

GUIDELINES FOR DEMOLITION

of 1101 WEST HISTORIC MITCHELL STREET

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The following criterion are to be considered when evaluating a potential demolition of a historic property.

1. CONDITION

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety. Any self-created hardship or demolition by neglect is not grounds for the issuance of a certificate of appropriateness for demolition.

The property underwent remodeling into its current Art Deco form in 1937 when its tenant was The Grand, a ready-to-wear women's department store.

It is authentic to its era and not a reconstruction. There has been no indication of structural failure in the building or reason that it could not be re-used. That it does not fit the scale desired by the applicant is not a reason to consider the building a threat to health and safety. The provided engineer's report does not state the building is unsafe. The engineer concludes the report with commentary that is entirely outside his expertise and beyond the purpose of the report. There is no indication from the Department of Neighborhood that the building requires a raze order.

This criterion is not met.

2. IMPORTANCE

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area. Whether or not it is of such architectural or historic significance that its demolitions would be detrimental to the public interest and contrary to the general welfare of the people of the city.

The Grand has both historic and architectural importance.

The building is the flagship store of The Grand, a Rosenberg family business. The Grand was an exclusive ready-to-wear women's department store started here in 1905, with later additions and expansions over its 75 years of business until it closed its doors in 1980. During this time, the company's success allowed the Rosenbergs to branch out to additional locations for The Grand including in Whitefish Bay, Capitol Court, Wauwatosa and Southridge. The Grand's Historic Mitchell Street location was the City of Milwaukee's first ready-to-wear department store exclusively for women and the business' tag line, "She gets her clothes at The Grand"

became its long-standing slogan. The late 1800's and early 1900's national department store movement was a significant step toward present clothing shopping trends as the norm prior was for wearers or hired seamstresses to produce clothing for the individual on a sewing machine. The Grand's leadership was committed to staying on top of industry trends and bringing them to Milwaukee, and the business was known for its local advertising campaigns. For example, in 1945 The Grand received dresses that marked the city's first shipment of garments "from mill to retail" by air freight, a four-day process that previously would have taken four weeks. Further examples include a 1955 campaign that boasted The Grand's dressing of the wives of Milwaukee Braves players, and a 1956 photo campaign of models in The Grand clothing posed with peafowl- 25 of which had been donated by The Grand to the Washington Park Zoo.

A significant remodel in 1937 gave the store an up-to-date façade with simple lines, a dark base, light upper story, and a main entry accented with vertical elements, much like the jewelry of the period. This Art Deco façade that leans toward Art Moderne is unlike any other on Historic Mitchell Street. Few buildings in the city have this aesthetic or style.

The Grand's Mitchell Street location was also a node for the business and property owners' involvement in the economic development of the district and the city. The Grand founder, Benjamin Rosenberg, was a member of the Milwaukee Association of Commerce and one of the organizers of the Mitchell Street Advancement Association (MSAA). Both his son, Pierce Rosenberg, and his son-in-law, Richard Weil, served as president of MSAA. Pierce Rosenberg, who became president of The Grand following his father's death in 1953, was also one of the founders and then president of the Better Business Bureau of Milwaukee, as well as director and then vice-president of the Milwaukee Association of Commerce for several years. As active as Rosenberg leadership of The Grand was in business, they were also very active in the local Jewish community.

The loss of this building would erase the tangible piece of an important regional business in Milwaukee that provided an insight into the retail history of the city, especially as it relates to women shoppers.

The Architect

The architect R. E. Oberst, designer of the 1937 façade, made significant contributions to the architectural character of the city in the early 20th century. Oberst (c. 1885-1972) began his career as a draftsman in 1905 then partnered with Albert Jewett 1910 only to pursue a separate practice in 1911. In 1917, he was one of the first architects in the state to register with the American Institute of Architects. Oberst was very active in the 1920s and 1930s with many of his buildings concentrated in the city's East and South sides. Among the building types he designed were fraternal lodges, funeral homes, commercial buildings, apartment houses, churches and residences. Oberst was a 32nd Degree Mason within Milwaukee's Tripoli Shrine Masonic Temple, which most likely helped him obtain a number of commissions. During the 1920s and 1930, Oberst favored the use of various Period Revival styles, as well as some of the more modern styles. Buildings of this period typically were constructed with low maintenance

materials like brick, tile, stone and copper. He remained active and maintained an office in Milwaukee until his death in 1972. His known projects along Historic Mitchell Street include the terra cotta sheathed Classical Revival-style Edward H. Motl Jewelers (1922) at 808-810 W. Historic Mitchell Street and the Lion Store (1919-1920) at 906-908 W. Historic Mitchell Street, now a branch library and apartments. None of his other known projects incorporate the features of Art Deco/Art Moderns as does the Grand. It stands out among his projects and shows him a versatile designer who could transform a 19th century building into a graceful and up-to-date store expressive of its exclusive inventory and clientele. (West Mitchell Street Commercial Historic District National Register Nomination Section 8 Page 17)

This criterion is not met as The Grand was a significant business not only to Mitchell Street but to the metro area and its building is a one-of-a-kind in the city.

3. LOCATION

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.

Not all buildings are two story on Historic Mitchell Street, but a majority are. The Grand is two stories and contributes to the overall character of the neighborhood and streetscape. It demonstrates the cohesiveness of the streetscape and the scale of neighboring buildings.

This criterion is not met.

4. POTENTIAL FOR RESTORATION

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

It appears that the building is a candidate for restoration/rehabilitation and has been occupied for most of its history with little degradation to the building fabric. At the time that Benjamin Rosenberg opened this original location of The Grand, the store was 25 feet wide and 90 feet deep. As this was the business' flagship location, the storefront was expanded and remodeled a number of times throughout its 75 years of business, until ultimately it occupied 70,000 square feet by the time of its close in 1980. The engineer's report does not say that the building is unusable, unsafe

The building remained vacant for four years until it was altered to convert the first floor into separate storefronts which were then occupied by Walgreens and Holzman Furs in 1984. Walgreens remained in this location until 2011 and Holzman Furs until 2021. Shortly afterwards in 1986, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) designated the Historic Mitchell Street District. Following this designation, the Walgreens remodel of its storefront in 1995 was reviewed by the HPC. Work on the building exterior has come before the Commission again only a handful of times in the years since, most notably for storefront repairs in 2012. The storefront

that housed Walgreens was vacant for approximately five years and has had tenants off and on in the years since.

When taking into consideration that work to the property's exterior has been subject to Historic Preservation Commission review since 1986, its history of long-term tenants prior to and following the designation that kept the property up to city code, and the architect report submitted by the applicant which reviewed the entire building, there is no apparent concern regarding the potential for restoration. Furthermore, as the property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the property owner is eligible for tax credits that could assist in the renovations of the existing building.

For a more detailed outline of the ownership and tenancy of 1101 W. Historic Mitchell, see the [supporting timeline document](#).

This criterion is not met.

5. REPLACEMENT

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is to be replaced by a compatible building of similar age, architectural style and scale or by a new building that would fulfill the same aesthetic function in the area as did the old structure. It is proposed to replace the current building with a five-story mixed use building named the Encore.

The proposed new building is substantially larger than The Grand. At 5 stories the Encore more than doubles the size of The Grand. Its detailing gives a nod to The Grand in its Deco/Moderne-like main entrance but it will lack the authenticity of the original. It will not meet the same aesthetic function as the historic building. Removing The Grand leaves a hole in the chronology of Mitchell Street which has buildings from the 1880s through World War II. No other building fulfills the visual character of The Grand's art Deco/Art Moderns styling.

This criterion is not met.
