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To: Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission

Date: Tuesday, August 8, 2023

Re: 266 E Erie Street - Certificate of Appropriateness

Background

The 266 E Erie Street building, sometimes referred to as the Miller Brewing Company Tavern/MIAD Student Union, resides at the western tip of a triangular block within the Historic Third Ward. The parcel is bounded by East Menomonee Street to the north, North Broadway to the east, and East Erie street to the south.

The two-story building consists of two distinct structures that were constructed in separate phases. The original 1884 building occupying the western half of the parcel is masonry-veneered with balloon-frame wood walls and a basement. The 1912 addition to the east is built of solid masonry walls as slab-on-grade construction. A double cross gabled roof is clad in 3-tab asphalt shingles. A partial flat roof is clad in asphaltic membrane and a small turret with windows is built into the western roof area.

Painted brick exterior walls feature punched window and door openings. The opening locations vary by elevation. In some cases, they are symmetrical about gable roofs above, and elsewhere they are not aligned with other architectural features. The east elevation features punched windows on the second story and in the stepped parapet. A small one-story structure occupies the northeast building corner.

The building was originally constructed to serve as a saloon and rooming house. It would later be acquired by Miller Brewing Company and would continue to serve as a tavern for Miller and the building's subsequent owners until acquired by MIAD in 1996. The building suffered a fire in January 2013 after which MIAD sold the property to current owners Joseph/Gencap Triangle LLC in September 2014.



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Photos

— See attached photos —

Request

The building has remained unoccupied since suffering the 2013 fire, which caused significant damage. The fire pre-dated the purchase of the building by the current ownership group. Since acquiring the property, the current owners have pursued multiple building plans for the property, including first the possibility of new construction for student housing. After this pursuit was rejected, a Historic Designation Study Report was submitted in November 2014 and the property was subsequently designated locally historic. The designation brought with it stricter design parameters, impacting the range of potential re-development possibilities. Larger density is restricted as design modifications would need to be volumetrically approximate to the original building. This effectively limits the only possible redevelopment strategy to adaptive reuse of the existing building. The owners studied this possibility in 2017, engaging the services of TKWA and Spire Engineering. The study concluded that the extent of remediation required to create a long-term solution would result in a building that is a replication rather than an authentic article. This is described further in the sections below.

After the adaptive re-use study, the ownership group again retained TKWA and Spire to explore the possibility of constructing a new 4-story office building with ground floor commercial use. The design was in-keeping with the scale of neighboring buildings while adding greater density to the building parcel. The exercise revealed the economic challenges of building any new structure on this property, leading the ownership group to pause and reconsider the best path forward. Due to the condition of the structure resulting from the excessive foundation settlement and the fire, the only reasonable option is to raze the existing building and construct a new, volumetrically similar structure that is set upon a sound



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foundation that is architecturally appealing and will contribute to the Third Ward for future generations.

Demolition Criteria

While demolition of historic buildings is not encouraged, there are guidelines to inform instances when demolition may be an acceptable solution if approved by the Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission. The following guidelines have been taken into consideration for the demolition request of an existing building located at 266 East Erie Street in Milwaukee's Third Ward.

1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety and is beyond hope of repair. This would generally be in the case of a major fire or a natural catastrophe.

Foundation:

The existing building was constructed in two phases. The original western phase was constructed with a full basement. The eastern phase addition was built primarily as slab-on-grade, but also included a new stair to the original basement. Significant building settlement suggests that the building foundations are not supported on piles, but rather by perimeter strip footings. It is our determination that after the original west portion of the building was built, it went through a period of uniform settlement as the organic materials below the footing compressed. When the eastern addition was constructed, this building went through the same settlement process, but was "held up" at the west end where it connected into the original building. Where the two phases of construction intersect, the settlement of the eastern addition has caused the building to hinge about this point, causing significant cracking in the exterior masonry facade. This is most evident on the north wall where portions of the wall bow outward toward the sidewalk and a second floor window sill is severely out of level. The same settlement is evident on



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the interior where an intersecting interior masonry bearing wall has detached from the exterior wall.

Brickwork:

Painted Cream City brick clads the building envelope. The brick appears to be unsupported, and it is uncertain if it ties back to the balloon-framed wood studs.

The brick is in various states of disrepair/deterioration. On the south, east and north facades, areas of brick have been completely eroded away, leaving only the mortar joints in-tact. Cracking and deteriorated mortar joints are common throughout the building. Paint is peeling in many places, or missing completely, likely due to moisture infiltration. Some brick repairs have been done previously, but the quality of those repair methods is **questionable**. In some locations, concrete was formed and poured into voids where brick had deteriorated. A repair that was done on the east facade appears to have been constructed with paver bricks, rather than the appropriate material.

It is uncertain what has led to the significant brick deterioration. It is possible that the brick batch was bad to begin with. There is evidence that suggests the brick may have been sandblasted at some point. If that is the case, Cream City brick is especially susceptible to wear because of its soft clay characteristics. Some of the most significant damage is at the base of the walls where the brick would be exposed to sidewalk salt.

Roof:

The roof structure was severely damaged from the fire. The damage was caused both by the fire itself and water used to contain and extinguish the fire.

Existing masonry parapets appear to be significantly deteriorated and are not salvable – requiring a complete rebuild with new brick.

Floors:



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The second floor shows significant settlement (on the order of 12" sloping from the west point of the building to the center demising wall). Floor joists require reinforcement in numerous locations due to improper and potentially unsafe modifications made over the years.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building or a part of it is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area.

The Historic Designation Report notes architectural details as follows:

"The two different construction dates of the building can be identified by the architectural details. The 1884 building features segmental arched window openings with corbeled brick hoods. Two decorative bands of sawtooth design join the widow hoods, one band at each story. This same sawtooth design is used as spandrels below each of the windows as well. The 1912 addition lacks these details but retains the same proportions for the window openings and door openings. The back or east wall of the 1912 addition features a stepped parapet, most likely due to fire regulations."

The building has undergone multiple building renovations including recorded changes occurring in 1912, 1920, 1921, 1935, 1951, 1980, 1996, and 1997. It is unclear if the noted building alterations include the bricking up of many windows which is especially apparent on the ground floor of the north facade.

The Historic Designation Study Report does not focus on the building's architectural significance, but rather on the commercial history of the site.

3. Location



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Consideration will be given to whether or not the building or a part of it contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.

The Historic Third Ward has been significantly redeveloped over the past four decades under the ARB design guidelines. The revitalization has included a combination of adaptive reuse of existing buildings and new construction. The context for 266 E Erie is a microcosm of the same, including:

1. South: MIAD - 4-story adaptive reuse of a warehouse-style building.
2. West/North: MIAD Dormitory - 6-story new construction which opened in 2014.
3. East: 4-story and 3-story existing brick buildings with residential dwelling units over ground floor commercial space.

While most buildings in this vicinity have seen improvements, the 266 E Erie building stands in stark contrast. Located less than a block away and visible from the thriving North Broadway shopping street, the building's dilapidated condition detracts from an otherwise beautiful neighborhood.

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building or a part of it is beyond economically feasible repair.

The ownership group, who has expertise in adaptive reuse within the Third Ward, working in tandem with their architects, structural engineers, and seasoned contractors have concluded that the existing structure is infeasible to restore. This is for several reasons:

- The existing building suffered a severe fire in 2013 when the structure was used as MIAD's student union, pre-dating the current ownership group's acquisition of the property. The entire roof structure on the east side of the building was



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damaged beyond repair by both the fire and the water used to extinguish the blaze. Intermediate structural repairs were implemented to protect the public from any potential structural failure, but these repairs were not intended to be a permanent fix.

- In addition to the failing roof structure, large areas of the brick walls of the building are at the end of their functional life and will require complete replacement. There are numerous areas where the bricks have deteriorated and have lost up to 50% of their cross-sectional area, leaving only the grid-work of mortar joints. This is occurring primarily at the base of the walls where salt water from sidewalks have splashed on the walls and at the parapets where water has likely infiltrated through failed wall cap joints. Additionally, It appears that there may not be brick-ties connecting the brick back to the structure or that they have corroded/broken away, as the brick is bowing away from the wall studs on the north elevation of the building. The combination of severely deteriorated brick, the lack of connection back to structure, and movement of the foundation walls below has resulted in extraordinary amounts of settlement, cracking, and bowing of the brick walls. At this point, there are portions of the exterior brick that are bowing severely and in danger of potential collapse. There is no practical way to restore the veneer damage without completely removing and replacing large areas of the brick exterior with new replacement brick.
- Lastly and most significantly, the building has experienced extreme amounts of settlement. This is due to the fact that unlike most other buildings in the 3rd Ward, it was not constructed on piles, but rather strip footings that were placed on the marshy organic soils. The building was constructed in two phases, many years apart. The two portions of the building have settled at different rates over time, creating differential settlement of the entire building resulting in sloping floors on the second floor that are out-of-level up to 12"±. This issue is also beyond practical restoration practices and would require re-supporting all of the existing foundations with helical piers. This would require excavating down to the bottom of the footings on the inside and outside face of all exterior walls, installing



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helical piers, and casting new reinforced concrete grade beams on each side of the existing stone walls. These extreme efforts would stop any further settlement, but the building would still be left with sloping floors.

These significant issues have led the owners to deem restoring the building economically and practically infeasible.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given as to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character.

The building consists of two structures that were constructed in separate phases. The original 1884 building occupying the western half of the parcel is constructed of masonry-veneered, balloon-frame wood walls. The 1912 addition to the east is built of solid masonry walls. The architectural details differ between the two buildings. Per the Historic Designation Study Report, "The rear or east side of the building features simple windows on the second story and in the parapet but is otherwise lacking detail... The two different construction dates of the building can be identified by the architectural details. The 1884 building features segmental arched window openings with corbeled brick hoods. Two decorative bands of sawtooth design join the widow hoods, one band at each story. This same sawtooth design is used as spandrels below each of the windows as well. The 1912 addition lacks these details but retains the same proportions for the window openings and door openings."

Conclusion

The prospect of restoring the building is rendered infeasible by two significant factors.



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First, the resultant damage from the 2013 fire requires replacement of the roof and roof structure. This damage predated the current ownership's involvement and has been addressed with repairs intended to protect the public's well-being in the near term. Second, the significant differential settlement of the building requires remediation that will necessitate the deconstruction of many building components. This will include the removal and replacement of large portions of the brick facade, the rebuilding of parapets, replacement of all exterior and interior windows and doors. The entire building perimeter will need to be excavated to the bottom of footings to add grade beams and helical piers.

Any attempt at reconstruction will result in a building that is a facsimile of the current building. The replication contradicts the integrity of historic preservation, instead creating a "Disney" like imitation, rather than a legitimate historic "restoration".

Demolition of the existing building presents the opportunity to build a new structure that is sympathetic in scale, integrity, and longevity. The new work will be created by an ownership group with a proven track record of building high-quality projects in the Third Ward. The design work is being overseen by an architectural studio that is renowned for adaptive use, historic restoration, and new construction. Together, this team is committed to delivering a new building befitting the beautiful setting, that will feel naturally a part of the Historic Third Ward.

Therefore, we request that the Historic Preservation Committee issue a Certificate of Appropriateness to raze the building located at 266 E Erie Street.