



## Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

**HPC meeting date: 11/15/2010**  
**Ald. Robert Bauman District: 4**  
**Staff reviewer: Paul Jakubovich**  
**PTS #69442**

**Property** 327 E. WISCONSIN AVE. and addresses on Milwaukee Street around the corner

**Owner/Applicant** MBI PROPERTIES LLC Douglas P Nyssen  
111 E WISCONSIN AV, STE 1710 Kahler Slater, Inc.  
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**Proposal** Demolish five buildings, (319-325 E. Wisconsin Avenue, 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue, 625 N. Milwaukee, 627 N. Milwaukee, 629-631 N. Milwaukee, 633 N. Milwaukee) in the East Side Commercial historic district. Construct new hotel complex.

## Staff comments

The proposal calls for the demolition of five contributing buildings in the East Side Commercial historic district in order to make way for a new hotel complex. This is the last intact late nineteenth and early 20th century block of commercial buildings in downtown Milwaukee. Recognizing the historic significance of this block and two others adjoining it, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior placed the buildings, in their present condition, on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. The criteria for listing on the national register are particularly demanding and the designation had to pass reviews at the local, state and federal levels of government. The City of Milwaukee placed the buildings on the local register, protecting them from demolition, in 1991. Since the designations, permit records indicate that little or no changes have been made to the exteriors of the buildings.

Many historic buildings surrounding the block in question have been successfully restored and put to new uses for the benefit of the people who live in and visit Milwaukee. Several buildings just north of the proposed project in the 700 block of N. Milwaukee Street are pre-Civil War, making them older than the buildings being proposed for demolition and yet they have been successfully renovated. The Third Ward historic district to the south is a vibrant center of activity today in large part because of the many old buildings that have been creatively and sensitively rehabilitated. The same success can be brought to the East Side Commercial historic district.

The demolition of the buildings would have a negative impact on the remaining historic buildings in the district. One of the gems on the block is the McGeoch building at the northwest corner of Milwaukee and Michigan which has been sensitively restored by its owner, architect David Uihlein. He has gone to great lengths to rejuvenate his building and opposes the neighboring project in its present form.

None of the buildings have been so altered that they cannot be restored. In fact, with the use of proper restoration techniques the buildings could be the nucleus of a rejuvenated downtown Milwaukee. Of the buildings on the Milwaukee street façade approximately 90 percent of the upper stories remain in their original condition. On the Wisconsin Avenue side, the changes that have occurred, exclusive of the street level storefront, occurred so long ago that they too, have acquired their own historic character.

The five buildings that are proposed for removal do not meet any of the seven criteria for demolition that are listed in the city's preservation ordinance. HPC staff has looked closely at each of the criterion and has the following response.

Criterion h-1: Removing these buildings would irreparably damage the last remaining historic district and assemblage of buildings of its kind in the City of Milwaukee.

Criterion h-2: As a group, the buildings represent a veritable catalog of architectural styles and building materials.

Criterion h-3: Demolishing the buildings would be contrary to the objectives of both the historic preservation plan for the district and the city's recently adopted Downtown Plan which specifically states that "Locally designated contributing historic buildings should be retained and redeveloped in accordance with local preservation requirements." A photograph of 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue, one of the buildings being proposed for demolition, appears in the Downtown Plan book as an example of the buildings that should be restored and redeveloped.

Criterion h-4: The buildings could not be easily reproduced today. Even the proportions of the buildings and the system used to generate it are not in common use today.

Criterion h-5: As a group, the buildings represent a unique snapshot of Milwaukee in the years prior to world War II.

Criterion h-6: the buildings are not deteriorated beyond repair. The downtown bookstore at 327 E. Wisconsin Avenue, for example, supports the weight of at least three floors of very heavy books.

Other tenants over time on the ground floor have included a gift shop, Sanctum Regnum (1970s), Easter Seal Society Store (1980s), the Hand of Glory (1990s) and the House of Magic (1990s). Upper floors have included Swanson Productions, a beauty salon, Kromer Cap Company, and printing companies among other offices.

Alterations to the Pioneer Building have been minimal over time. The front windows of 611 were in-filled with brick in late 1966 to accommodate a new restaurant that was moving into the former Woman's Exchange space. The main entrance to the building lobby was remodeled in 1961.

627/629-631 N Milwaukee Street Diefendorf's Building (1867)  
(627 was access to upper floor, 629 to the Italianate building, 631 to the building with the altered façade)

Record of COAs  
03/06/2008-Signage (631)  
05/07/1991-Signage (631)

NR Listing 09/23/1986  
627-Contributing  
631-Non Contributing

Local Historic Designation 11/18/1991

Occupants  
1869-1876-William A. Munn tin shop  
1872-1874-Christian Statesman, newspaper  
1930-shop that sold gifts, confectionery and floral goods  
Shop that sold children's clothing  
1934-J. P. Erwin Niedringhaus Antique Silver  
1935-Furrier  
1937---Emma Lange Smartwear  
1977-Wall Galleries retail sales and auction of antiques and household furniture  
1971-Haessler Hardware Company

**Recommendation**                      Recommend HPC Denial

**Conditions**

**Previous HPC action**

**Previous Council action**