



## Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

*Living with History*

**HPC meeting date: 11/09/2015**  
**Ald. Robert Bauman District: 4**  
**Staff reviewer: Dean Doerrfeld**  
**PTS**

**Property** 500 NORTH WATER ST. East Side Commercial Historic District

**Owner/Applicant** TEXAS CITY VENTURE, LTD. c/o Kahler Slater Architects  
JOHN REINHART 111 W. Wisconsin Ave.  
4011 80<sup>TH</sup> ST. Milwaukee, WI 53203  
KENOSHA, WI 53142 Phone: (414) 290-3796

**Proposal** This project involves the adaptive reuse of the Button Block into an extended-stay hotel. The hotel will consist of approximately 94 guestrooms; public spaces including lobby, dining area, meeting rooms; fitness center; indoor swimming pool; and, associated support, administration and mechanical areas. The proposed project will use state and federal historic preservation tax credits and received Conditional Approval from the National Park Service on August 10, 2015.

**Staff Comments** The Button Block is a seven-story Romanesque Revival style commercial building constructed in 1892 on the northeast corner of N. Water and E. Clybourn Streets. The architects were the Milwaukee firm of Crane and Barkhausen. The first two floors are constructed of dark red, rock-faced sandstone and the upper floors clad with dark red pressed brick trimmed with sandstone and terra cotta on the primary facades. At the southwest corner is a seven-story turret with conical roof that is supported by a granite column with a Romanesque capital. The east (alley) elevation consists of Cream City brick with regular window openings. The north elevation is a Cream City brick party wall shared previously with a building to the north, now demolished. The structure was damaged heavily by a fire in 1992. The first and second floors of the building are occupied currently by a restaurant; the third through seventh floors are vacant.

Since the fire in 1992, considerable work was completed on the building, including: new roofing, installation of aluminum storefront windows in the first floor, re-glazing of wood sash in the second floor, replacement in-kind of sills, replication of a belt course in fiberglass, and installation of aluminum windows in the fourth through seventh floors. Windows in the third level appear to be original wood sash.

There are numerous components to this undertaking.

- **Roof:** A new EPDM membrane roofing system will be installed. New mechanical equipment will be installed on the roof. Maximum height of these units is approximately 12 feet, but the placement allows for minimal street visibility due to the parapet wall.
- **Masonry:** Brick and stone joints will be repointed to repair loose mortar or where inappropriate sealant was applied previously. The mortar will match the existing in color, composition, and hardness. Any stone or brick replacement will match the existing in color and profile. Where deteriorated stone is salvageable, a stone-patching mortar will be used. The parapet wall will be repaired and made structurally stable. Skyward facing joints will be sealed. The existing fire escape on the east elevation will be removed as will all abandoned conduit piping, signage, and anchors. All holes will be patched to match surrounding materials.
- **Windows:** All deteriorated wood of the second floor windows will be repaired with epoxy filler. Windows in the third floor and those in the second floor of

the east elevation will be replaced with aluminum windows to match those of the fourth through seventh levels. The demolition of an adjacent building to the north left a blind party wall. The applicant proposes to cut in new windows in the third through seventh floors to accommodate the internal room layout.

- **Doors and North Entrance:** Existing entries on the Water and Clybourn Street elevations, which are not original to the building, will be replaced with aluminum entries. Utility doors on the north and east elevations will be replaced with flush-panel metal doors. A vehicular drop-off is proposed for the north elevation. Construction will include concrete steps and ramp, a revolving door in the existing opening, and metal rails with glass panel inserts. The entrance will be covered with a cantilevered steel canopy with a fritted glass top.
- **West Elevation:** A façade feature wall is proposed for the entry into the vehicle drop-off area. This will span the opening left by the building demolished previously. The proposed design for this feature consists of concrete piers, painted steel framework, perforated metal panel and a glass canopy element.
- **Signage and Streetscape:** A new vertical blade sign is proposed for the south façade of the building and the replacement of a similar sign on the west elevation. Individual metal letters defining the hotel name is also proposed in the parapet of the south elevation. The Button Block name will be retained in the west elevation. Changes to the streetscape are minimal with concrete planters, the façade feature wall and drop-off area, and screening around trash receptacles and utilities.

Staff believes this is an excellent adaptive reuse proposal for a building underutilized for the last two decades. The repair of the parapet wall, re-pointing of masonry, use of matching replacement materials, and replacement in-kind of certain building components is appropriate and within the guidelines. The guidelines offer additional guidance on the installation of new openings and additions to historic buildings. Adding new openings to the north elevation is appropriate as the guidelines recommend against creating new openings in primary historic elevations; however, this is a secondary elevation and historically, was a blind party wall with an adjacent building. The proposal for the vehicle drop-off area and canopy is also within the guidelines which state that additions “harmonize with the existing building architecturally and are located so as not to be visible from the public right-of-way, if at all possible.” The guidelines also discourage additions that are unsympathetic to the original structure and intrude on principal elevations. The modifications to the north elevation are sympathetic to the existing structure, do not intrude visually on a principal elevation, and the materials and design reflect a clear differentiation between the historic architecture and the new construction.

The façade feature wall, constructed between the Button Block and its nearest neighbor to the north, is an appropriate modification. Its construction will reinforce the street wall at the pedestrian level, filling in the gap between the two buildings. The use of modern design and contemporary materials clearly sets it apart from the historic building.

Staff’s only concern is the replacement of the third floor windows, apparently original to the building, of the west and south elevations. Replacing the windows in the east elevation does not affect the material integrity of the building as it is a secondary elevation, originally an alley front, and now faces two large parking lots. Replacement of the third floor windows on the remaining elevations is within the guidelines in certain respects, such as retention of the original openings, sills, and sash configuration; however, Historic Preservation Commission precedent has established the retention of original windows if at all possible. This creates a dilemma. Openings in the fourth through seventh floors already hold replacement aluminum windows. The wood windows will be retained in the lower, cut stone portion of the building. Retaining the wood windows of the third floor will result in two different window types in the brick, upper five stories of the building. It may be

preferable to have a consistent window type throughout these two elevations.

**Recommendation**

Adaptive reuse of the Button Block as presented in the COA application: Approve with Conditions.

**Conditions**

Explore the possibility of retaining/repairing the third floor windows of the south and west elevations.

Present any substantive material changes to staff for approval.

**Previous HPC action**

**Previous Council action**