



# Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

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**HPC meeting date: 9/13/2021**  
**Ald. Milele Coggs District: 6**  
**Staff reviewer: Tim Askin**  
**PTS #115184 CCF #210674**

<b>Property</b>	1737 & 1751 N. PALMER ST.	Brewers Hill
<b>Owner/Applicant</b>	Three Leaf Development	GROTH DESIGN GROUP N58 W6181 COLUMBIA ROAD CEDARBURG, WI 53012
<b>Proposal</b>	Proposal is a 50-unit apartment building on a corner lot. It is six stories with mostly modern materials in the new five-over-one modality that is becoming increasingly common nationwide. The application is thorough and adequately discusses design details.	
<b>Staff comments</b>	The stated goal of the guidelines is that “new construction be designed to harmonize with the character of the district.”	

## **Siting**

Most housing, including historic apartment buildings within the district, have setbacks that are relatively deep (approx. 20 feet). The housing across Palmer already has atypically shallow front setbacks for Brewers Hill and this new apartment block has setbacks even shallower than at those homes.

## **Form**

While efforts were made with alternating recesses and patterns to the solids and voids, the building, even in perspective view, has a monolithic appearance that is incompatible with the existing, historic housing in the neighborhood. The massing does is not compatible nor does it provide a transition to the industrial portion of the neighborhood.

## **Materials**

The six-pane upper-level windows hint at some of the industrial character to the south, but are more reflective of the later factories of the upper King Drive area like Nunn-Bush and others rather than the nearer Mayer Shoe Factory or most of the Schlitz campus. Guidelines require compatibility with the district, specifically colors, textures, proportions, and cladding materials. Fiber cement panels, poured-in-place concrete retaining walls, storefront systems, metal windows, and white brick are not characteristic of the district. Fiber-cement panels create an EIFS-like appearance in the façade and would constitute the synthetic stucco that is substantially prohibited on street-facing facades in the zoning code. Faux-wood fiber cement panels, as proposed for part of the penthouse roof are also unacceptable, as this Commission has consistently rejected synthetic wood and faux wood grain texturing.

## **Scale**

Most housing within the district consists of single-family houses and duplexes, many of which are two or three-story buildings. Due to the significantly larger height and bulk of this six-story apartment building, a less monolithic design would help aid in maintaining the character of the existing district and block even as density increases. Setting the building back further from the street and increasing the recession of the proposed balconies would improve compatibility.

Additionally, overhangs should be compatible with the surrounding structures. The proposed penthouse roof has a floating effect and hangs heavily over the lower roofs. It is also lighted, including, in the submitted renderings, during daylight. The penthouse roof should be redesigned in order to be less imposing and more compatible with existing rooflines in the district.

**Streetscape**

In order to maintain the character of the district, and the 1700 block of N Palmer Street, the siting of the apartment building should be adjusted. The proposed setback should be deepened, with additional green space between the sidewalk and the apartment building.

Materials, retaining walls and lighting, including the lighting of the penthouse roof, should be compatible with the character of the district. See previous details about changes needed to these elements.

**Conclusion**

In initial discussions with the architect, staff strongly recommended step backs, increasing height toward the south, to create a cleaner transition to the industrial area south of this site to the historic district. These were not implemented and they remain staff's recommendation if the developer wishes to continue with this level of density. Further, zoning provides no fixed height limit for this property. As one of the downtown zones, height is limited by a floor area ratio (an equation of built square footage to the amount of lot that is built upon, lot size, and bonuses). The intent of the code is to increase height by encouraging deeper setbacks and including step backs. A Ratio/Height bonus can be achieved by including a rooftop deck; this was not done. The desired level of density may be feasible on this site; it is not acceptable, however, in the current design. It is staff's opinion that none of the design guidelines have been met, therefore staff recommends denial.

**Recommendation** Recommend HPC Denial

**Conditions**

**Previous HPC  
action**

**Previous Council  
action**