



# Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

*Living with History*

**HPC meeting date: 9/28/2015**  
**Ald. Nik Kovac District:3**  
**Staff reviewer: Dean Doerrfeld**  
**PTS**

**Property** 1701-11 and 1717-19 North Humboldt Avenue BRADY STREET HIST. DISTRICT

**Owner/Applicant** CA Humboldt, LLC Ogden Multifamily Partners, LLC  
5501 North Kent Ave. 1665 North Water Street  
Whitefish Bay, WI 53217 Milwaukee, WI 53202

**Proposal** This project involves the demolition of an existing commercial structure and the construction of a three-story, mixed use development on the northwest corner of the intersection of East Brady Street and North Humboldt Avenue. The new construction is composed of retail on the first level of the East Brady Street elevation, an internal parking structure, and 23 apartments. The building is designed with masonry exteriors and movable glass fronts in the retail spaces. Both inset and projecting balconies are incorporated in the building design. The third floor of the building is set back slightly from the primary wall plane and the cladding varied to contrast with the brick of the lower levels. At the corner of the building, masonry extends vertically to a coped parapet wall. The elevations of the residential units facing North Humboldt are also masonry clad with varying surface treatments and fenestration.

**Staff Comments** The building that currently rests at the northwest corner of the intersection, known as the "Zoom Room," is a single-story, three-bay, masonry-clad building with a flat roof encircled by a parapet wall. The original corner entry is infilled with the current entry on the west wall. A masonry and glass storefront is located on the south elevation and a similar feature was located just north of the corner entry—this area is infilled. Constructed in the Post World War II era, the current structure replaced an earlier retail establishment destroyed by fire in the 1940s. The current structure is not considered a contributing resource to the Brady Street Historic District. Its scale, massing, and form are not consistent with other buildings in the district. Demolition of this building will not adversely affect the integrity of the historic area.

The current proposal calls for a three-story, masonry-clad building expressing retail on the first floor of the Brady Street elevation with residential units with an internal parking structure and residential units on the upper levels. A rooftop structure with an open terrace is provided to residents.

The Brady Street (south) elevation includes movable glass storefronts with a glass and metal framed entry on the eastern end of the elevation. A three-story section clad in brick reinforces the corner of the Brady Street-Humboldt Avenue intersection. This section includes a metal-coped parapet wall to provide vertical accent. Cordova stone facing defines the foundation with a belt course of similar material separating the first and second levels. The glass and aluminum frame storefronts feature a solid lower panel (approximately 2' in height), a central glazed area, and an upper area of glazing separated by horizontal aluminum framing. This simulates, but does not mimic historic storefront construction. The upper levels incorporate inset balconies which also serve as a visual break between the corner mass and the remainder of the building. The western portion of the Brady Street elevation is composed of a two-story, masonry-clad section topped by a third level sheathed in synthetic weatherboard. The top level is set back slightly from the plane of the masonry. All windows are fiberglass frame extending upward from floor level. Selected windows are further detailed with stained-wood screens. Window openings in the masonry section are topped by sections of ornamental brick.

Five elements comprise the Humboldt Avenue (east) elevation. The southernmost element is a three-story, masonry-clad section with detailing similar to the Brady Street face: first level storefront, Cordova stone foundation accent, belt course, and metal-coped parapet wall. The upper two stories of this section include a projecting bay constructed of glass with metal framing. The projection has a perpendicular south wall and angled north wall. The four remaining elements are similar in design. All are three stories in height with insets between each unit and projecting balconies. The northernmost section is clad in stone for all three levels. Openings in this section include an overhead garage door and two vertical windows on the first level, and asymmetrically placed windows in levels two and three. A passage door provides access to the projecting balcony of each level. The remaining three sections are stone-clad only for the first and second levels. Although the material for the upper level is not specified, it is likely synthetic weatherboard. The insets between sections are also clad in this material. One window in the upper level of each of unit is housed in a stone-clad, slightly-projecting bay. Windows, doors, and balconies are similar to other portions of the building. The third section varies in its treatment of the first level. This area contains a modified storefront with a passage door providing access to a vestibule and elevator.

Then north and west elevations repeat the vocabulary established on the other elevations. The east section of the north elevation is sheathed in stone to continue the treatment of the east elevation, and the balance of the wall is sheathed in synthetic weatherboard. The southern section of the west elevation continues the stone, brick, and weatherboard of the Brady Street elevation with the balance of the building covered in synthetic weatherboard. Small "Juliette" balconies are located in several openings of the residential units.

The proposal calls for the construction of a rooftop structure to house mechanical equipment and a common area for residents. An open terrace with railing is proposed for the southern portion of the roof.

### **Summary**

Infill and redevelopment in historic districts is a balance between economic and preservation interests. The Brady Street Historic District Preservation Guidelines for New Construction offer some guidance on designing buildings compatible with the historic fabric of the area. Further insight on infill design was gained from reviewing design guidelines from other communities. In general, all define the basic tenets of new construction: scale, massing, materials, setbacks from the street, continuity of pedestrian level elements, fenestration, reducing verticality through setbacks on upper levels, and conformity with the existing street wall. Many parallel federal guidance that discourages new construction that promotes a false sense of history. Others call for the reproduction of historic elements throughout the building.

The Brady Street corridor displays varying streetscape elements. In some areas, building fronts create a defined street wall of uniform height, fenestration, and pedestrian relationship. Other areas display a variety of styles, height, building materials, and street setbacks. Generally, this proposal conforms to the Brady Street Historic District Preservation Guidelines for New Construction. The use of differing materials, setbacks, insets, and fenestration minimizes the impression of a single building mass and the height of the structure.

Several issues remain with the building design. The large expanse of glazing and asymmetrical shape of the projecting bay on the southeast corner facing Humboldt Avenue introduces an incongruous element to the building. Glazed areas extending upward from floor level adds a vertical emphasis that could be reduced through solid surfaces at the bottom or the use of simulated divided light windows that add additional horizontal emphasis. Calls for certain building materials differ; for example, the upper level of the Brady Street elevation is noted as both masonry veneer panels and synthetic weatherboard. The ornamental treatment above windows stops at the fascia line on the south elevation, but extends to the coping on the west. Specifications for balconies and railings are not included. The reveal of

the balcony walls facing Brady Street should be brick to follow the main elevation. The parapet wall of the corner mass should further back, perpendicularly, from Brady Street. A final issue is the mass of the rooftop structure on the Humboldt Street elevation. This is setback sufficiently from Brady Street, but will appear as an additional level from the east. This is likely constrained by the elevator that lies in the vestibule area. This should be re-examined to determine if there is some method of reducing the visual impact of this portion of the building. Additionally, no construction or ornamental details for this portion of the structure were provided.

**Recommendation**

Demolition of existing building: Approve pending approval of new construction by Historic Preservation Commission.

Construction of mixed use building: Disapprove as submitted to allow applicant to respond to comments of Historic Preservation Commission.

**Items needed for further review**

Continue brick facing of parapet wall at corner to the north.

Provide details of balconies.

Provide details of rooftop railing.

Clarify wall cladding of third floor.

Increase brick reveal on Brady Street balconies.

Revise details of projecting bay at southeast corner facing Humboldt Avenue.

Modify window design to reduce vertical emphasis.

Revise to maintain consistency of decorative elements above windows.

Examine possibility of reducing mass of rooftop structure and provide details.

**Previous HPC action**

**Previous Council action**