

Agenda Item B. Review of National Register Status for Properties Proposed for Demolition

In addition to reviewing new nominations, the State Historic Preservation Review Board is tasked with completing evaluations of National Register eligibility for other specific properties when necessary to assist the SHPO.

In Connecticut, a State Historic Preservation Review Board opinion is necessary in some cases when demolition is proposed and action under Connecticut Environmental Protection Act is being considered. The Protection Act applies to properties that are listed on the National Register. However, there are many cases where lack of clarity in the original nomination or a change in the physical integrity of a property warrants re-evaluation of the property's designation status.

At the March 24, 2023 meeting, the SRB will be asked to assess whether or not one property, located within a National Register-listed historic district, retains enough integrity to continue to contribute to said district.

This package includes current information about the property and a copy of the nomination for the district it is a part of, as well as a copy of a recent Historic Property Evaluation Report, dated December 20, 2022, by Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, Inc.

Agenda Item B.

B.1. Review of National Register Status for Property Proposed for Demolition, 31-35 South Main Street, Norwalk, South Main and Washington Streets Historic District Boundary Increase (NR# 85003505)

Staff requests that the SRB evaluate whether the property known as 31-35 South Main Street, Norwalk, continues to contribute to the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District Boundary Increase.

The South Main and Washington Streets Historic District was listed on the National Register on September 16, 1977 (NR# 77001393). It was subsequently enlarged through two additional increases: the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District Boundary Increase, listed November 8, 1985 (NR# 85003505), and the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District (Boundary Increase #2), listed April 15, 1999 (NR# 99000449). The property in question was designated a contributing resource in the first boundary increase in 1985.

The building is identified in the nomination, in Section 7, page 1, where it is listed in the inventory of contributing buildings as, "33-35 South Main Street (Udelman Building): two stories, 1927, yellow brick with limestone facade on the ground floor. Prominent cornices above the central entry and two wide storefronts; entry is surrounded by rope-turn carving. Wide, three-part second-story windows grouped in threes beneath a molded cornice and set off by limestone quoins; center second-story window has a blind arch filled with basketweave brickwork. Name and date tablet within the stepped center portion of the parapet. Photographs 2 and 3." It is again referenced in Section 8, page 1, where a list of previous occupants is provided.

The South Main and Washington Streets Historic District Boundary Increase (1985) used the same areas of significance as the original nomination - Criterion A for the commercial development or South Norwalk and Criterion C for architecture. The nomination notes that, "both these themes are amplified by the addition

of the eleven buildings in the extension.” The boundary increase summarizes the original district’s buildings’ significance: “because they illustrate the historical development of the area as South Norwalk’s commercial center [Criterion A],” and, “because its buildings embodied the distinctive characteristics of late 19th and early 20th-century commercial architecture [Criterion C].”

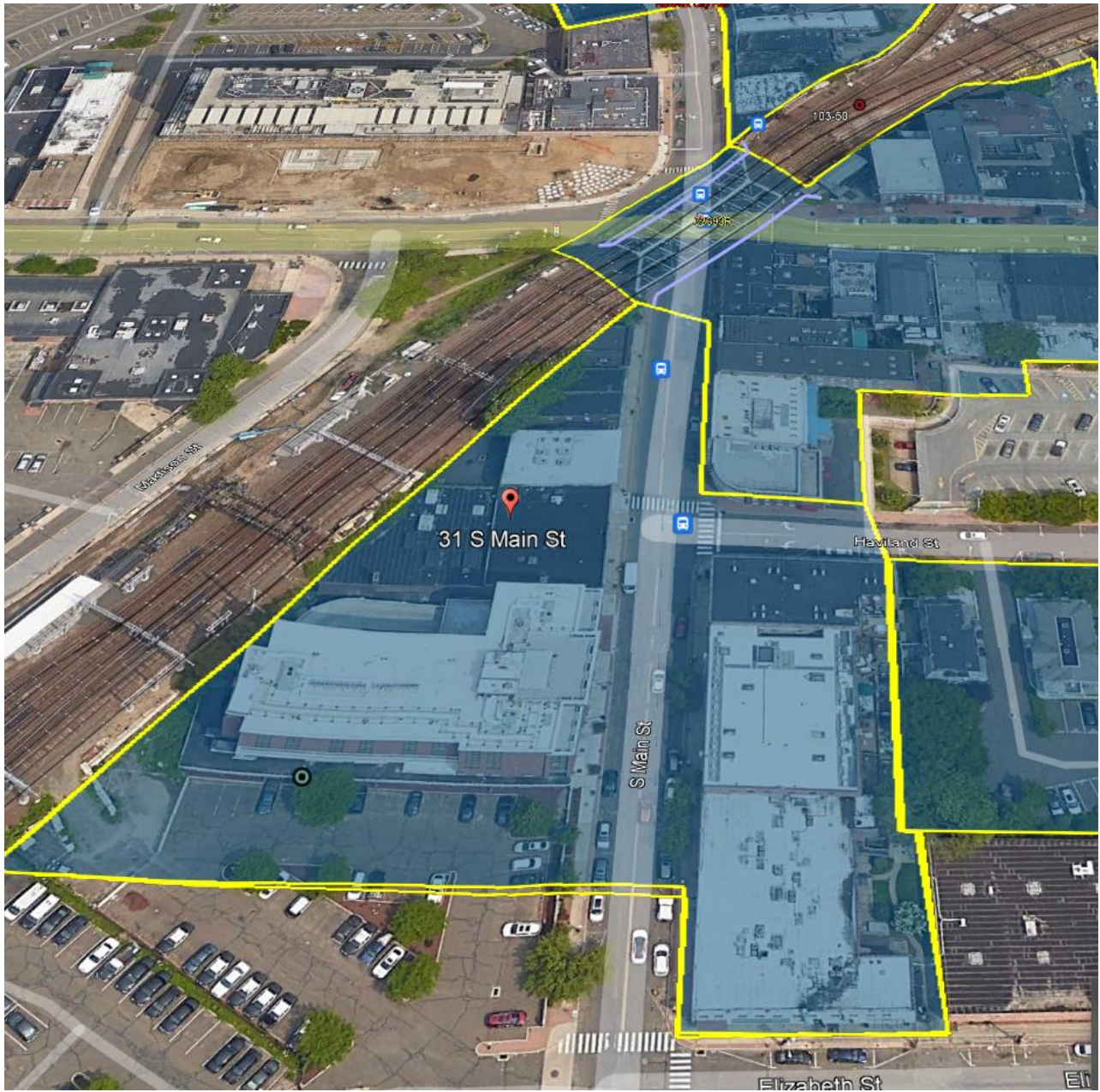
Description

According to the nomination, the structure is 2 stories in height, composed of yellow brick with a limestone façade on the first floor. A review of the building in person reveals that the façade is yellow brick and limestone, while the other elevations are composed of red brick. The building is composed of two main masses: a front block that is two stories tall, continuing two storefronts and a central stairhall, and a rear single-story block. A full basement runs the entirety of the structure.

Demolition Delay

The City of Norwalk has a 120-day demolition delay ordinance. A demolition application was submitted on January 20, 2023. On February 15, 2023, the Norwalk Planning and Zoning Commission approved demolition of the building as part of a larger development.

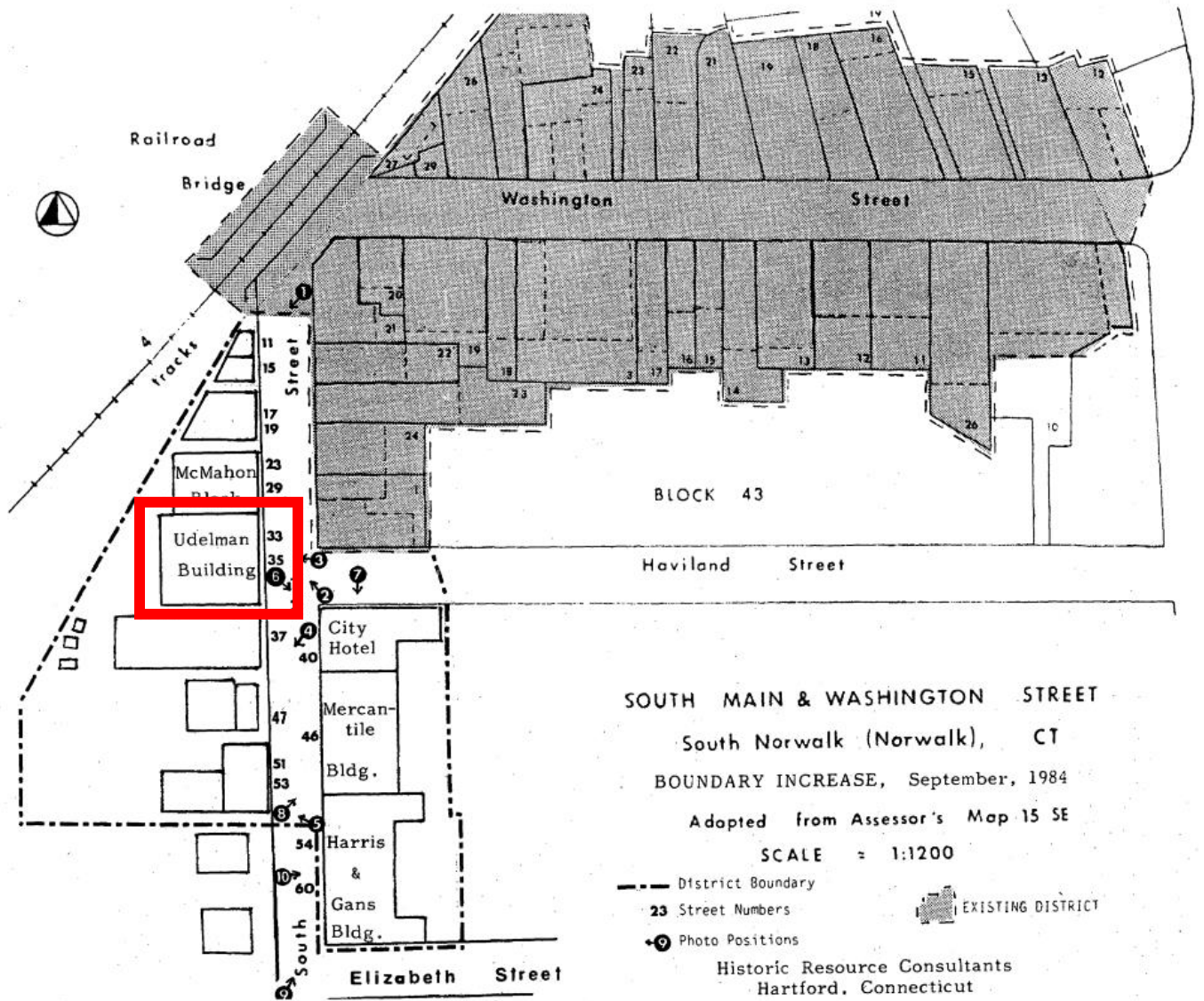
Photographs and figures are below:



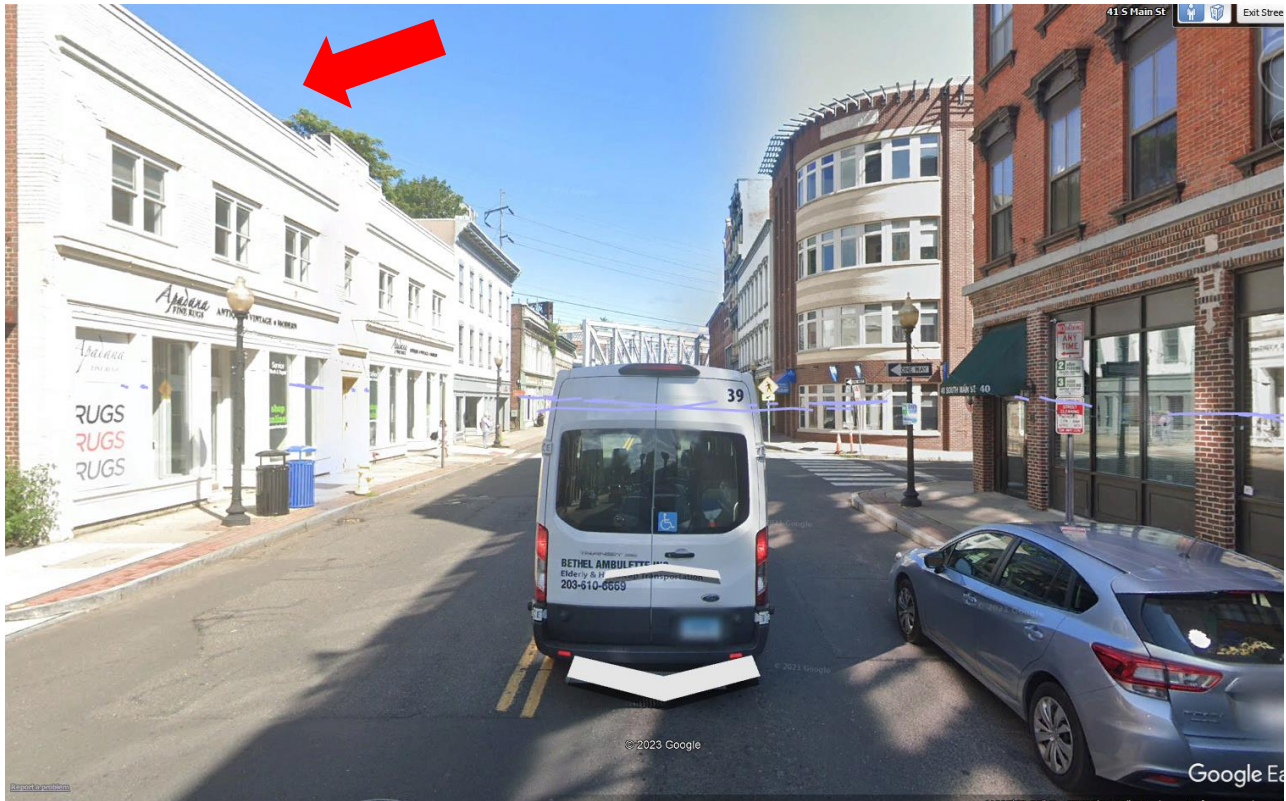
Location of 31-35 South Main Street, Norwalk, within the South Main and Washington Streets National Register Historic District Boundary Increase, map oriented north (google earth, 5/31/2019). National Register boundary shown in yellow. District to the northeast is the South Main & Washington Street Historic District. District to the east is the Haviland and Elizabeth Streets / Hanford Place Historic District.



Location of 31-35 South Main Street, Norwalk, outlined in red (google earth, 5/31/2019).



Map of the South Main and Washington Streets National Register district boundary, including proposed increase. 31-35 South Main Street is identified as the Udelman Building (outlined in red).



South Main Street, Norwalk, view looking north. 31-35 South Main Street to the left. *Google Earth*, September 2021.



South Main Street, Norwalk, view looking south. 31-35 South Main Street to the right. *Google Earth*, September 2021.



31-35 South Main Street, Norwalk, camera facing northwest, *google Earth*, September 2021.

****Additional photos of current conditions (December 2022) are within the attached Historic Property Evaluation Report****

**Historic Property Evaluation Report
31-35 South Main Street, Norwalk, CT**



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20 December, 2022

Table of Contents

<u>Report Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	3
BACKGROUND	3
BUILDING DESCRIPTION	3
CONDITIONS/OBSERVATIONS	4
CONCLUSIONS/INTERVENTION OPTIONS	5
APPENDIX A: PHOTOGRAPHS	7

Introduction

The services of Jan Hird Pokorny Associates (JHPA), based in New York, NY, were obtained by F.D. Rich Company of Stamford, CT. to evaluate the context and salient conditions of the commercial building façade at 31-35 South Main St., South Norwalk, CT., and suggest possible preservation options. On 17 December, 2022, Michael Devonshire, of JHPA, Inc. performed a visual site assessment of the exterior of the building at 31-35 South Main St., Norwalk, CT. The visual inspection was the basis for the findings of this Evaluation Report.

Purpose

The purpose of the on-site evaluation was to determine what original materials/finishes remain extant on the building main facade and what later accretions have occurred that have impacted the original façade, the condition of extant architectural features, and what interventions would be necessary to maintain or restore the building to an historically appropriate level without loss of inherent historical integrity.

Methodology

The inspection and report methodology included review of pertinent documentation, a visual review of the historic district, and close on-site visual assessment of the building exterior and adjacent context.

Format

The written report and photographs are intended to complement and, where applicable, reference each other to produce a comprehensive evaluation of the building.

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This report is considered work for hire and may be reproduced only at the discretion of F.D. Rich Company. Copies of the files related to this assessment are available to the client on CD or flash drive upon request. The services represented by this report are for the exclusive use and benefit of F.D. Rich Company, and such services, data, recommendations, proposals, reports, documentation, and similar information produced and provided by the consultant are not to be used or relied upon by other parties without written permission from the consultant or F.D. Rich Co.

Background

The building at 31-35 So. Main St. was included in the 1985 boundary increase of the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District of South Norwalk, and was included as a contributing building under Criteria A and C for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Building Description

The building at 31-35 South Main St., originally known as the Udelman Building was constructed in 1927, and is a two-story, seven bay wide structure, clad in brick with limestone trim elements. A narrow central entry bay is flanked by three wider symmetrical bays. The first floor features a recessed central opening to second floor offices flanked by commercial storefronts that feature central recessed entries with two large commercial windows on either side. A discontinuous limestone cavetto string course

surmounts the store level sign band of the commercial storefronts. The second floor features a single central punched window opening with one-over-one sash, flanked on either side by three punched openings with paired one-over-one sash. Above the window spandrels, a shallow cornice featuring an ovolo base and corona complete the formal “storefronts”. The façade is completed by a brick masonry parapet capped with a limestone coping which has been covered with sheet metal. A central stepped pediment features the name and date of the building construction in limestone.

Conditions/Observations

General

The building appears to have undergone a renovation within the last 20-25 years. The renovation (or a later intervention) included: removal of the original storefronts and replacement with new wood and glass elements that are much less articulated than the originals, replacement of the central main entry door, replacement of second floor windows. The work also has included complete painting of the building facade, which appears to have concealed a number of building deficiencies and deterioration as noted in the following conditions (Photo 1).

In order for the building to return to its original appearance, removal of the extant paint will be necessary. Paint removal will reveal a great number of deficiencies, both structural and cosmetic, that will impact the historical integrity of the building.

Brick Masonry

The original facade brick masonry is a glazed buff-colored brick, laid in common bond, with the exception of an infill spandrel arch above the second floor level central window opening that features a basket weave pattern in the brick masonry.

Paint has failed on the façade bricks at some locations. Serious displacement of the brick masonry above the second floor level window level has occurred, which appears to be a result of corrosion and oxide jacking of the steel lintels at the window heads. The masonry displacement is severe at some locations and may present a hazard to public safety (Photo 2).

It is likely that repair of the brick masonry will be problematic and not result in a successful “restoration”. Removal for salvage of the bricks above the lintel level without damage will be difficult, as they are laid in Portland cement mortar, a tenacious, rigid material that will not be able to be removed without damage to the bricks, thus a considerable amount of original masonry will be lost.

Limestone

As with the brick masonry above the second floor level window level, limestone quoins are severely displaced and will be difficult to salvage and reuse without damage – resulting in a considerable amount of replacement (Photo 3).

At the central pediment inset name and date panel limestone, there is a significant amount of stone spalling (Photo 4). The disfigured stone obscures the date of construction, and is visually obtrusive. At the parapet coping level, the copings have been covered with sheet metal that may be concealing damage, and the two stone scrolls that flank the stepped pediment have been covered with asphaltic material. At the limestone string course above the storefront sign band the original limestone cornice above the 31 Main St storefront appears to have been replaced with a ferrous replacement, which has

lost paint and is corroding. The course above the #35 storefront is delaminating and spalling at several locations. The sign band limestone at both storefronts appears to have been patched; awkwardly applied repairs are visible through the paint film. Portions of the limestone at the street level window surrounds are also damaged. At the central entry door surround, there are visible poorly applied patch repairs at the ashlar stone, and the rope detailing and base stones at the door surround are eroded, exhibiting mechanical damage. Early photographs of the façade reveal a cornice and entablature above the central door that appears much more robust and elaborate than the extant broken pediment and ovolo base element. The extant pediment shows a considerable amount of mechanical stone damage. The ashlar quoins at the two ends of the façade also exhibit considerable mechanical damage (Photo 5).

Windows

Early photographs reveal that the original windows featured one-over-one hung sash in frames that fully filled the punched openings. The extant windows are one-over-one wood sash, inappropriately smaller than the originals openings, and placed awkwardly off center within the masonry openings - with sheet metal infill panning at the perimeters (Photo 6).

Doors

The paired doors to the commercial spaces within the storefronts are new, and appear to be in serviceable condition. The single central entry door appears to be nonoriginal and is in only fair condition

Conclusion/Intervention Options

As mentioned, the building at 31-35 So. Main St. was included in the 1985 boundary increase of the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District, and was designated a contributing building under Criteria A and C for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Restoration for reuse of the building façade to a level complying with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards will be very difficult, if not impossible.

While the building does represent a period of commercial activity in the morphology of downtown South Norwalk, it was originally exceedingly modest in design, only slightly more articulated than the building at #37 So. Main St., that was demolished for the present hotel. A comparison to the other buildings within the original and expanded district suggests that the design of the building is decidedly unremarkable.

The lack of architectural zeitgeist notwithstanding, the present condition of the building's main façade, hidden by layers of paint which conceals a plethora of building deficiencies, presents serious problems from the perspective of architectural integrity and authenticity. With an attempt to "restore" the building to its original appearance, removal of the paint (which itself was an inappropriate treatment for the building) will reveal fully the significantly damaged and deteriorated condition of the limestone trim elements, and probably previous inappropriate brick replacement as well. Spalls and exfoliation of limestone elements will be prominent and require patching, stone dutchman repairs, or full replacement. Further, the significantly displaced brick masonry and limestone elements will require reconstruction and likely replication; the inappropriate and awkward windows will require replacement with more suitable units to replicate the originals; the wooden storefronts will require replacement with period-appropriate fronts; replacement of the ferrous cornice element with limestone will be required. Removal of the sheet metal flashing at the front parapet coping may reveal further stone damage that will require replacement. Ultimately, the present near monochromatic appearance of the building is unsightly; the appropriate interventions necessary to return this building facade to its original (or even historically acceptable)

appearance will result in a building highly compromised and totally lacking in authenticity or historic architectural integrity. Very little historic material would exist.

Considering the above conditions and the loss of authenticity that would be the result of any restoration effort, including an effort to salvage the existing façade and incorporate into a new building on the site, it is recommended that the building be permitted to be demolished, and several unique elements that might be able to be salvaged without damage (ex. The central entry door surround and pediment, name and date panel) be incorporated into or displayed within any new building constructed on the site.

Appendix A: Photographs



Photo 1 Paint obscures much of the damage and deterioration on the building façade



Photo 2 Oxide jacking of steel has resulted in serious damage to brick and stone masonry.



Photo 3 Stone masonry has been seriously displaced and presents a hazardous condition



Photo 4 Limestone spalling will require significant intervention affecting building integrity



Photo 5 Ashlar quoins at the building ends are damaged and unsightly



Photo 6 Windows on the building are inappropriate and will require appropriate replacement.