

STAFF REPORT: AUGUST 9, 2023 MEETING

PREPARED BY: A. DYE

APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8486

ADDRESS: 686 SELDEN

HISTORIC DISTRICT: WILLIS-SELDEN LOCAL

APPLICANT: BETHANY HOWARD, CITY OF DETROIT, GENERAL SERVICES DIVISION-CITY WALLS; GW1 CASS LLC

PROPERTY OWNER: GW1 CASS LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JULY 17, 2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JULY 21, 2023

SCOPE: PAINT MURAL ON BRICK AREAS AT SIDE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Erected ca. 1924, Selden Manor is located at 686 Selden, on the north side of the street between Second and Third Avenues. The four-story masonry structure was erected to the lot lines, except for the small setback at the rear elevation. The front elevation retains some of its original classical revival detailing, including the tile roof.

The first-floor exterior was likely faced with limestone and wraps around both sides of the building. The remaining side walls and rear wall are faced entirely with dark brown brick; the only ornament consists of the window openings with stone sills. The alleys to the east and north, and the three alcoves within the west elevation, have single, double, and triple window openings.



Staff photo, July 21, 2023.

PROPOSAL

One mural was painted on each of the four west-facing masonry walls. The artist used the following products to complete the mural:

- [Benjamin Moore Ultra Spec Masonry Int/Ext 100% Acrylic Sealer primer 608](#)
- [Benjamin Moore Ultra Spec Masonry Elastomeric Waterproof Coating Flat \(359](#)
- [Element Guard® Exterior Paint - Flat Flat \(763\)](#)

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

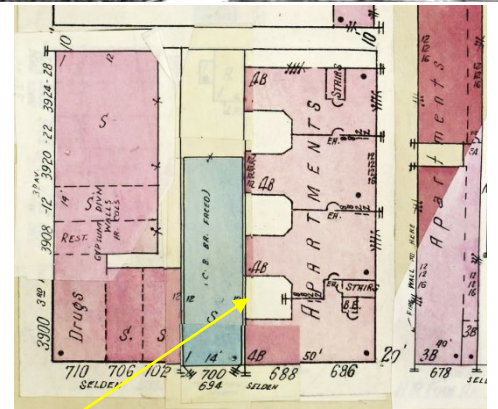
- The Willis-Selden Historic District was established in 2011.
- The contrasting-colored brick denotes where the cornice and small balcony were removed; only a few original corbels remain below the extending walls at the second floor. A building permit was issued on August 25, 1958 for the removal of the cornice and related wall repair.



Staff photo, January 21, 2022



Photo from April 26, 1925 Detroit Free Press article



Sanborn Map, Vol. 2, 1921 – 1950

- The Sanborn map shows that the block on which 686 Selden sits was filled with structures that obscured the now exposed west elevation. The outline of the building that had been erected at 694 Selden remains evident on the west-facing walls of 686 Selden.
- The stone wall at the first floor does not appear to have included windows (unlike the east wall), but it remains an integral component of a distinctive character-defining feature of the building. Furthering this point is the fact that face brick was used on the upper wall, while the remaining bays were covered with common brick.



Google street view, November 2020.

- At the February 9, 2022 meeting the Commission issued a Notice-to -Proceed for the replacement of the existing vinyl windows at the side and rear elevations with new vinyl windows; operation is one-over-one double-hung sash.
- Staff inquired on whether a physical assessment of the walls was completed prior to the artistic application. Does the City Walls program inspect the condition of the wall(s) before accepting the building for a mural, making sure there is no existing water damage, missing/cracked brick and/or mortar?
Yes, I assess the walls. 686 Selden did not appear to have water damage and there was no missing or cracked brick and mortar @ eye level. The 4 building pillars were in an ideal condition for the artist, who also assessed the wall. The artist used a lift which helped him get to the higher heights while painting the mural, and he didn't report back with any issues concerning the condition of the walls above eye level.



Staff photo, July 21, 2023.



Staff photo, July 21, 2023.



Staff photo, July 21, 2023.



Staff photo, July 21, 2023.



Staff photo, July 21, 2023. Note that this southernmost elevation at the street incorporates face brick and finished stonework, as distinct from the other three areas. The artist here used the ornamental band of stone as the rim of the painted vase.

ISSUES

- Staff reviewed the product data for the primer and waterproof coating. It is staff's opinion the products used create a barrier against the brick, however, as the entire wall system was not covered, the unpainted brick retains a level of permeability.
- The southernmost wall closest to Selden was, and remains, a component of the decorative building façade which is a distinctive character-defining feature. Standards 2, 5, 9, and 10 focus on the retention, preservation, and non-alteration of a building's historic features, finishes and its environment. Additionally, should the removal of the mural on the southernmost wall be attempted, staff is concerned with potential damage to the historic face brick.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation One – Denial – Application of mural to southernmost west-facing bay

Staff finds that the painted surfaces on the southern bay (i.e., the mural closest to the street) does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the following reasons:

- The stone blocks and protruding trim are a component of a comprehensive design at the building's first floor which wraps both sides of the structure. The use of face brick at the upper level furthers this bay's integration with the front elevation building design.
- The mural altered the features of the wall and distorts the historic comprehensive design at the first floor.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the work as proposed, as it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standards 1, 2, 5, and 6:

- 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.*
- 5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*
- 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.*
- 10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

Recommendation Two – COA – Application of mural to three west-facing bays with common brick.

Staff finds that the proposal for the remaining work items will not alter the features and spaces that characterize the property and district and therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Elements of Design for the district.