

STAFF REPORT 12-9-2020 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 20-6985

ADDRESS: 427 HENRY (AKA THE HENRY, HENRY APARTMENTS, HENRY FLATS)

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 Henry apartments, view to the southeast. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Henry Apartments (427 Henry), according to the City’s Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB), was possibly under construction as early as 1900, making it the only building of nineteenth century design in the district, as well as the smallest. It is a Federal Colonial Revival design whose architect is unknown. Originally known as Henry Flats and incorporating five luxury units, it was subdivided into 26 small units by 1923 as the neighborhood began to transition from upper- and upper-middle class to rooming houses.

The Henry is a contributing resource to the Cass-Henry Historic District, and HDAB describes it further as thus:

This light-brown brick façade [building] consists of two bays flanking a narrower central bay. The central bay contains smaller, hallway window openings, with end bays bearing projecting wood bay windows on the second floor and simpler rectangular window openings on the top floor...The door surround consists of two Tuscan columns supporting a denticulated, classical entablature. “THE HENRY” is incised into the frieze in simple, sans

serif lettering. A small side window sits on each side of the entrance.

Despite being the oldest building in the proposed historic district, the Henry incorporates safety and quality-of-life innovations which became ubiquitous in Detroit apartment buildings following a 1911 ordinance (and which spread statewide after passage of a similar 1915 law): central hallways, with front and rear stairways, as well as hallway windows and an attic ventilator, are all found on the Henry.

The Henry's façade is slightly asymmetrical, which is most obviously evident by the larger width of the easternmost, second floor bay window, which seeks to accommodate the greater width of the building from the center line to the east side. The intent or reason for this idiosyncratic design is not immediately clear. The two bay windows on this primary façade are framed and clad in wood with a hipped metal roof covering. Except for a nominal gesture via brick quoining, the light brown brick at the primary façade does not turn the corner into the side elevations. The non-primary elevations are of common brick, with arched brick window openings speaking to its period of construction. There is a somewhat unexpected three-story bay at the otherwise unadorned alley (west) elevation, clad in clapboard, which is missing its first story windows. Six doorways, each flanked by a pair of windows, animate the rear elevation. The Henry Street entrance, and all window openings on the first story, have been closed up with concrete block; this closure extends to the wood bay at the alley (north elevation), which was apparently partially demolished at the first story to accommodate the block. Most of the bottom of the building, to include the 1st floor and entrance area, has been painted brown, including the rear (south) elevation.

The building was already vacant and boarded at the time of its designation, but does still retain a handful of historic windows in random locations. One single hung window is found in the central bay on the second floor and a similar unit is found in the central bay on the third floor. The original cornice has been removed, replaced with a parge coating. The building appears to be in fair condition and, despite the missing windows and alterations to the entrance, retains its historic integrity. The deterioration and alteration to the wood bays, and the soiled brick, give this building a relatively more shabby appearance than others in the district.

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 condition, with areas of staining, missing mortar, puncture holes, and some missing units. Stone is in fair condition with some cracking and staining. The wood forming the bay window structures is in poor condition. There is evidence of a former balcony/fire escape structure at the rear, no longer extant. The building has a flat EPDM roof in poor condition, and two skylights, also in poor condition.

The historic wood windows, per documentation submitted by the architect, appear to be in fair condition. See submitted architectural drawing 5A421. The existing windows include non-historic 1/1 wood window and a vinyl window at the north façade, a triple bay window on the second floor of the north façade with central 8/1 double hung and two flanking 6/1 double hung windows, and at the main entrance, two fixed wood windows with diagonal wood muntins. An additional set of wood windows is found on the second floor of the west (alley) elevation with center 6/1 double hung flanked by 6/1.



Detail view showing conditions at the Henry (primary) facade. The center (2nd story) window is original. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



Detail view showing main entrance at Henry, note "THE HENRY" name above. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



View to the southwest with Bretton Hall visible beyond. Staff photo, November 24, 2020.



View of rear elevation from adjacent alley. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.



Detail view of west-facing bay at alley elevation. Note unusual clapboard detailing, and missing first story windows. Staff photo, December 7, 2020



Detail view of an original wood window at the front elevation. Staff photo, December 7, 2020.

EXISTING CONDITIONS (DISTRICT)

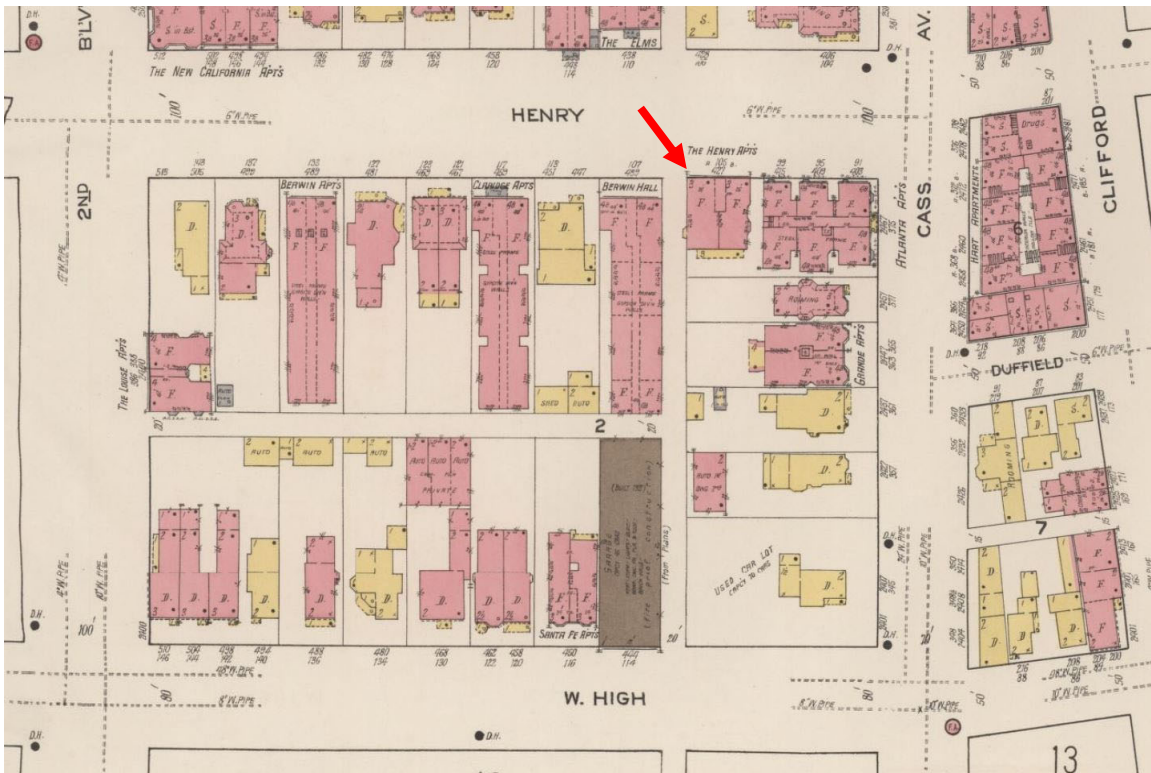


427 Henry, highlighted in blue, in its current district context. Image from Motor City Mapping.

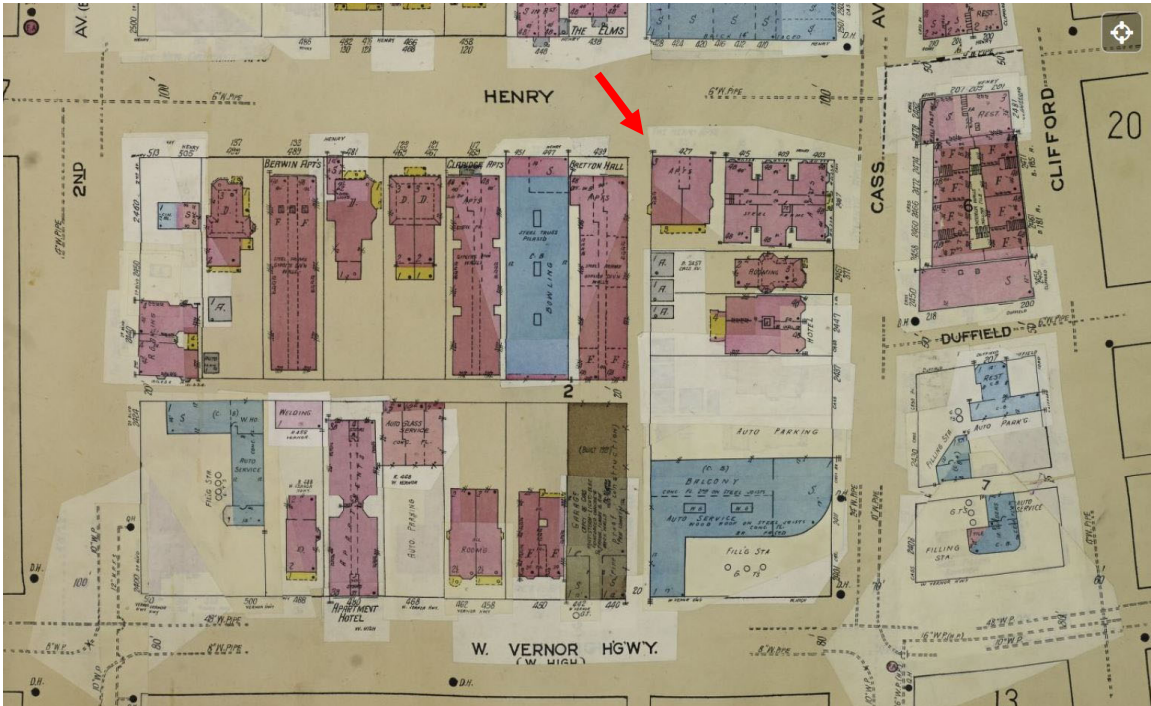
The Henry apartments building is one of seven contributing resources to the Cass-Henry Historic District. The district is significant as the “best remaining depiction of the form, scale, and density that once predominated throughout the area,” per the HDAB report. With the single exception of 447 Henry (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 427 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 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. 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*

Rear balconies/fire escape

- *Balcony structure rebuilt in each end bay, with steel structure and a composite decking surface*

Cornice

- *A new cornice made of GFRP or fiberglass, supported by paired brackets and based upon the existing cornices on 439 and 489 Henry, as referenced in (revised) drawing 5A401 received 11-25-20*

Main entrance and doors

- *Remove existing concrete masonry units (CMU) and rudimentary plywood door*
- *Install a new glazed panel door compatible with the historic nature of the building (color TBD)* (material not provided)
- *Create a defined entrance area in front of the door with new concrete porch, and a raised concrete curb to enclose ornamental trees and plants*
- *New glazed panel doors at balconies installed within existing frames*
- *ADA lift to be installed at grade in between the balconies on the south (rear) façade to provide access to the first floor porches*

Windows

- *New historic replica aluminum-clad wood windows throughout: Marvin Ultimate Double Hung G2 per attached data sheet (color TBD)*
- *On the north (primary) façade, two 1/1 windows will replace the existing (non-historic) 1/1 windows in the center bay. At the two end bays, 6/1 windows will be installed at the first and third floors. The bay windows will receive new 8/1 and 6/1 windows, some of them replacing historic-age windows.*
- *The existing fixed historic-age wood windows flanking the entrance (with diagonal wood muntins) will be replaced with units that match existing profiles and sight lines.*
- *At the west (alley) elevation, the bay window structure will be reclad with new wood (and first floor reconstructed) with the existing sightlines and applied wood trim maintained or rebuilt if too deteriorated. 6/1 windows will be installed at the bays*
- *Remaining openings at secondary elevations (east, west and south) will receive 1/1 single hung units*
- *Basement windows will be fixed pane aluminum-clad wood units with no dividing mullion*

Lighting

- *Exterior building lighting will be provided and designed to highlight building features*

- *Lighting locations may include up-lights on the east façade (presumably north?) and wall-mounted fixtures flanking the entrance*

Signage

- *Future signage is proposed to be reinstated on the building at the entrance (exact location TBD)*
- *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 condensers will be added to the center and western side of the roof with painted metal panel mechanical screens to obscure the condensers*
- *Existing rooftop penthouses will be rehabilitated and retained*

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 5A101 (floor/roof plans), 5A401, 5A401.1 (elevations), 5A421 (window details)

Additional photographs, renderings, presentation materials, and narrative provided by the applicant in support of this application is appended to this report and posted on the public website for the meeting.



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 “channel-letter” sign mentioned in the district’s Elements of Design (#15) for this property has since been removed. The sign did not contribute to the historic character of the building.
- The Henry is the only building in the district with any original windows remaining. For larger commercial projects, the Commission and the National Park Service have typically been more lenient in the importance of wood windows as character-defining features meriting preservation, with the implication that each particular window (unless especially ornamental) is less important on the continuum of overall character for large buildings (via use of the *cumulative effect* theory – see discussion in the staff report for 1322-1332 Broadway, February 2020 meeting of this Body). However, The Henry is a very diminutive apartment building, and frankly of a scale akin to some of the larger houses in our residential historic districts. For this reason, staff finds that these remaining windows, especially at the primary façade, are relatively more important character-defining features, which would subsequently be held to a “beyond repair” qualification under Standard 6.
- The building’s original entrance door(s) is no longer extant. Staff finds that the proposed replacement design is historically appropriate. The building’s designation report, excerpted above, does take note of the building’s name “The Henry” as a character-defining feature remaining at the building’s entrance. This feature should be preserved.
- The new cornice proposed for the building appears to be appropriate
- An ADA lift and new entry door is proposed for a location at the rear of the building. Staff finds this to be an appropriate intervention.
- Staff finds that the steel and composite balconies/fire escape at the rear of the building are appropriate interventions that are clearly modern yet compatible with the building’s historic character.
- 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 only a 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
- For the reasons stated above under “Observations,” staff is not eager to recommend replacement of the remaining historic wood windows absent proof of being beyond repair. The existence of “last remaining” character-defining elements has always merited special attention in the practice of historic preservation; indeed, the existence of this particular historic district is itself an example of such good practice. The remaining wood windows at the Henry Street facade, if restored, would contribute to the historic character of the rehabilitated building and should be retained. Given that this façade has a relatively small number of windows (18 total), and each of those windows has a comparatively larger effect on the character of the whole (similar to a smaller residential property), the replacement windows for this primary façade (only 10 would be required, by staff’s count, to join the 8 existing), should be specified as wood to match existing. The aluminum-clad replacement windows as proposed would be appropriate for the other, secondary elevations. Staff does not find that the Standards or Guidelines would prize aesthetic or technical uniformity over preservation of historic fabric.
- Staff communicated with the applicant on 12-5-20 regarding the submittal of additional photographs showing all historic windows still extant. The architect is resurveying the building on 12-6-20 and intends to submit revised information to the Commission prior to the meeting concerning the status and number of remaining historic windows, including photographs thereof. This report will be updated as additional information is received.

- 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.
- The ultimate design for building signage should ensure retention and display of the stone-carved "THE HENRY" name as a contributing element to the historic character of the building, and not otherwise obscure ornamental architectural elements. 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 windows on the front (primary) façade to be a mix of the restored original wood windows with the remainder to be new windows in the design configurations proposed but executed solely in wood; except as staff approves replacement of historic windows based on receipt of documented deterioration beyond repair (condition subject to receipt of further clarifying information from applicant concerning original windows)
- The historic name of the building, set in stone above the entryway, be preserved and remain visible.