



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date	5/4/2026	CCF # 252001
Ald. Bauman	Staff reviewer: Andrew Stern	
Property	918 N Vel Phillips Ave	Journal Square
Owner/Applicant	Seeds of Health Inc. 1445 S 32 nd St. Milwaukee, WI 53215	Tia Richardson Cosmic Butterfly Design

Proposal

The applicants wish to design and paint an approximate 40'X70' (2800 sq. ft.) mural on polytab for the south-facing exterior wall of Tenor High School Journal Square campus.

Staff comments

Originally built on 1918 (later addition in 1923 and 1960) the building was known to be the home of the Milwaukee Sentinel and was transformed into Tenor High School Journal Square campus in November 2021. The school used color, inspiring murals and quotes in their interior space. The applications suggests that the mural design on the south facing exterior wall will include community design workshops engaging students, teachers, staff, alumni and faculty of MATC. The exterior south facing wall seems suitable for polytab mural installation. The wall has been covered by a metal screen for decades and was painted prior to the installation of the screen.

Such a mural installation has not yet been approved by HPC, but was contemplated in the guidelines. All murals approved so far have been on removable panels. As the building is more than 100 years old, there is a risk of damaging the bricks and building's structural integrity.

May HPC Comments

The applicants applied a small test panel of the primer, polytab, and varnish on the rear brick wall of their property and supplied documentation of the process. The test panel remained on the building for nearly a week, allowing time for HPC commissioners to independently inspect the application, if so desired. The test panel was subsequently removed and that process was also documented by the applicant. The applicant submitted memos from Holton Brothers masonry contractors and State Painting Company painting contractors both indicating that the application and removal of the test panel did not damage the brick surface

Relevant details about risks:

This could destroy the brick of old historic building:

Bricks are naturally breathable and porous and sensitive to having their breathable nature inhibited.

This could damage structural integrity of old historic building:

Our mural guidelines strictly prohibit the painting of murals directly on brick for several reasons, namely artist's legal rights, preservation of historic masonry, and reversibility. As such, applicants are proposing a method of installation that is nominally removable.

The polytab material does appear to meet the intent of the guidelines with removability and reversibility, though in practice it appears that removal would result in destruction of the mural. There is some concern that the adhesive should be a breathable material to minimize potential damage to the masonry. Staff have been

unable to find a breathable mural adhesive that is rated for outdoor use. Applicants should pursue every effort to find such a substance.

Recommendation

Approve with conditions.

Conditions

Every effort should be made to find a breathable adhesive for the polytab material. A photograph of the finished mural, fully installed shall be supplied to HPC staff upon completion.