

STAFF REPORT: 11/12/2025 MEETING

PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

ADDRESS: 2411 14TH STREET

APPLICATION NO: HDC2025-00684

PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICT: CONDUCTORS PROTECTIVE ASSURANCE BUILDING (C.P.A BUILDING)

APPLICANT: HANNAH BERRY/LIONS AND RABBITS CENTER FOR THE ARTS

OWNER: ROBERT ZALKIN

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 7/24/2025

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11/06/2025

SCOPE: PAINT MURAL ON SIDE WALL, INSTALL PAINTED BOARDS AT WINDOWS, INSTALL LED LIGHTING

EXISTING CONDITIONS



Current appearance. Photo taken by HDC staff, 7/24/2025

Per the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board:

The C.P.A. Building is a six-story, flat roofed, limestone and granite commercial flatiron building of steel and concrete construction situated on the angled corner of Michigan Avenue and 14th Street, facing Michigan Central Station and Roosevelt Park. The term flatiron refers to the shape of an old-fashioned iron used for pressing clothes -- narrow on one end and extending outward in a triangular fashion at the other. Like the more famous Flatiron Building in New York City, the C.P.A. Building defines an important corner, anchoring a commercial thoroughfare.

In plan, the C.P.A. Building is in the shape of an irregular pentagon, with two acute angles forming the single-bay entrance façade at the southeast corner of the building. Each floor above the double-door entrance has a single, double-hung sash window with a spandrel separating it from the floor below. The two other primary façades along Michigan Ave. (south) and 14th St. (east) splay out from the corner bay and are composed of identically proportioned units. However, the Michigan (south) façade has three bays, and the 14th Street façade (east) has six bays, with the primary entrance to the upper floors in the fourth bay of the latter façade. The two entrances are heavily embellished in the Classical language. At both entrances, large, beaded consoles hold up dentiled cornices bearing a heavily embellished lintel. An upper panel above the lintel and between consoles was originally incised with the name, "C.P.A. Building." These incised panels were later covered with green and white neon signs with curved edges that read "C.P.A. Building" in identical font to the original incised lettering. It is believed these neon signs may have been installed early in the building's history due to their streamlined design and identical typeface.

Symmetrically arranged detailing of cornucopias and shields in low relief are framed with classical moldings in a leaf pattern, with bead and reel, and egg and dart moldings beneath the cornice of the entrances. The flat, precast panels framing the doorway continue the detail. A large, non-original square clock (installation date unknown) is situated beneath the lintel, although a historic photo shows originally a round clock was affixed at this location. The building is faced with regularly stacked white Bedford limestone blocks with mortar joints above a six-foot tall gray granite base. Wide pilasters rising up six stories define its bays. Each bay on the two primary façades features segmentally arched, three-part subdivided transom windows above large display windows resting on a low apron bulkhead (all now boarded). Above the ground floor, each bay per floor contains two individual double-hung sash windows with spandrels below in which a rosette is centered. All second-floor windows, with the exception of the west facade, have dentiled window sills. Also with the exception of the west façade, three façades are capped by a dentiled cornice. The 14th Street entrance to the upper floor offices, in the fourth bay from the southeast corner of the building, is a duplicate of the front entrance, however without a clock in the transom over the doors. The rear, or north elevation along the Fisher Service Drive, has similar materials and detailing of its upper story levels with windows mimicking the single-bay entrance façade at the southeast corner of the building. Its non-decorative back door and equal height side window are boarded.

A 2008 photograph of the building prior to the board-up of ground level windows and doors indicate original doors and windows were replaced at an unknown time. Per this photo, black security window bars were added after 2008. The west elevation is faced with brick and lacks architectural embellishments, as it was historically partially covered by a smaller-scaled building within the Michigan Avenue commercial block to its west. Seen above this façade is a rooftop penthouse structure. This façade contains fourteen non-decorative, metal-framed, two over two, upper-story windows. (At the time of this report, thirteen of the fourteen windows were boarded). A white, brick-faced rectangular plan drivethrough structure, with columnar supports and a canopy, contains a drive-up window (now boarded) was attached to the building in 1977. This structure is a non-historic feature, built outside the period of significance, located within a noncontributing parcel to the historic district



Current appearance. Photo taken by HDC staff, 7/24/2025

PROPOSAL

- At stories 2-6, affix painted wood boards to existing wood boards at all window openings
- Paint a large-scale mural on the west wall mural,
- Paint a mural on boards which cover the east wall, first story storefront area
- Install freestanding interactive phone stations
- Install LED light strips within all window openings and at the parapet

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- *Detroit City Code, Section. 21-2-56 - Powers and duties, #2).* notes that “...the Historic District Commission shall...review permit applications as provided in Division 4 of this article for designated historic districts, interim historic districts, and proposed historic districts. Per Section 21-2-71, applications for work in proposed historic districts are received and processed in the same manner as currently designated districts. *Detroit City Code, Sec. 21-2-78* further states that “the Historic District Commission's review of permit applications for work in **proposed historic districts** shall be **for informational purposes only**.”
- The CPA Building is currently under consideration for designation as a local historic district by the Detroit City Council. HDAB staff has noted that a public hearing at City Council Planning and Economic Development Committee is scheduled to be held on 11/13/2025.
- The applicant has therefore submitted the proposal to the Commission so this body might review the outlined proposal and render a decision with respect to the historic appropriateness of the outlined scope. Note that the applicant is seeking to undertake the work in mid-2026, per the submitted timeline.
- As the building has not yet been designated as an historic district, a designation report and Elements of Design have not yet been finalized and codified into City code. However, a draft

copy of the designation report and Elements of Design for the district was provided to the Commission for review and comment in August 2025. Staff has reviewed the draft documents, as well as the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Building and makes the following observations with respect to the proposed project's historic appropriateness:

Paint a Mural on the West Wall

The building's exterior walls are masonry. The application proposes to add a painted mural to the west wall, specifically noting that mural will span the entire west elevation of the building. As stated in the application materials, the mural will be installed per the following:

- *All flaking or unstable paint will be hand-scraped using preservation-safe methods. The surface will be cleaned and primed using artist-grade, pH-neutral primer.*
- *Painting will be executed with high-quality, weather-resistant materials such as Montana Cans and O'Leary's Paint to ensure durability and protection from the elements.*
- *After painting, the mural will be sealed with a UV-resistant matte varnish.*
- *No masonry restoration, tuckpointing, or alteration will occur as part of this project*

It is staff's opinion that the proposed mural will not destroy historic materials or features that characterize the property as the west wall has been painted and is secondary in nature. Specifically, the building is "flatiron" in form, with heavily embellished limestone and granite cladding at its main/front side facades and corners. However, the west wall is clad with brick and displays no decorative detailing. Also, please see the below Sanborn Fire Insurance map, which indicates that the west/side wall was partially obscured by a commercial strip of buildings. The installation of a mural at that west wall will not impact the building's significant, character-defining facades.



Current appearance of west wall. Photo taken by HDC staff, 7/24/2025. This entire side of the building will be covered with a mural



South façade, proposed LED lighting. Image provided by applicant

Install New Phone Booths

The scope item related to the new phone booths is incomplete as it does not outline the number, dimensions, and specific location(s) of the booths. However, the application does indicate that the booth(s) will be freestanding and moveable. The application also indicates that they will be located to the west of the building, within the portion of the site which has been deemed as “non-contributing” by the draft designation report. It is therefore staff’s opinion that the installation will not likely negatively impact the building’s historic character.

Install a “Paint-by-Numbers” Mural at the South Façade

The application proposes to install a “Paint-by-Numbers” mural at the first story storefront area. Specifically, the mural has been painted on wood panels and will either be “...affixed to a freestanding frame or temporarily installed at the base of the building.” The application does not provide specific details with respect to the dimensions of the mural and the manner in which the mural will be installed at the site as either a freestanding frame or affixed the building’s base. However, staff does note that the proposed location of the mural/the first story at the south façade is currently covered with boards. Also, per the HDAB draft designation report, all historic-age storefront elements were removed by 2008. This scope item is therefore unlikely to negatively impact the building’s historic fabric as long as the new installation is either affixed to the existing boards and is not mounted to the limestone columns at the south façade or is freestanding.

ISSUES

- The current application does not specify how the new LED light strips will be installed at the buildings window openings and parapet. Also, their collective impact is contrary to the historic character of this building.
- The current application does not outline the number, dimensions, and specific location(s) of the proposed phone booths
- With respect to the mural proposed for the south façade, first-story storefront area, the application does not provide specific details re: its dimensions and the manner in which it will be installed at the site as either a freestanding frame or affixed the building's base

Recommendation 1 of 1 - Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness – Add murals, lighting, and phone booths

It is staff's opinion that the project meets the Standards and is in keeping the district's Elements of Design. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work with following conditions:

- The LED light strips proposed for location at the building's window openings and parapet shall be removed from the project scope.
- HDC staff shall be afforded the opportunity to review and approve the final installation details for the proposed phone booths
- The mural proposed for the south façade, first-story storefront area, the application does not shall be installed in a manner which does not damage or obscure the building's masonry. HDC staff shall be afforded the opportunity to review and approve the final installation details prior to the issuance of the project's permit

Per Section 21-8-78 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, any COA or Denial resulting from this application is for informational purposes only, another application for Certificate of Appropriateness must be submitted to the HDC if the district has been designated prior to the commencement of the proposed work.