

New Clayton luxury apartment plan saves historic Shanley

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Joe Holleman: St. Louis Post Dispatch

After an 18-month battle, building preservationists are claiming victory with the apparent rescue of a historic Clayton office building.

Developer **BalkeBrown Transwestern** has unveiled its \$85 million plan to build **Bemiston Place**, an eight-story apartment/retail complex on Central Avenue.

The plan also calls for the preservation of the architecturally significant **Shanley Building** at 7800 Maryland Avenue.

“We’re happy to be able to integrate the Shanley into the project,” said Balke’s chief executive, **Steve Brown**. “We believe it is a major contributor to the fabric of downtown Clayton.”



The Shanley Building, at 7800 Maryland Avenue, pictured Feb. 8, 2019. The building houses the Clayton License Office and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is generally recognized as the first International Style building in the Midwest. Photo by Hillary Levin, hlevin@post-dispatch.com

Not only does the plan save the 84-year-old landmark, it also incorporates the two-story building into the project by turning it into office space and a storage area for the proposed building's tenants.

“We want to make it into something meaningful, rather than just make it into a museum,” Brown said.

The fight to save the Shanley began in March 2019, after the unveiling of a previous plan, **a \$270 million development by Fred Kummer's HBE Corp** for the half-block bounded by Maryland, Central and Bemiston avenues and an alley. The plan called for the Shanley to be demolished.

Preservationists **started a petition drive** and held rallies to save the Shanley, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Chris Stritzel of **CitySceneSTL**, who started the petition drive, called the new plan “a big win for the preservationist movement ... a victory, as it saves the Shanley.”

Stritzel said the Kummer plan was not only opposed by preservationists, but by neighbors and small business owners who disliked the plan’s design and its elimination of retail shops.

Brown said his company took over the development rights for the block in March 2020 and was “super excited to re-purpose the Shanley.”

In **plans unveiled Monday** in an online community meeting, Brown and architect Frank Andre of Hord Coplan Macht Inc. of Baltimore walked about 90 people through the project:

Bemiston Place is intended to be a 242-unit, 390,000-square-foot luxury apartment complex on a 1.5-acre lot that would include three levels of parking (some underground). About 10,000 square feet of street-level space on Central has been earmarked for smaller retail shops and a larger space for a restaurant at Central and Maryland.

Brown said the intersection is “one of the most important corners in Clayton, but it’s kind of dead right now.”

The company hopes to have approval from Clayton officials early next year, then begin demolition of the current structures by fall 2021 and be open for business by fall 2023.

The plan also calls for the Shanley to be renovated to contain small offices and a conference room that tenants can rent. It also suggests using part of the building for tenants to store bicycles.

“How cool would that be to have an office in the Shanley?” said Brown, who noted that the Shanley sorely needs some renovations.



A photo of the Shanley Building included as part of an application to be included on the National Register of Historic Places. The photos were taken in 1981 by Esley Hamilton, preservation historian for the St. Louis County Parks and Recreation Department

“It looks a little tired right now and it hasn’t really been taken care of in recent years,” Brown said. But when that work is done, he said, “it’ll feel like a little jewel.”

The Shanley is generally recognized as the first **International Style** building in the Midwest. Its architect was Edwardsville native **Harris Armstrong**, a leader in the modernist movement.

When the Shanley was completed in 1936, it was highlighted in both Architectural Record and Architectural Review and won a silver medal at the Paris Exhibition of 1937.



Harris Armstrong

After that, Armstrong was in high demand and eventually designed more than 100 structures in the St. Louis area.

Armstrong's other signature works are the **Ethical Society of St. Louis** in Ladue, the **Magic Chef building** in St. Louis, **Cori House** in Glendale, and the **Grant Medical Building** in the Central West End.

He also designed nine homes in the suburb of Oakland, living in two of them and using a third for an office. He resided in Oakland from the mid-1940s until he died in 1973.