

STAFF REPORT 12-9-2020 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 20-6982

ADDRESS: 459 HENRY (AKA CLARIDGE APARTMENTS)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: CASS-HENRY

APPLICANT: KRAEMER DESIGN GROUP, LLC

OWNER: CASS VILLAGE APARTMENTS, 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 of the Claridge Apartments, view to the southeast. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Claridge Apartments building (459 Henry) was erected in 1916. Per the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board’s (HDAB) 2018 designation report for the Cass-Henry Historic District, the building contains sixty-four units (twelve on each of its four stories). The building has a yellow-brown brick façade, and is characterized as a Georgian Revival structure dominated by an Arts and Crafts-inspired, arched, open entryway, into which is recessed a central entrance. The entryway/porch features heavy brick piers with alternate projecting courses of brick, forming a striated effect or modernistic quoining pattern. Cast stone arches sprung from pilasters are installed between the piers and the building, on top of which is a roof with a railed balcony potentially accessible from the second stair landing. The existence of this covered porch, and the brick color, mark the major features differentiating it from its sister buildings; 439 Henry (Bretton Hall) to the east, and 489 Henry (Berwin Apartments) to the west. Like these other buildings, the Claridge has a center bay featuring “balconettes” with thick stone surrounds. Other window openings are unembellished and rest upon stone sills or

a stone belt course. The has also lost its decorative cornice, unlike its sisters.

The Claridge Apartments is vacant, yet retains substantial integrity and is considered to be a contributing resource to the historic district. The cast stone elements at the arched entry porch have been inappropriately painted black, though the name "CLARIDGE" inscribed above in the stone architrave remains clear and visible. Its central entrance, underneath the arched entry, features what appear to be historic age, wooden double entry doors, which are currently boarded. The sidelight and transom windows are boarded, so staff could not determine status of any windows underneath. Per the applicant, the transom is leaded glass with an arts and crafts design. There is a single non-historic light fixture affixed to the brick above the entry.

The balconette door locations at the levels above (center bay) have been altered with inappropriate windows, non-historic infill brick, or boarded. At the uppermost location, two double-hung windows of non-historic age poorly sized for the opening are incorporated in a partially bricked closure.

The entrance is approached by concrete steps featuring a steel guard rail of non-historic age. At variance with its stable-mates, the Claridge has a non-historic concrete (or concrete-skimmed CMU) retaining wall curving streetward from the steps, which has also been painted black and encloses planting beds featuring a monolithic hedge.

Windows at the basement and first stories are boarded around the perimeter of the building. All windows appear to be vinyl 1/1 replacements that are perhaps a few decades old.

The yellow-brown face brick extends around to the side elevations and continues for about one bay (somewhat less than Bretton Hall), then transitions to common brick with architectural detail reduced to stone sills. There are no windows in the west-facing "wrap", and only a few in the east-facing portion. Architectural interest is sustained through a number of protruding brick courses which form a striated design in the brickwork, picking up a similar motif in the building's brick porch piers. The remainder of the side elevations are punctuated with large numbers of window openings in a semi-regular manner.

The rear elevation is of a more utilitarian nature, with furniture loading openings at each rear stair landing, and a projecting steel beam (hoist) above, aligned with the center hall; most of the door openings are boarded, but a single visible door does potentially appear to be of historic age. The brick is common and has been painted brown up to about six feet high, presumably to obscure or discourage graffiti. There is a short flight of (non-historic) concrete steps to the rear door.

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 to good condition, with some locations of step cracking, mortar loss, puncture holes, and some efflorescence below stone sills. The black paint on the stone pilasters and arches at the porch is cracked and peeling. The stone shows some discoloration and cracking. The two exterior basement doors on the north (primary) façade are boarded over.

A light-colored brick band exists at the top of the north façade where a cornice once existed.

The building has a flat membrane roof in fair to poor condition.



View to the southwest of the Claridge (447 Henry in foreground). Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



View showing main entrance at Henry, note "CLARIDGE" name above. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



Detail view of entry doors and stone detailing of porch. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



Detail view of altered balconette openings and cornice area above. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



View of west elevation, adjacent to parking lot at 467-569 Henry. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



South (alley) elevation. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.

EXISTING CONDITIONS (DISTRICT)

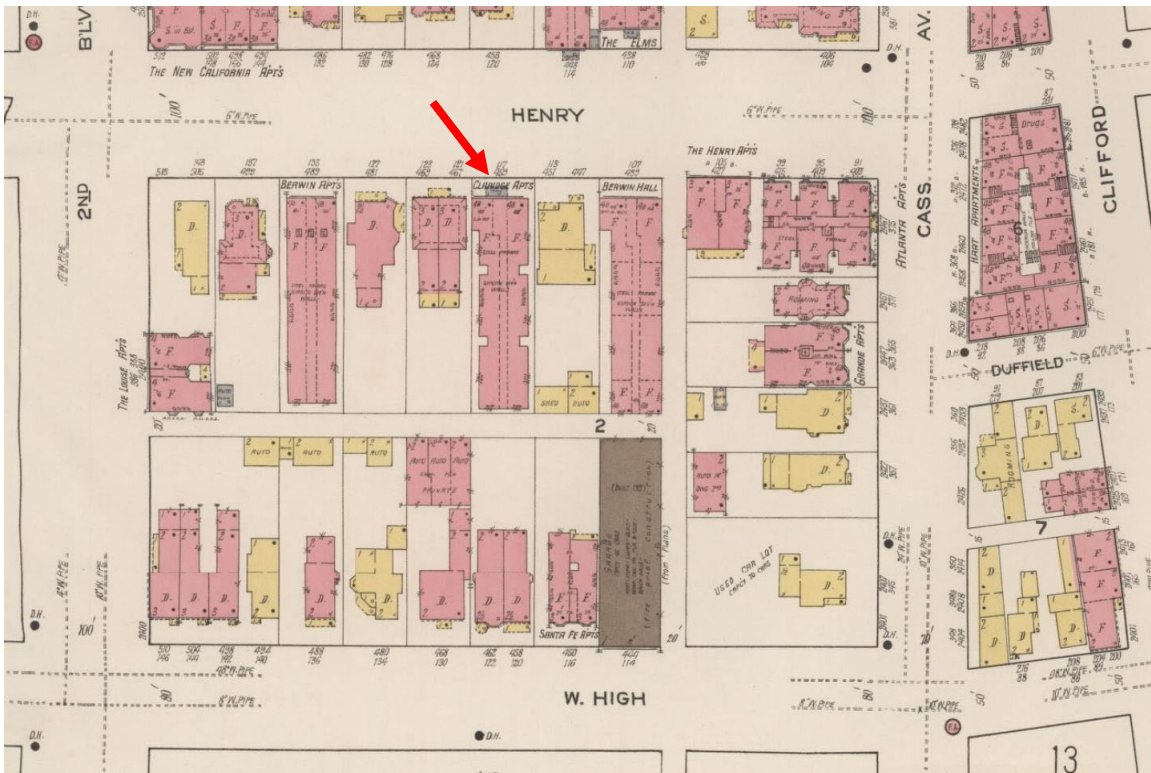


459 Henry, highlighted in blue, in its current district context. Image from Motor City Mapping.

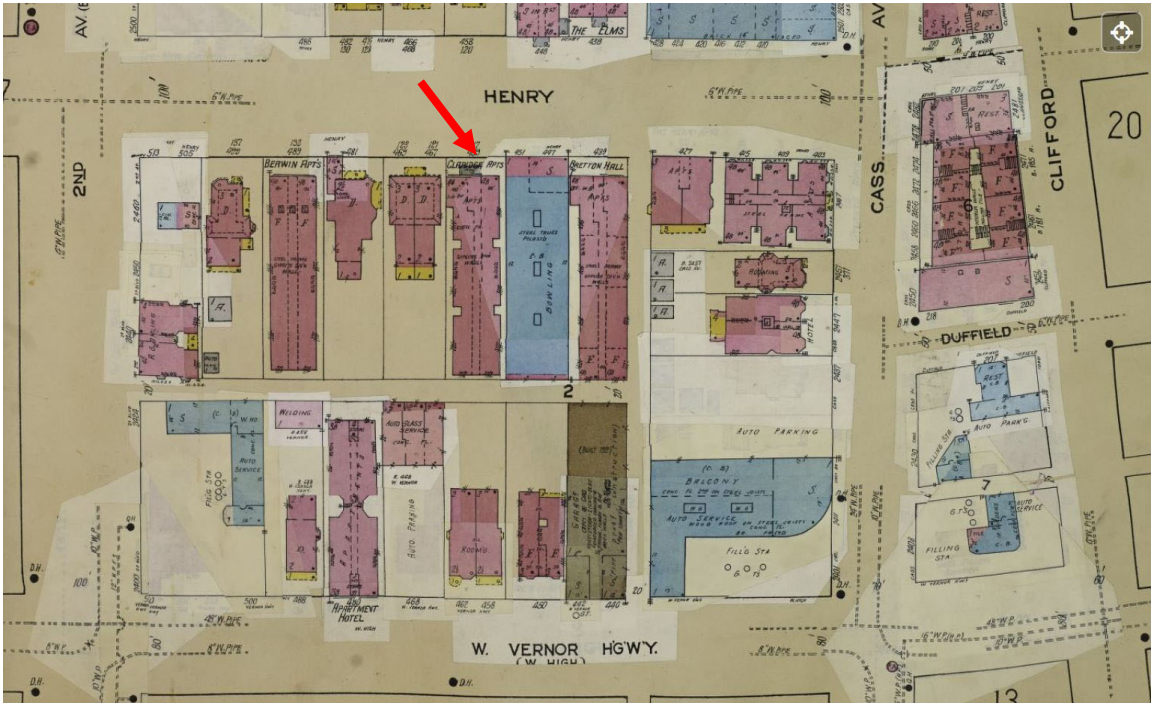
The Claridge Apartments building is one of seven contributing resources to the Cass-Henry Historic District. The district is significant as the “best remaining depiction of the form, scale, and density that once predominated throughout the area,” per the HDAB report. With the single exception of 447 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 459 Henry. 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 just 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 immediately adjacent to the Claridge. All frame structures have been removed.

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*
- *The stone elements at the main entry porch will be cleaned to remove all paint and return to bare stone* [process not provided]

Cornice

- *A new fiberglass or GFRC cornice will be fabricated using the existing cornices at 439 and 489 Henry as design intent. Cornice color to match historic color found at reference locations (TBD).*

Main entrance and doors

- *Main entrance doors will be inspected for damage and repaired as necessary with new hardware to match existing*
- *Basement doors will be inspected for damage and repaired as necessary with new hardware or replaced with compatible doors*
- *At the center bay balconettes, the anachronistic windows will be removed, along with the infill brick knee wall. Openings will be replaced with wood double doors, using the balconette doors at 439 Henry (Bretton Hall) as design intent. Aluminum storm doors will also be added in front of the double doors. The storm doors will be compatible with the historic nature of the building without appearing falsely historic.*
- *At the rear elevation, the ground floor steel door and the furniture loading doors will be inspected for damage and repaired as necessary with new hardware or replaced with compatible doors.*
- *ADA lift and new entrance door will be installed on the west façade of the building convenient to the adjacent parking lot*

Windows

- *New historic replica aluminum-clad wood windows throughout: Marvin Ultimate Double Hung G2 per attached data sheet (no extant historic windows, color TBD)*

Lighting

- *Exterior building lighting will be provided and designed to highlight building features*
- *Lighting locations may include up-lights on the west (Cass) façade and wall-mounted fixtures flanking the entrance*

Signage

- *Future signage is proposed to be reinstated in the same location as the stone-inscribed "CLARIDGE" above the main entry door*

- *Final signage drawings (including size, color, and design) will be submitted for staff approval before installation*

Roof, rooftop mechanicals, and penthouses

- *Current poor condition membrane roof to be removed and replaced with a new EPDM roof*
- *Small condenser farm will be added to the rear center of the roof and screened with an approximately 5' tall metal roof screen in a "Dove Grey" color*

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 2A101, 2A102 (floor/roof plans) and 2A401, 2A401.1, 2A402, 2A402.1 (elevations)



View to the southwest showing all Henry Street buildings in the historic district. The Atlanta (2467 Cass) is closest to the observer, followed by 427 Henry (The Henry), 439 Henry (Bretton Hall), 447 Henry (1-story commercial garage), 459 Henry (Claridge), and 489 Henry (Berwin). 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. The applicant proposes appropriately conservative repairs, 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 metalwork, masonry, and other similar features, so as to ensure against wholesale replacement of such features.
- As the building has no remaining original windows, the applicant proposes new historic replica, aluminum-clad wood windows throughout. Staff finds the proposed product to be appropriate, and that a 1/1 configuration would also be appropriate in all instances.
- The approach to restoration of the building’s cornice is appropriate and reasonable
- The building’s designation report does take note of the building’s name “Claridge” as a character-defining feature remaining at the building’s entrance. This feature should be preserved. The application suggests that future signage “will be reinstated in the same location.”
- An ADA lift and new entry door is proposed for a location on the west elevation convenient to the parking lot. 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 approvable process has been proposed for the removal of the brown paint over the brick, or the black paint over the stonework. A process or specification ensuring the preservation of the historic masonry should be submitted for staff review.
- The ultimate design for building signage should ensure retention and display of the stone-carved “CLARIDGE” name as a contributing element to the historic character of the building. Staff suggests that, if desired, it would be appropriate to place modestly-scaled additional signage in the landscape in front of the building subject to the Commission’s own sign guidelines and 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, and other exterior elements/color 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
- The historic name of the building, set in stone above the entryway, be preserved and remain visible.