



# Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

## LIVING WITH HISTORY

<b>HPC meeting date</b>	<b>1/9/2023</b>	<b>CCF #221086</b>
<b>Ald. Bauman</b>	Staff reviewer: Tim Askin	
<b>Property</b>	308 W Kilbourn (formerly 333 W. State)	Milwaukee Journal Complex
<b>Owner/Applicant</b>	HKS Holdings, Inc.	Ethan Skeels, AIA Kahler-Slater

### Proposal

This proposed project consists of a new 8 story hotel constructed at the corner of MLK Jr. Drive and Kilbourn Avenue, current address 308 West Kilbourn Ave. The site is currently a surface parking lot.

The new hotel building is designed as a freestanding structure. The glassy facade of 8th floor of the proposed hotel is set back from the main masonry mass of the building and consists of vertically operating glass panels that can provide an open rooftop feature to the top floor in warmer months. The overall height of the building is approximately 6' lower than the upper most roof elements of the Journal Building.

The proposed materials for the new building consist of brick masonry that is complimentary in color to the Kasota Stone panels of the historic structures, accented with a dark stone base that references the granite base of the adjacent 1960's addition. Architectural metal panel accents at the punched openings and roof. The public spaces of the hotel create street activation along both King Drive.

### Staff comments

HPC staff brought this before DCD's design review team for input discussion, and comment. Their input was valuable and appreciated. They decline to make any official report on a matter that is primarily before HPC.

### *Siting*

Starting in the early 20th century, Kilbourn from City Hall to the Courthouse site was to be our grand civic boulevard. While the plan never crossed the river, much of the intended effect was achieved in locating institutions, even if scattershot in today's appearance. The zoning requires a front setback of 10 feet. This would result in a 10-foot setback on King Drive. This is illogical and no buildings on this block comply. The rest of the immediate vicinity is built to the sidewalk edge also. The standard seems to have held only on the south side of Kilbourn. HPC and DCD staff agree that the developers' proposed footprint with no setback is appropriate.

### *Form*

Staff appreciates the architect's efforts towards making this a background building with a degree of unique expression. It was a considerate approach, but the site requires grandeur. The 1960s Journal additions are all the amount of background character that this block can tolerate.

Efforts were made toward patterns and expressing solids and voids with recessed windows, there is a lack of undulation to the façade. Window recesses do not correct for the overall flatness. Particularly in perspective view, it has a monolithic appearance that is incompatible with the historic Journal and Sentinel/Republic buildings. The generally massing is arguably compatible, but the arrangement of the pieces creates the appearance of an undifferentiated solid block. It has the general appearance of a highly altered historic building (see visuals on last page). The historic core of the Journal complex achieves a multi-story base and grand with subtle detailing and undulation that break up the otherwise monolithic massing.

The entrance is missing a necessary level of grandeur and is so understated as to be unclear. A corner entry should be considered, but may not be necessary. A bolder architectural statement is needed to embrace the intended pedestrian experience of King Drive.

### *Scale*

The height meets the guidelines, but the expression of the building divisions gives a squat, stubby appearance. Increasing the height slightly, particularly at the base, should help de-emphasize this

massing. The rooftop deck, as designed throws off the scale. While it gives a slight sense of a shorter building from certain angles, it primarily looks like an entirely different building, a single story restaurant was installed on the top as an afterthought. Guidelines require fenestration and overhangs to be compatible and respectful of the historic structure (1920s building).

- The overhangs are not compatible with the design of the Journal buildings either at ground level or rooftop. Canopies are not part of the character of the Journal Complex.
- Windows seem designed for a high speed auto-oriented environment. Kilbourn is grand civic boulevard intended to be experienced from pedestrian scale and speed. Mid-level windows feature artificial shadow lines that again seem oriented to automotive experience. Expressing the brick reveals rather than hiding them with metal panels is more appropriate to a pedestrian scale.
- The former Old World Third Street is a key pedestrian corridor in the downtown plan. Restaurant and plaza help, but are insufficient with rest of the building's detailing to achieve this experience. The storefront window systems are rectangles without expression. The windows need shape and a trim profile of some kind.
- There is a general lack of articulation and undulation in the façade. Historic buildings in the area and within the Journal Complex have distinct in-and-out sections in their facades.
- The west façade needs detail. Kilbourn Avenue is a view corridor in both directions. Architectural interest and articulation is required here because of the visibility over Major Goolsby's building and clear lines of sight from the expanded convention center and then all the way to the courthouse
- A better defined cornice at top of middle section and final roofline is needed. When attempting compatibility with historic properties, roof lines should not float away. They need to have a clear and strong visual end point.
- Planters at base are not shown in floorplans and not in all renderings. The planters help ground the building and emphasize solidity of the base. This or similar features should be incorporated on both street facades.

#### *Materials*

Metal panels are hard to do well and even harder in historic districts. The neighborhood and site context absolutely require a masonry or terra cotta base. At the roof, the metal is such an abrupt transition that it looks like a different building. The brickwork is too simple and adds little character beyond the Kasota stone coloring.

- Downtown zoning does not allow metal panel this close to sidewalk. Metal panels are wholly banned in the new construction guidelines.
- The rooftop space appears to be enclosed by overhead doors. This is an artifact of the rendering and is not an intended material or visual effect. This will be clarified and refined in the next phrase. HPC has never found overhead doors to be acceptable fenestration for any non-vehicular space.
- Arrangement of materials creates an appearance of three separate buildings rather than
- Stone base is appreciated, but a stone base does not work with off-the-shelf storefront system that is mounted flush with the façade. The ground floor windows need detailing and shape to give adequate visual interest for a pedestrian experience.
- The materials do not visually connect across the three sections. No lines carry through all the floors, boundaries are not clearly expressed. Transitions are abrupt.
- The completely flat plane of running bond brickwork gives a flat, artificial appearance.
- When materials and logical divisions are changed, a change in plane is visually necessary. Slight setbacks, visual banding with projecting or receding articulation would provide needed character.

#### **Recommendation**

HOLD for revisions