

01-12-16

Attention: City of Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission

Project Name: Mitchell Street Historic District, Hills Department Store,
906-910 W Historic Mitchell Street, Milwaukee, WI 53204

Overall Description

The Hills Department Store, located on the northwest corner of 9th and Mitchell Street, was originally a department store, later a hardware store, and most recently a commercial office building. The subject property shares a block with the former Goldmann's Department Store to the west, with a pedestrian alley-way running north/south between the two buildings. Directly across W. Mitchell sits St. Anthony's Church, and across S. 9th St. is a non-contributing two-story commercial building. Behind the subject property is a small one-story building, which connects underground to the Hill's building, and abuts a large paved surface parking lot to the north. The property is located within the Historic Mitchell Street district, a nine block stretch of architecturally and historically significant commercial structures locally designated by the City of Milwaukee, and deemed an eligible district to which this building(s) contributes.

The main Hill's building was constructed as a four story department store for the Lion Store in 1919, as was the single-story north service building. In 1928, the property was sold to the owner of the Hill's Dry Goods chain. The name was changed to the Hill's Department Store where it operated until closing in 1962. Empire TV and Appliance owned and operated the building from 1964 to 1973, when the building was taken over by National Hardware, who operated at the building until 1983. The building was renovated into commercial and governmental office in 1986.

The Hills building is a five-story reinforced concrete structure with brick masonry infill at the exterior walls, excluding the basement which is entirely concrete. The building was designed in the neoclassical architectural style with limestone veneer on the ground-floor level and red tapestry brick from the second to fourth stories on the east and south elevations. The fifth story is a partial story that was added later and is stepped back from the front façade. The red tapestry brick that makes up the front façade does not extend to the fifth story. The west and north elevations have exposed concrete structure with exposed common brick infill. Many of the building's elements are accentuated with limestone trim, including the cornice, window trim, and other ornamental features. The ground floor has large plate-glass commercial windows that were replaced in 1986, but kept the same overall configuration as the original storefront. The Hills Department Store upper fenestration has a grid of two fixed pane windows with flanking smaller double-hung sash windows on the sides and capped with a divided lite transom.

The one-story brick and stone north building was originally constructed as a receiving room and garage. The building has little architectural detail, except for a stepped parapet and limestone pilasters and trims that match the main building on its primary 9th street facade. The storefront at this location was infilled previously with concrete block on the first floor. The brick infill on the second floor appears to have been original as the brick matches the face brick on the other building. This structure is linked to the larger building by a staircase that leads to the basement of the main

building that runs under the vacated alley between the buildings. The basement is continuous under both buildings.

The main entrance is on Mitchell Street, although the building is also accessible through a secondary entrance on 9th St. and through the north building. The main entrance features a metal canopy and an entrance vestibule with storefront display cabinets. It was subdivided in during the 1980's renovation with a wall separating the basement stair exit from the rest of the vestibule.

The Hills Department Store will be rehabilitated for a new Milwaukee Public Library branch in the first floor commercial space and mezzanine, with storage in the basement. The remaining areas of the lower level will be used for tenant storage and commercial lease space (currently anticipated to be a fitness center). The upper floors of the south (main) building will be rehabilitated into residential housing units on floors 2-5. The north building will be rehabilitated into eight lofted townhouse studio apartments, also market rate, entered from the alley space between the building creating tenant courtyards. The western portion of the north building will continue to be service space, including deliveries, trash, and recycling. The basement of the north building will continue to be mechanical and service space, including the WE Energies transformer substation on the north-west corner of the basement.

All renovation/restoration work is being done under the Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part 2 and amendment dated 11/11/15 as submitted to and conditionally approved by the National Park Service in the letter dated December, 15, 2015 (NPS Project No. 32215), and will meet the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation

1. Masonry

Existing Feature and Condition - The Hills Building consists of a main rectangular building with primary façade on Mitchell Street, secondary façade on 9th Street, and an auxiliary service and storage building with primary façade on 9th Street. The two buildings attach at the basement level.

The primary and secondary street-facing facades on Mitchell Street and South 9th Street respectively, are primarily red face brick with limestone detailing in the neoclassical architectural style with regular fenestration. Bays are defined by brick pilasters with limestone capitals and bases, which rest on a limestone base which frames the storefront on the first floor. The building is capped by a painted metal cornice. The fifth story is a partial story that was added later and is stepped far back from the front façade. The red tapestry brick that makes up the front façade does not extend to the fifth story. It is constructed of concrete/concrete block with a parged cementitious exterior which is spalling in some areas. The non-primary facades are clad in common brick which has been painted up to the floor line of the second story. A ghost sign ("Big Ben – Self serve shoes – entrance around corner") is visible on the west façade and will be preserved. There is irregular fenestration, many of which have been infilled with brick or mechanical grilles over time.

The north building is similarly constructed but simpler in detailing with a face brick and limestone primary façade on 9th Street. It appears from historic sketches of the building that the upper portion of the primary façade was always brick, formerly above two garage doors, now infilled with concrete

block and a stucco finish. The non-primary facades are clad in common brick between exposed concrete structural elements which have been painted up to the floor line of the second story.

Work and Impact on feature – The character defining masonry exterior of the Hills Building will be retained, cleaned and repaired. In areas where the masonry needs to be tuck-pointed, the mortar will be repointed with mortar to match the adjacent in composition, strength, color and profile to the adjacent historic mortar. Where masonry units are damaged, spalling or missing, replacement masonry will be installed to match the cleaned adjacent original masonry in material, dimension, color and finish. Window/door penetrations will be lowered and fire escape doors removed on the west façade of the main building, and the fifth story south façade of the main building (both non-primary facades) to accommodate the residential units. The parged finish on fifth floor of the main building will be patched and painted. The elevator penthouse at the sixth level and above is similarly constructed, but the parged finish is in much worse condition. New metal panels painted to match the existing wall will be installed over the parged brick and concrete on the west, south and east walls where the penthouse is set well back from the edge of the building. The north face will remain as is.

On the north building, new openings will be cut into the north and south non-primary facades to accommodate daylight and entry in the new residential units. In these areas, masonry openings will be reframed to match the adjacent cleaned original masonry in material, dimension, color and finish. Some of the original window openings will have the brick infill removed and new sills installed to accommodate new windows. The masonry on the primary 9th street and first story of the south facades of the north building, as well as the first story of the north and west facades will be attempted to be cleaned with the gentlest chemical cleaner possible to expose the face brick. Samples will be provided to the State Historic Preservation Office/National Park Service (SHPO/NPS) and Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) with product literature and photographic documentation of test patches prior to proceeding with the work. If gentle cleaning is not effective in the test patches, these areas will be cleaned, patched and repainted. The west and north facades of the north building will be cleaned, patched and repainted.

2. Roofing

Existing Feature and Condition – The roof on the main building is a built-up flat roof above an attic space that rests on the structural concrete deck beyond a masonry raised parapet. The fifth floor roof and the roof on the north building are similar roofing systems laid on the structural roof above minimal insulation over a sloped wood deck. The upper roofs at the 6th floor elevator penthouse level as well as the roof above the passenger elevator penthouse consist of sloped insulation and modified bitumen roofing directly on a flat concrete structure. All of the existing roofing is damaged and deteriorated. There is outdated mechanical equipment on the fifth floor roof and the penthouse. The roof is drained by roof conductors through piping interior to the building which seem to be in working order.

Work and Impact on feature – The existing roofing systems will be removed, with new sheet waterproofing membrane roofing membranes installed over new sloped rigid insulation. A section of the attic plenum above the concrete roof deck will be removed and a new interior parapet will be installed to create the 5th floor roof decks. The 5th floor roof decks will be installed above the roofing

system, consisting of concrete roofing deck pavers on pedestals. Existing rooftop mechanical equipment will be removed and replaced with new equipment in the same location. The roof decks will not be visible from any vantage point on the ground.

3. Fire Escapes

Existing Feature and Condition – There are two sections of existing metal fire escape on the west and north elevations of the main building. There are also straight metal ladders connecting the top platform landing at each fire escape with the roof above. The metal on both systems is intact with little rust, though the painted finish is deteriorated.

Work and Impact on feature – The fire escapes will remain, but the lowest movable ladder sections and ladders from the fire escapes to the roof will be removed. Remaining portions of fire escape will be scraped, sanded, primed and painted with metal primer and paint. The exit doors that serve the fire escapes will be replaced with windows in the same location with masonry infill below the new sill height.

4. Windows

Existing Feature and Condition – While most of the original window openings on the Hills Building remain, the window units themselves have been replaced in several renovations or replaced with mechanical grilles. On the primary south facade and the secondary west facade of the main building, the upper story window units were replaced in 1986 with Marvin wood windows with a painted exterior finish. Most of the windows on the east, south and west elevations were replaced with Marvin Magnum clad wood windows in 1996 due to deterioration of existing frames and sashes. To control energy costs, the maintenance personnel on the former ownership/management team screwed these non-historic units fixed and may have sealed the units on the exterior of the bottom sash. This has resulted in some deterioration of the wood in the lower sashes of the current windows. On the fifth floor, the north and west facades of the main building, and all elevations of the north building, there are non-historic fixed units of single pane glass in original locations or in new masonry openings added over time to add light to the interior spaces. The majority of these windows are wood replacement units with a painted exterior finish.

Work and Impact on feature – Existing non-historic clad wood replacement windows on the south building will be retained, repaired or replaced in kind as necessary on the second, third and fourth floors of the primary and secondary facades. Window openings on the non-primary facades (north and west) will be opened up in the tenant apartments in the existing openings and infilled openings. An additional awning window will be installed three brick courses below the existing opening sill in order to lower the sill to accommodate operable windows at the residential tenancies as existing sills are positioned higher than reasonable operable (west elevation only). Masonry will remain in existing blocked up window openings in elevator and mechanical spaces on the north side, and grills will remain on the north and west facade to service new mechanical rooms. All new or replaced windows will be wood simulated divided light windows with painted metal clad exterior with lites of low-e clear Solarband 60 glazing.

In the north building, new window and door openings are being added on the north and south facades to service the new tenant residential units. The existing non-historic downsized window

openings on the primary 9th Street façade of the north building are being reglazed with translucent insulated glass. The west façade of this building will retain the existing openings, but a new garage door and man door will replace the existing non-historic units. All new or replaced windows will be wood double-hung windows with painted metal clad exterior with lites of low-e clear Solarband 60 glazing.

5. Storefront

Existing Feature and Condition –The Hills Building original first floor storefront was replaced with butt-glazed single pane glazing in a modern aluminum 1-3/4" wide by 6" deep non-thermally – broken storefront system during the 1986 renovation. At that time, the original articulation of the original clerestory windows with ribbed translucent glass was kept, but the main windows below were divided in half with a butt-glazed silicon joint in lieu of the raised exterior metal mullion cover used at the original mullion location. The storefront glazing is in relatively good condition, with sections of leaking or deteriorated glazing at the mullions and gasketed connections and some missing or damaged mullion covers. A section of storefront matching the configuration of the Mitchell Street elevation was removed from the west façade closest to Mitchell Street and infilled with brick.

Work and Impact on feature –The non-historic storefront on the first floor will be replaced with insulated glass storefront panels matching the existing opening configuration and detailing in new thermally-broken storefront framing of the same dimensions as the existing. The existing metal transom separating the clerestory windows from the main windows below will be repaired and repainted to match the new storefront finish. The section of storefront infilled in the first bay of the west façade toward Mitchell Street will be re-opened, and new storefront installed to match the size and detailing of the Mitchell Street façade. In the second, third and fourth bays at the ground level, the original infilled window openings will be reopened and the sills lowered. The new openings will be infilled with new storefront matching the vertical delineation of the adjacent storefront, but with a raised sill height. The two sections of curved storefront at the Mitchell Street entry façade will be restored, and the two sections that were replaced by Plexiglas on the 9th Street façade will be rehabilitated with curved glass storefront sections. The clerestory windows above the display windows will have ribbed glass at the exterior pane of the insulated glazing panel. The main windows will be clear glass with low-e Solarband 60 glazing.

6. Entries

Existing Feature and Condition –The Hills Building entry lobbies will remain in their current location. The main entry on Mitchell Street retains its original doors and the framing of the glazed storefront display window boxes on the interior of the vestibule. Framing of the original marquee was downsized and re-clad in metal fascia and soffit of simpler detailing than the original. The 9th Street entry also is similar in configuration to the original, with a door at the south on a lower height accessing a ramp, and two doors mulled to the north above a step. Both entries retain their original historic transoms above the doors and terrazzo floors.

Work and Impact on feature –The entries will retain their existing elements and detailing. The display window boxes will be restored in the south entry vestibule. Automatic door access hardware will be added to the south door opening of the east entry vestibule and the east door of the south vestibule to accommodate current accessibility requirements. Doors will be primed and painted if

currently painted, or sanded, stained and sealed if currently stained. Terrazzo floors will be buffed and cleaned. The ramp inside the east vestibule will be reconfigured to accommodate current ramp rise/run requirements and the non-historic interior vestibule doors will be relocated and replaced with doors similar in construction and detail with the exterior vestibule doors. At the south vestibule, the wall added in the 1980's to separate the stair exist from the rest of the vestibule will be removed and a door separating the vestibule from the stair will be added at the west side. The existing marquee above the south entry will be re-clad with new decorative metal fascia, new metal soffit and repainted with new recessed lighting to replace the existing incandescent fixtures. The proposed design of the new fascia and signage on the marquee has to be coordinated with the public library tenant and will be submitted for review and approval to the SHPO/ NPS and MHPC prior to any work being done on that element.