

STAFF REPORT 12-9-2020 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBERS: 20-6980, 20-6978, 20-6979 and PORTIONS OF 20-6987, 20-6986, 20-6985, 20-6984, 20-6983, 20-6981

ADDRESS: 2457 CASS (VACANT LOT); 467-469, 481 HENRY (PARKING LOTS); OUTDOOR AREAS OF 2447 CASS, 2467 CASS, 427 HENRY, 439 HENRY, 447 HENRY, 459 HENRY, AND 489 HENRY (PARCELS WITH BUILDINGS); AND PUBLIC ALLEYS/SIDEWALKS/RIGHTS-OF-WAY TO INCLUDE THE ENTIRE HISTORIC DISTRICT

HISTORIC DISTRICT: CASS-HENRY

APPLICANT: KRAEMER DESIGN GROUP, LLC

OWNERS: SORIN ENTERPRISES, LLC/CASS HENRY VILLAGE APARTMENTS, LLC/OLYMPIA DEVELOPMENT OF MICHIGAN, LLC/CITY OF DETROIT (FOR PUBLIC ALLEYS/SIDEWALKS/ROW)

ARCHITECT: NEUMANN/SMITH ARCHITECTURE

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11-20-20

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

SCOPE: DISTRICT-WIDE SITE IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDING PARKING LOTS, OUTDOOR SPACES, STREET FURNITURE, LIGHTING, LANDSCAPING, TREE-PLANTING, PAVING, RESURFACING, FENCING, AND PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

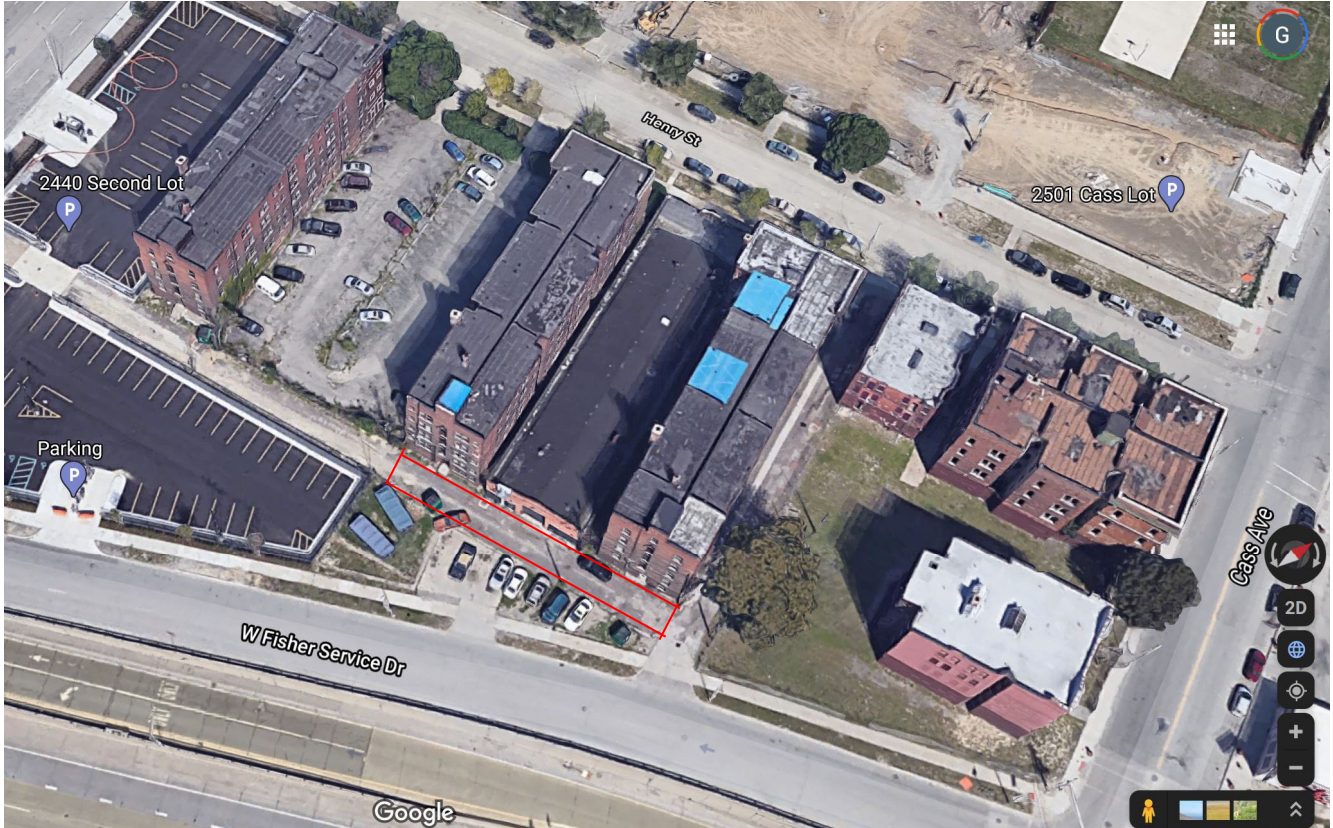


View southeast towards downtown at existing parking lots (481 Henry), Cass-Henry Historic District. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Cass-Henry Historic District was established in 2018, and covers a substantial portion of the city block bounded by Henry to the north, Cass to the east, West Fisher Service Drive to the south, and Second Avenue to the west. The district contains ten legal parcels, seven of which contain historic buildings considered contributing resources. The remaining three parcels include a grassy vacant lot at 2457 Cass, between 2447 Cass

(Hotel Ansonia) and 2467 Cass (Atlanta Apartments), and a pair of parcels that serve as parking lots at 467-469 Henry and 481 Henry, between the Berwin and Claridge Apartment buildings. There is additional public land included in the district's boundaries and subject to the Commission's jurisdiction, including the northern half of the east-west alley between Second and Cass, a substantial portion of the north-south alley between Henry and the West Fisher Service Drive, and the public sidewalks/rights-of-way fronting all private properties and extending north and west to the centerlines of Henry and Cass, respectively.



The designation report of the city's Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB) makes the following statements concerning the district's outdoor character:

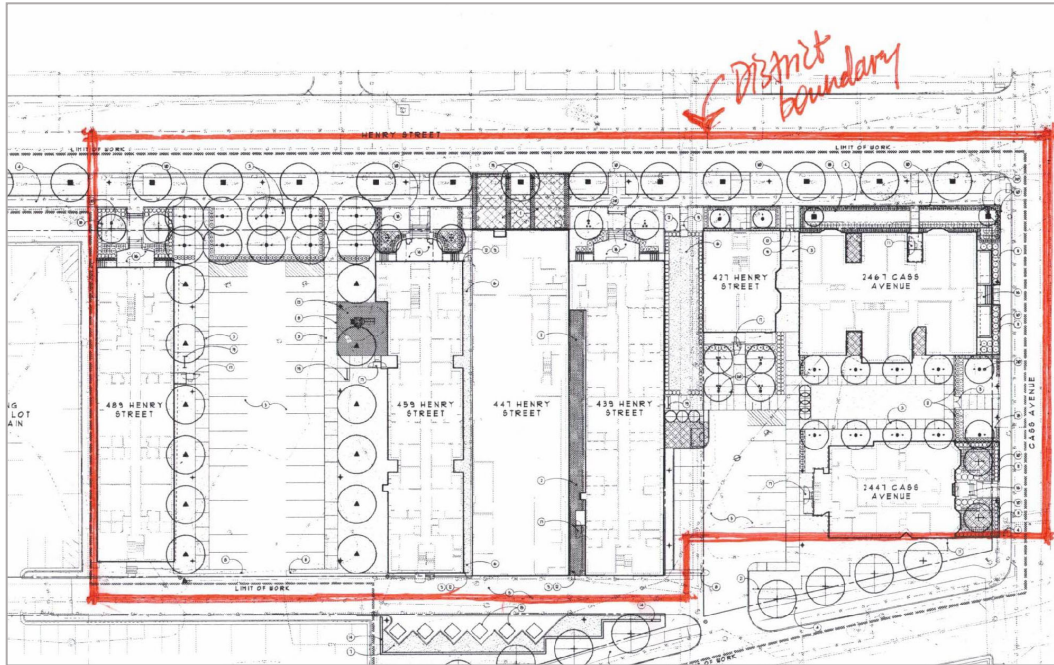
Character-defining features of the district primarily include the buildings themselves, though a few mature street trees remain, along with sidewalks and concrete walkways and steps approaching each building. Even where buildings have been razed, walkways, landscaping and mature street trees remain, helping the district to retain much of its historic residential feeling.

Two of the district's Elements of Design (Section 21-2-236), which are intended to describe existing conditions and establish design expectations for new development, are worth citing in their entirety:

(13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments. *Typical treatment of individual residential properties is a shallow, flat front grass lawn, subdivided by a straight concrete walk leading to the front entrance. The single commercial building [i.e., 447 Henry] features a paved front setback. Asphalt-paved alleys provide rear access to lots in the district, though outbuildings that may have existed historically no longer remain. Hedges and other landscaping features are sparse but often regularly spaced and symmetrically arranged. Trees vary in size, age, and species. Public sidewalks run alongside both streets in the district. Curbs, while historically stone, have been replaced with concrete in a majority of the district. Public lighting is generally of the modern, steel, pole-mounted variety. Chain-link fences are commonly situated at the front lot line; the building at 459 Henry Street [i.e., Claridge Apartments] features a short concrete retaining wall at the front lot*

line, behind which sits a front yard with prominent shrubbery. Modern black wrought iron-style fencing exists in front of a portion of 2467 Cass Avenue.

(14), Relationship of open space to structures. Front yards are generally quite shallow, and rear setbacks are very narrow, except at 2447 Cass Avenue and 447 Henry Street, where small rear yards exist. Other than public rights-of-way, large areas of open space exist only where they have been created by building demolition; these spaces serve as parking lots or are maintained as open lawns.



Staff sketch of Cass-Henry District Boundary superimposed over the applicant's submitted site plan, showing areas subject to Commission jurisdiction. Note that the lower portion of the internal parking lot (south of 427 Henry and west of 2447 Cass), including the entrance, is out of jurisdiction. The row of dumpsters south of 459 and 447 Henry is similarly outside of the historic district.

The HDAB report does not specifically mention the alleys, which remain open to vehicle traffic and are paved in a mix of original historic paving blocks and concrete or asphalt patching. The continuity of the brick pavers is marred in the north-south alley by a substantial concrete repair. A large area of intact historic brick paving exists in the east-west alley behind the Claridge (459 Henry), 447 Henry, and Bretton Hall (439 Henry) and is marked in red on the aerial photo (previous page). Additional site elements include large electrical infrastructure, at the midpoint of the north-south alley and at the midpoint of the east-west alley (behind 447 Henry).



View of vacant lot at 2457 Cass, view to the west. South elevation of the Atlanta Apartments dominates the right side of this image. Staff photo, November 24, 2020



View of Henry Street trees towards Cass. Staff photo, December 7, 2020



View of conditions in front of The Henry (foreground) and the Atlanta (beyond). This paving brick (as opposed to that in the alleys) does not appear to be a historic-age installation. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of north-south public alley between The Henry and Bretton Hall, looking south. Note concrete strip running length of this alley. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of landscaping, sidewalk, fencing and various site elements in vicinity of Bretton Hall and 447 Henry, looking west. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of landscaping and curb cut/driveway to 467-469 Henry parking lot. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



Detail view of existing landscaping at 481 Henry, with the Berwin (489 Henry) beyond. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of landscaping, sidewalk, fencing and various site elements in vicinity of the Berwin (489 Henry), looking west near the end of the historic district. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of east-west alley behind the Claridge and 447 Henry, looking east. Abundant and reasonably sound historic brick paving exists in this location. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



Reverse view of east-west alley, looking west. The historic district boundary runs along the centerline of this alley.. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of north-south alley, looking north. Most of this alley is in the historic district. Bretton Hall at left. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of open space behind 427 Henry, center, and 2447 Cass, at right. Staff photo, November 24, 2020

PROPOSAL

The proposed scope of work for the district-wide site improvements is depicted in the attached schematic site drawings* for this Body's review and, *per the applicant*, specifically includes:

- *The streetscape on Henry Street will be redesigned to eliminate most of the curb cuts, as access to the parking area will be relocated to the alley*
- *Existing parking lots at 467-469 Henry and 481 Henry will be redesigned with a wide landscape buffer to shield the occupants of 489 Henry (Berwin) and 459 Henry (Claridge) from noise and headlight glare*
- *Per the landscape plan L101, twelve Honey Locust trees, six at each side, will frame the parking lot. Ground surface treatment in this landscape buffer is not specified*
- *A tot lot [playground with equipment] will be added to the area directly adjacent to the parking lot and 459 Henry (Claridge)*
- *The sidewalk along the southern side of Henry Street will be retained, a wide greenbelt will be planted, and a decorative hardscape and patterned concrete will be used directly in front of 447 Henry for the anticipated retail/dining tenant.*
- *At each residential building, a forecourt will be created by construction of a 12" concrete planter curb with ornamental plantings found within the forecourt*
- *For the buildings along Cass Avenue (2447 and 2467 Cass) and 18" aluminum garden fence will be placed in front of each building.*
- *The landscaping in front of each building will have a slightly different arrangement of landscaping and trees to provide greenery and visual interest to the buildings*

North-south alley between Bretton Hall (439 Henry) and The Henry (427 Henry)

- *The north-south alley between 439 Henry (Bretton Hall) and 427 Henry (The Henry) will be recreated into additional outdoor gathering spaces as well as parking for residents.*
- *The northern end of the alley will become a seating area with a granite chip [decomposed granite, or DG] surface; it will be surrounded by plantings [yew shrubs] and accessed through an aluminum fence and gate [6' high, see landscape details sheet L201], set back from Henry Street*
- *Per the landscape plan L101, a wide east-west sidewalk ending in a bike rack alongside Bretton Hall intersects at this point*
- *A short row of three (3) small 'Kindred Spirit' Oaks are planted adjacent to the sidewalk, followed by a bed of pachysandra at the northwest corner of the parking lot adjacent to the electrical infrastructure*
- *The southern end of the alley will form a portion of a surface parking lot with 15 parking spaces [overlapping onto private property at the rear of 2447 and 2457 Cass]. Drive aisle will be accessed from West Fisher Service Drive.*
- *New concrete paving will be installed along the parking lot and provide access to 2447 Cass, 2467 Cass, 427 Henry, and 439 Henry. The concrete paving will also extend between 427 Henry and 2467 Cass. This area will have lawn furniture and will also be accessible via an aluminum fence and gate facing Henry Street.*

East-west alley south of 439 Henry, 447 Henry, 459 Henry, and 489 Henry

- *Alley to be repaved with asphalt*
- *Alley to remain accessible to vehicular traffic and barrier free entry to 439 Henry*
- *A consolidated site refuse enclosure will be located along this alley and will be screened from the West Fisher Service Drive with both plantings and a masonry screen wall. [outside of historic district]*
- *Along the service drive a staggered 6' tall ornamental aluminum fence will be built just south of 2447 Cass Avenue and the open green space south of 427 Henry to provide privacy from the service drive [outside of historic district]*

2457 Cass (current vacant lot between 2447 Cass and 2467 Cass)

- ***A public/private gathering space will be created with ornamental plantings*** [framed by an allee of ten (10) Ginkgo trees extending west for the full depth of the adjacent buildings] ***and lawn furniture located closer to Cass Avenue, while a larger outdoor park for residents will be nestled further into the site, between the buildings, and will be accessed by an aluminum fence and gate off Cass Avenue***
- Per the landscape plan L101, the entryway to the public gathering space will be flanked by historic reproduction light poles (cut sheets provided)
- The public gathering space has an unspecified ground surface flanking the central walk, and will be symmetrically framed with perimeter yews and holly
- The residents' park includes a sidewalk along the two rows of Ginkgo trees and an unspecified ground surface in the center. The park terminates at its west end with a row of three (3) 'Kindred Spirit' oaks

427 Henry

- Per the landscape plan L101, a sidewalk running north-south will be established immediately west of the residents' park discussed above. The southern half of this sidewalk services the 15-space parking area, while the northern extension traverses the interstitial space between 2467 Cass and 427 Henry and connects with the public sidewalk at the Henry via a 6' ornamental fence/gate.
- Immediately behind 427 Henry, a quartet of Eastern Redbud trees will frame the sidewalk approach to the ADA porch lift

Fronts of buildings: Cass Avenue

- At 2447 Cass (Hotel Ansonia), two crabapple trees will flank the entry approach, set in beds of pachysandra surrounded by holly and yew shrubs. The composition is symmetrical across the entry.
- At 2467 Cass (Atlanta Apartments), the planting bed behind the above-mentioned 18" garden fence will feature a row of lilac shrubs arranged symmetrically about the entrance
- Towards the corner with Henry, additional shrubs are integrated into the composition

Fronts of building: Henry Street

- A row of sugar maples is proposed for the street trees. Status of existing trees, some quite large, is unclear.
- At 2467 Cass, a formal planting area with a perimeter of inkberry and Oakleaf hydrangea, with crabapple trees at either end, enclosing a lawn bisected by a sidewalk to access the ADA lift
- At 427 Henry, a similarly formal composition of hornbeams flanking the approach, with a perimeter of weigela shrubs
- At Bretton Hall (439 Henry), flanking Dogwood trees are juxtaposed with an azalea border behind
- At 447 Henry, scored concrete paving with paver inlay and border
- At Claridge Apartments (459 Henry) flanking Dogwood trees set in pachysandra, with inkberry borders
- At the landscape buffer in front of the parking area (467-469 Henry, 481 Henry), a double row of Tuliptrees with symmetrically arranged inkberry shrubs forming perimeter borders flanking sidewalks accessing the area
- At Berwin Apartments (489 Henry), flanking crabapple trees with a symmetrical yew perimeter and a border of hydrangea

Historic reproduction light poles ("acorn lamps") in public and private areas throughout the district, per the landscape/site plan

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- After review, staff finds that the proposed scope of work is well-developed and generally proposes appropriate site improvements, and is mostly sensitive to the preservation of the district's character-defining features.
- The modifications to the parking area are particularly welcome, as they Honey Locust trees will grow to help fill the void left by earlier demolitions, and buffer the lot from the buildings. The installation of tree and plant species proposed is carefully selected, thoughtfully designed, and appropriate for the district. It is unclear whether the existing trees along Henry (some quite mature, and called out in the designation report) are proposed to be removed or incorporated into the landscape plan. Staff expects they will be retained.
- At the east-west alley, staff has concern about the proposed asphalt resurfacing. There are substantial areas of historic paving brick in the two public alleys, marked by areas of concrete and asphalt patching. Staff typically recommends to the Commission that such areas be preserved to the extent feasible, as they contribute significant historic character at a district-wide scale. In this case, the north-south alley has been insensitively repaired and scarred with a wide concrete strip. The east-west alley has a large area of contiguous brick extending across the alley in the area behind the Claridge, 447 Henry, and Bretton Hall. Staff recommends that any removed pavers be salvaged and reused within the district, possibly to infill areas of pavers at the rear elevations, or in the "paved inlays" designed at the front of 447 Henry. If the Commission approves removal of the brick pavers, concrete rather than asphalt would be a more appropriate choice.
- Historic reproduction "acorn style" exterior light poles (cut sheets attached, 'Old Town' style) are proposed in locations throughout the district. Staff notes that these types of fixtures can create anachronistic perceptions of a historic district at odds with its authentic historic character, in conflict with the Standards. They are commonly found in new construction areas seeking to recreate a sense of historicity. As the Cass-Henry Historic District has its own established historic character, further assistance is not needed. Contemporary light poles of a modern, unobtrusive design and constructed of traditional quality materials (e.g., dark anodized or painted metals) are recommended instead.
- The east-west and north-south alleys are owned by the city, as are the sidewalk and berm areas proposed for interventions. Staff has received confirmation from the administration that the City is aware that ODM is seeking changes to the public right-of-way, alley and sidewalks and that ODM has the City's consent to apply for these changes with and through the Historic District Commission.

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 site improvement consistent with historic standards and guidelines
- Mature trees greater than 6" DBH should be identified and incorporated into the proposed landscape plan, especially at the fronts of parcels and street trees along Henry.
- Consistent with discussion above, staff recommends that the design for the light poles be revised, and that the design for the east-west alley be revised to preserve the historic paving brick.

RECOMMENDATION

Since a discretionary authorization regarding city property is involved, the Commission is asked for two decisions related to this project:

Section 21-2-5, Effects of projects on districts

The Commission is requested to make a finding concerning the “demonstrable effects of the proposed project and report same to the Mayor and City Council.” The intent of this section is to provide guidance to city government prior to committing to a particular course of action, under the following requirement:

A City-financed, licensed, permitted, authorized or contracted physical development project shall be considered to have a demonstrable effect on a designated or proposed historic district when any condition of the project creates a change, beneficial or adverse, in the quality of the historical, architectural, archeological, engineering, social or cultural significance that qualified the property for designation as an historic district or that may qualify the property for designation as an historic district. Generally, adverse effects occur under conditions which include:

- (1) Destruction or alteration of all or part of a resource;*
- (2) Isolation from or alteration of the surrounding environment of a resource;*
- (3) Introduction of visual, audible, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the resource and its setting;*
- (4) Transfer or sale of a City-owned resource without adequate conditions or restrictions regarding preservation, maintenance, or use; and*
- (5) Neglect of a resource resulting in its deterioration or destruction.*

Staff recommends that the Commission find a demonstrable effect for the Cass-Henry Historic District site improvements project affecting public sidewalks, alleys, and other rights-of-way, and that it is likely to be **beneficial**.

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 applications (collectively describing site improvements in the Cass-Henry Historic District on public and private property), as they meet 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 to specifically include review of specifications/cut sheets for lighting, signage, plantings, 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.
- Trees with diameter larger than 6” DBH at the front (street side) of the various buildings (including street trees) to be retained and incorporated into the landscape plan. Staff authority for removal of diseased trees, per established procedures requiring the inspection of an arborist, is continued.
- The design be modified to replace the proposed “acorn style” light poles be replaced with a contemporary design, subject to staff approval
- The design be modified to preserve the brick alley pavers at the rear elevations (east-west alley), subject to staff approval