



# Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

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**HPC meeting date: 9/9/2019**  
**Ald. Jose Perez District: 12**  
**Staff reviewer: Tim Askin**  
**PTS #114834 CCF #190672**

**Property** 1202 W. HISTORIC MITCHELL ST.

**Owner/Applicant** EASTSIDE MGMT LLC  
PO BOX 240224  
MILWAUKEE WI 53224  
Mauricio Ramirez, Artist  
Berwyn, IL

**Proposal** Applicant requests retroactive approval to paint a mural on the east facade of 1202 W. Historic Mitchell Street. The mural is painted directly onto the masonry wall. The facade faces S. 12th Street and covers the majority of a major street elevation.

**Staff comments** This report has no comment on the design and the design is irrelevant. The only matters at hand are the principles and the ordinances. There shall be no discussion of the artistic merit; our review is strictly on these written policies. In the absence of guidelines specific to murals, we must stay neutral on content.

The east wall was not originally painted. It appears to have been unpainted from its construction in the 1920s through at least the early 1980s. Photos from the 1940s and 1980s indicate it contained decorative brick patterns with multiple colors of masonry in this west wall. These are still minimally evident. It has been painted in recent years as a response to graffiti. It is doubtful whether a Certificate of Appropriateness was obtained for this work. There have been approximately reported 15 graffiti incidents at this building since 2013, though not all were along this wall.

There is a difference between painting a building and paint as a medium of artistic expression. Painting in general is maintenance issue. The painting of a mural constitutes an alteration to the façade of the building. Historic buildings are works of art unto themselves and are not meant as a canvas for unrelated artistic expression.

If the Commission wants to approve murals in general, that will have to be added to the ordinance with approval criteria. There must be a moratorium on new murals until that is addressed.

**Suggested Guidelines** Ms. Hatala has done extensive research on mural guidelines in the historic areas of other communities.

There is a great degree of consistency and the following are typical:

- Prohibiting front or other major or street-facing facades
- No painting over window and door openings
- No painting over architectural details such as moldings
- Sunset provisions / time limits
- Maintenance of the mural is a major concern in the long run. Murals deteriorate and tastes change with time and ownership.
- The mural shall speak to the historic character of the area along with the current community
- Requirements to speak to the nature of the paint? What is the permeability and how will it affect the masonry?

Our suggestion: Murals are to be demountable and not painted directly on masonry.

**Recommendation**

Recommend HPC Denial based on ordinance criterion 320-21-11-g-1 “Whether the proposed work would destroy or adversely affect any exterior architectural feature of the improvement upon which the work is to be done or adversely affect the external appearance of other improvements on the site or within the district.”

Issue moratorium on murals at all locally designated properties until the ordinance is amended to address the issue.

**Conditions**

If the Commission wishes to approve a mural at this specific location:

1. Demountable mural rather than permanent attachment as exists now.
2. Require stripping of paint from windows, window trim, and sills.
3. All second floor windows to be restored or replaced in an appropriate manner within six months. Restore all windows on ground floor east elevation. Glass on the ground floor windows may be painted a single color that is complimentary to the murals, due to interior conditions. (Photos prior to the mural show visible batt insulation behind the glass.)

**Previous HPC action****Previous Council action**