April 17, 2023

Ms. Jennifer Ross
City of Detroit
Historic District Commission
Suite 808
Detroit, MI 48226

RE: Merchants Building – HDC Submission

Dear Ms. Ross:

Kraemer Design Group (KDG) is writing to submit information to the Detroit Historic District Commission (HDC), on behalf of Method Development, regarding the proposed rehabilitation of the Merchants Building located at 206 E. Grand River Ave. The first phase of the exterior work at the Merchants Building will include exterior masonry cleaning and restoration, a new fire escape, and new historic replica replacement windows.

The current scope does not include rehabilitation to the first-floor storefront and exterior doors and also does not include work to the roof, signage, or exterior lighting. Should these work scopes be proposed, a separate HDC application will be submitted.

The Merchants Building was commissioned by John J. Barlum and constructed in 1922. Barlum was a prominent Detroit based real estate developer. The building was constructed as an office tower and houses a variety of tenants including furriers, a bakery, the New York Life Insurance Company, and more. The building is rectangular in plan and eight stories in height. The building is constructed of a reinforced concrete frame with cast concrete and structural clay tile slabs. The building has two primary facades, north and west, facing Broadway and Grand River. Both facades are clad in white glazed terra cotta while the south and east facades are clad in a red brick. The north façade consists of six equal width bays and the west façade consists of six bays. Each bay is separated by glazed terracotta pilasters capped with Corinthian capitals at the seventh floor. A glazed terracotta cornice wraps the north and west facades at the second floor atop the Corinthian capitals. The south and east elevations are unadorned red brick with exposed concrete structure visually representing the structural grid on the facades.

The following is a detailed description of the proposed work:

<u>Masonry Restoration</u>

The exterior of the building is constructed of red brick and is clad with white glazed terracotta on the north and west facades. The south and east facades are faced in red brick with exposed concrete structure visible. The façade has been visually assessed by Kraemer Design Group and Resurget Engineering. The terracotta façade is in moderate condition overall with several areas, mostly below water tables and coping stones, exhibiting surface delamination and spalling. The brick facades are in moderate condition with the east façade being in moderate to poor condition. There is visible brick and mortar deterioration and failed mortar joints. The brick is painted black on the first floor of the east and south elevations. There is spalling concrete visible on the exposed concrete structure as well as corroded reinforcing bars visible from the exterior due to it being embedded too close to the exterior surface of the concrete.

The brick, concrete, and terracotta will all be cleaned and inspected for damage. The paint will be removed from the brick where it is present. The cleaning will be done according to the Secretary of the Interior Standards, and NPS Technical Preservation Briefs 1, 2 & 6. The cleaning will be tested with a standard detergent wash using the gentlest means possible. If this is not successful in cleaning the masonry facades, a low-pressure abrasive wash system is proposed. The system uses pressures as low as 10 PSI and is ideal for gentle restoration work. Should this be proposed, a mockup will be conducted to evaluate if the system is able to effectively clean while not degrading or damaging the existing materials. All damaged, deteriorated, or spalling masonry units are to be removed and replaced with new material to match the original units. Missing units are to be replaced to match the remaining adjacent materials and new brick and/or terracotta will match the existing as closely as possible in size, color, texture, and compressive strength. Any salvaged brick or terracotta will be reused where replacement is needed before new materials are used.

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Fire Escape

There is an existing fire escape on the east façade which is a black painted steel. The fire escape has a simple, metal slat landing at each floor with a cross braced steel railing. The fire escape is visibly corroding and brick at the support bracket locations are displacing and cracking and thus not safe for continued use. It is proposed that the fire escape be removed and replaced with a new reconstruction. The new fire escape will match the existing in form, material, and color and is proposed to be used as a second means of egress for the building. Example imagery of the corrosion visible on the fire escape steel is found in the attached façade assessment report produced by Resurget Engineering.

Windows

The building has existing wood windows as well as some steel factory style windows. There are multiple types and configurations of existing windows. The predominant type are in-swing casement style windows with fixed transoms above. Additionally, on the south façade, there are side-by-side in-swing casements with a single fixed transom above – giving the visual appearance of a 'T' shape on the window. The casement sashes and fixed transoms above are offset from each other – giving the visual appearance of a double-hung window. The windows on the north and west elevations are in groupings of 2, 4, or 5 divided by wood mullions. Each floor of windows are separated by formed metal spandrel panels which have been painted black.

The existing windows have been evaluated by Kraemer Design Group, Blackberry Systems, Inc. and Sealcraft window manufacturers. The windows are in poor condition throughout – particularly the sashes themselves. The wood windows are exhibiting rot and decay due to water infiltration from the failed exterior putty glazing. The sash joinery is failing – particularly the bottom rails and lower portion of the stiles on the majority of the windows. The exterior sills are split and fissured allowing water infiltration and encouraging decay. The steel factory style windows are severely corroded and in very poor condition. Many of the sashes have been modified over the years, including to accommodate window air conditioner units. Some window sashes have been nailed shut, boarded over, or have cracked or missing glazing. Additionally, some windows have been replaced with non-historic windows and storefront systems– as seen on the second floor as well as the single vinyl double-hung window on the south elevation. The mullions are in fair condition and the formed metal spandrel panels appear to be in good to moderate condition exhibiting some peeling paint.

It is proposed that the steel factory style windows be replaced to match existing. It is proposed that the wood casement and fixed transom windows be replaced with aluminum historic replica double hung units. It is proposed that the existing wood mullions between windows, the existing wood sills, and the existing metal spandrel panels be restored and retained. Double hung units are proposed in lieu of casements with fixed transoms above for a multitude of reasons: the building owner desires operable windows in the building as it is desirable to feature natural ventilation in a future hotel or apartment use. Additionally, double-hung units are the only window type which allows the existing offset to be maintained while also providing operability. The proposed historic replica windows will reasonably match the existing sightlines within allowable tolerances. Where windows are in existing groupings, the new historic replica sashes will be installed between the existing wood mullions which will be repaired and restored in situ. The existing wood mullions consist of multiple wood members. To meet historic sightlines it is proposed to cut into the interior trim pieces and insert the historic replica sashes within the width of the mullions so as to reduce the sash sightline and meet the existing historic sightline. Additionally, the 'T' shaped casement style windows will be produced by providing a sightline adaptor which matches the width of the center vertical.

The existing wood sills will be repaired and restored and capped with black aluminum flashing to protect the sills from further deterioration and water infiltration. The existing metal panels will be inspected for damaged, repaired and retained. The paint will be scraped and the panels will be repainted black. See attached window report produced by Blackberry Systems, Inc. as well as elevation drawings and existing and proposed window details for full window scope.

Conclusion

The items listed above provide a synopsis of the proposed scope of work for the rehabilitation of the Merchants Building. We kindly request a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work proposed. Further detail is provided in the attached drawings, photos, and documentation. Please contact Brian Rebain at Kraemer Design Group if you have further questions.

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Sincerely,

Kraemer Design Group, LLC

Brian Rebain
Principal

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