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TO: City Planning Commission

FROM: Christopher J. Gulock, AICP, staff

RE: **PCA (Public Center Adjacent) review of exterior changes to 511 Woodward Avenue**

DATE: May 13, 2019

REQUEST

The staff of the City Planning Commission (CPC) has received a request from Iconic-511 LLC (The Elia Group) to approve exterior changes to 511 Woodward Avenue.

The subject property is zoned PCA (Public Center Adjacent District), a classification which calls for City Council approval of any exterior changes following the review and recommendation of the City Planning Commission and the Planning and Development Department (Sections 61-2-181 and 61-11-81) of the Zoning Ordinance. The subject site will also need to be reviewed by the Historic District Commission.

BACKGROUND

The subject site is located on the west side of Woodward Avenue between West Congress Avenue on the north and West Larned Avenue on the south. The block measures approximately 271 feet along Woodward Avenue with a depth of 50 feet.

The site was developed in 1972 with the Detroit Federal Savings and Loan Assoc. Building – a 4-story glass and steel bank building. The existing building measures approximately 250 along Woodward Avenue with a depth of 30 feet, totaling 7,530 square feet. The current exterior of the building includes gold mirrored glass, a main entrance at the center of the building facing with a brick façade above, and a box on the roof screening mechanical/electrical/plumbing equipment. The front of the site along Woodward Avenue is developed with raised planters with steps leading to the front of the building. The site was most recently owned by Wayne County and has been vacant for 12 years.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

The Elia Group is proposing to purchase the building and redevelop it as a commercial space with several tenants. Please see the attached plans for reference. Proposed exterior changes include:

- Replacing the building façade on the north, east, and south sides of the building with clear glass;

- Adding a decorative metallic façade screen to the front of the building and wrapping around the top of the north facade;
- Adding horizontal exterior lighting; and
- Updating the existing front plaza with outdoor seating, ADA ramp access, and landscaping.

ANALYSIS

Surrounding Zoning and Land Use

The zoning classification and land uses surrounding the subject area are as follows:

North: PCA; developed the Chase Tower/The Qube (across West Congress)
 East: PCA; developed with One Detroit Center (across Woodward)
 South: PCA; developed with One Woodward Building (across West Larned)
 West: PCA; developed with the Guardian Building (across the alley)

P&DD Review

CPC staff and P&DD met with the developer on April 3, 2019 to discuss the proposed project.

Review

Section of 61-11-97 of the Zoning Ordinance lists the PCA District Review Criteria. The relevant PCA review criteria provisions are as follows, with preliminary staff analysis in italics:

- (2) Scale, form, massing and density should be appropriate to the nature of the project and relate well to surrounding development. *The decorative metallic façade and the transparency of the new glazing would impact the perceived form and mass of the building and its appearance along Woodward Avenue;*
- (3) The proposed development should be compatible with surrounding development in terms of land use, general appearance and function and should not adversely affect the value of adjacent properties. *The subject 4-story building is dwarfed by the adjacent 40-story Guardian Building – which backs up to 511 Woodward. One could argue that the proposed clear windows and decorative metallic façade would complement the One Woodward Building (built in 1962) to the south and the Chase Tower/The Qube (built in 1958) to the north;*
- (6) Adequate public and private open space should be provided for light and air, landscaping, and, where appropriate, for passive and active recreation. *The project is proposing to update the large existing plaza in front of the building along Woodward Avenue with outdoor seating, new landscaping, etc.;*
- (9) Appropriate buffering and screening of service, loading, refuse collection, mechanical and electrical equipment and parking areas should be provided. *The existing mechanical screen would remain on the top of the building, but the proposed façade screen would hide part of the existing mechanical screen;*
- (10) Careful consideration should be given to orientation for solar access to both the proposed project and surrounding development. *511 Woodward is quite smaller than the 4 adjacent office towers.*

- (11) Signage and graphics should be tastefully designed to be visually appealing and in character with surrounding development; they should provide needed information, direction and orientation in a clear and concise manner. *The proposed signage plan is not completed, but the proposed plans indicate the sign location and state that total building signage is 500 square feet.*
- (12) Security considerations, especially avoidance of visually isolated public spaces, should be a major element of the design program. *CPC staff understands final plans for the public space at the front of the building have not yet been completed, but the preliminary design is to remove the existing planters which would help open up the space.*
- (13) Barrier-free access and public safety features should be carefully planned. *The plans show adding an ADA access ramp to the plaza and main entrance.*
- (14) Preservation/restoration of buildings having architectural or historic value should be considered a primary objective. *The building changes will have to be reviewed by the Historic District Commission.*
- (15) Urban design elements of form and character should be carefully considered; such elements include, but are not limited to: richness/ interest of public areas through the provision of storefronts, window displays, landscaping, and artwork; color, texture and quality of structural materials; enclosure of public spaces; variations in scale; squares, plazas and/or "vest pocket parks" where appropriate; continuity of experience, visual activity and interest; articulation and highlighting of important visual features; preservation/enhancement of important views and vistas. *The proposed design opens up the north and south corners of the building; the first floor would be open and visible to the street; the site is proposing an outdoor seating area.*

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

This report provides some initial analysis of the PCA review. CPC staff maintains that 511 Woodward Avenue is an important location downtown along Woodward Avenue, and that the current vacant building with early 1970's architecture (gold mirrored windows) does not add to the aesthetic appeal of the area. The Elia Group is proposing a bold change to the façade of the building. CPC staff would like to hear additional feedback from P&DD, the Detroit Economic Growth, and the Detroit Downtown Partnership, if submitted, prior to making a recommendation.

Attachment