

HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLANNING REVIEW

Date: May 24, 2006

To: Environmental Section

From: Carlen Hatala 
Historic Preservation

Re: Tower Automotive/A O Smith
Bounded by Hopkins Street, 27th Street, Capitol Drive and 35th Street

We have reviewed the above 86-acre property, the former Tower Automotive/A O Smith Corporation site. Some preliminary research has been done on the site. It appears from fragmentary permit records that Herman Esser was the architect of the complex's original grouping of buildings that were constructed between 1919 and 1920. This is corroborated by his obituary. Esser's significance to industrial architecture is summarized on the attached page.

The American Society of Mechanical Engineers named the A. O. Smith Frame Plant as its 35th landmark in May 1979, in honor of the auto frame production line, the world's first fully automated factory.

The A. O. Smith Research and Engineering Building (3533 N. 27th Street) was designed by the leading national architectural firm of Burnham & Root of Chicago. The building was featured in a display of the firm's 100+ years of architectural design at the Chicago Architecture Foundation in 2006. It was given landmark status by the former Milwaukee Landmarks Commission in 1978. It is considered eligible for listing in the National Register and is eligible for local historic designation.

The original office building (3545 N. 27th Street) retains all of its original features and its design is attributed to Herman Esser. It is eligible for local historic designation and may be eligible for National Register listing.

Most of the industrial buildings in the complex still retain much of their original architectural detail. While plain in contrast to commercial buildings or residences of their era, they nevertheless display a design cohesiveness not found in many 20th century industrial complexes. The complex of buildings that remain on the site may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer will be coming in from Madison to

render an opinion. We are currently in the process of scheduling a meeting. I will inform you of the time and date of the meeting and hope that you can join us.