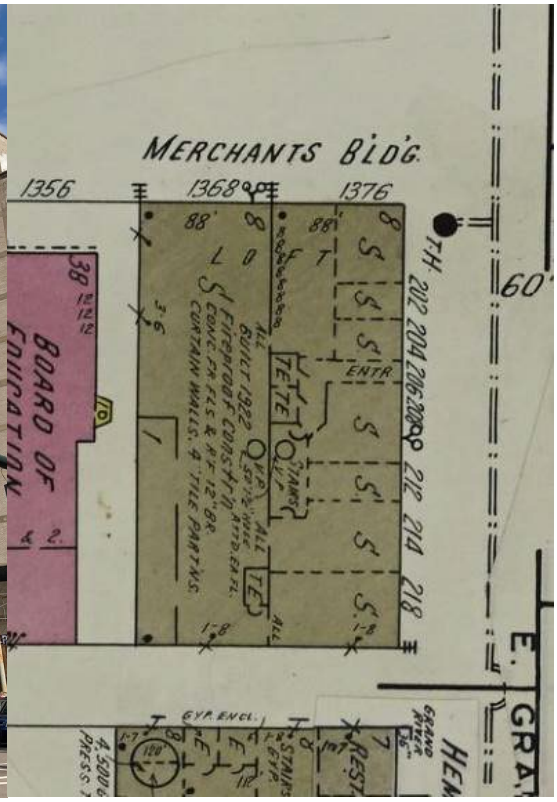

Figure 2:Sanborn map of 206 E. Grand River Ave, 1944

Figure 3: Image 206 E. Grand River Ave. in 1941. Image from HistoricDetroit.org.

PROPOSAL

The applicant is seeking approval for an exterior restoration project, including the replacement of windows above the storefront level. The scope of work includes the following:

1. Masonry Restoration: The brick, terracotta, and exposed concrete will be cleaned using the gentlest means possible in accordance the National Park Service's Preservation Briefs 1,2, and 6, and subsequently inspected for damage. Paint will be removed from the brick at the first-floor rear elevations. Spalling concrete at the exposed structural members will be removed and patched. Deteriorated masonry joints will be tuckpointed. Missing or severely damaged brick and terracotta elements will be replaced to match the existing in size, color, texture, and compressive strength.

Figures 4-6: Images of existing masonry conditions provided by the applicant.

2. Fire Escape: The existing steel fire escape on the eastern elevation is corroded and showing signs of deterioration at its connections with the masonry wall. The fire escape will be removed and replaced with a new fire escape that will match the existing in form, materials, and color.

Figures 7,8: Images showing the existing fire escape.

3. Window Replacement: The applicant proposes to replace all façade windows above the first floor storefront systems, as well as the windows at the rear elevations. The replacement windows are based on the SealCraft 8000 Series of aluminum windows. The applicant provides the following reasoning for the replacement windows; "the building owner desires operable windows in the building as it is desirable to feature natural ventilation in a future hotel or apartment use. Additionally, double-hung units are the only window type which allows the existing offset to be maintained while also providing operability."

    - The façade windows facing Grand River and Broadway are wood sash units in a variety of configurations. The windows at the second through seventh floors are casement units surmounted by fixed transoms and organized into banks with individual windows separated by wood mullions. The windows at the eighth floor consist of banks of wood casement windows without transoms. The applicant proposes to replace the windows on floors two through seven with double hung aluminum windows, and the eighth floor would receive new aluminum casement units. The sills will be retained, repaired, and covered with black aluminum flashing. The mullions will also be retained and repaired. The replacement windows will be installed with the same setback from the exterior walls as the existing windows. Additionally, the applicant proposes to remove portions of the interior trim at the jambs and mullions to reduce the visible width of the sash to better match the existing frame dimensions. The existing façade casement sash currently sits back from the transom sash above, and the proposed double-hung windows will mimic this arrangement. The proposed work also includes retaining, restoring, and repainting the metal spandrel panels between the floors of windows. A bank of contemporary office windows with reflective aluminum frames will be removed from the western corner of the façade at the second floor and replaced with the double hung aluminum units.

    - There are a number of different window types present on the rear elevations including industrial steel sash windows, casement windows divided by a mullion and surmounted by two transoms, and paired casement windows with a shared transom unit and no mullion. The applicant proposes to replace the steel sash windows with fixed aluminum frame windows that feature both between the glass muntins and applied exterior grids that match the existing configurations. The casement windows surmounted by transom windows will be replaced with the double hung units utilized on the facades. A "sightline adapter" is proposed for the casement windows without mullions that will match the width of the existing stiles.


Figures 9,10: Photographs of the existing windows at the rear of the building and west façade.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Broadway Avenue Local Historic District was established in 2005.
- Staff conducted a site visit and was able to observe the deterioration of masonry elements and the fire escape as described in the conditions assessments submitted by the applicant.
- In addition to the documentation provided in the application materials, staff site visits confirmed that many of the window sash members are exhibiting advanced deterioration, and that numerous windows have been removed or heavily altered over the course of the 20th century. Many of these alterations are related to the installation of window air-conditioning units. It is staff's opinion that existing conditions merit consideration of historically appropriate replacement windows.
- Per NPS guidance on "Replacement Windows that Meet the Standards," using the hierarchy of a building's features and taking into account the window's visibility, some general guidance can be drawn:

> "Replacement windows on the primary, street-facing or highly visible elevations of tall buildings *above a distinct base* must match the historic windows in size, design and *all details that can be perceived from ground level*. Substitute materials can be considered to the extent that they do not compromise other important visual qualities." [emphasis added]

Figures 11-14: Images of existing window conditions at the interior provided by the applicant.

ISSUES

- It is staff's opinion that the masonry restoration work and the fire escape replacement meet the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The proposed fire escape replacement and repair/in-kind replacement of masonry elements will not have a detrimental effect on the character defining features of the building.
- The windows on the rear elevations were historically minimally visible from the street due to the presence of intervening structures. It is staff's opinion that the rear windows are not distinctive character defining features of the building, and the proposed aluminum windows are appropriate replacements at these elevations.
- The windows at the facades of the building are distinctive character defining features of the Merchants Building. However, it is staff's opinion that the proposed replacement windows are not demonstrably inappropriate replacements. The applicant has provided sufficient documentation of significant deterioration, or in some cases complete removal of the original windows to merit replacement units The proposed design results in only minor changes to the visible dimensions of the sash as illustrated in the provided drawings. The units with the most substantial change in sash dimensions are the replacement casements proposed for the top floor, which are minimally visible from the street level. Although the operation of the windows will change, the characteristic fenestration patterns of the window frames (smaller windows set forward over larger windows, arranged in banks and divided by mullions) will remain. The retention of the sills and mullions will also lesson the visual impact of the project, and the removal of contemporary aluminum office style windows at the western corner of the façade will have a positive effect on the integrity of the building.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78, Determination of Historic District Commission

It is staff's opinion the project as does not alter or obscure the features and spaces that characterize the property. Staff therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed, because it meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation.