

City of Detroit

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July 16, 2024

HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

RE: PCA (Public Center Adjacent) Special District Review for requested exterior alterations at 557 E. Jefferson Avenue, related to a proposed entertainment use and unauthorized signage and mural development (**DEPARTMENTAL REPORT**).

NATURE OF REQUEST

The City Planning Commission (CPC) has received a request from KM Consulting on behalf of East Jefferson Hospitality Center for a PCA (Public Center Adjacent) Special District Review of exterior alterations for a proposed entertainment use at 557 E. Jefferson Avenue. This site is within a PCA (Public Center Adjacent/Restricted Central Business) zoning district, requiring approval from your Honorable Body after a review and recommendation from the Planning and Development Department (P&DD) and CPC staff. This request aligns with the provisions of Sections 50-3-222 and 50-11-97 of the Detroit Zoning Ordinance.

Due to unforeseen circumstances regarding this initial PCA request, CPC staff will be pausing its review at this time.

BACKGROUND

The building at 557 E. Jefferson Avenue, previously occupied by the Department of Administrative Hearings, has been vacant for 10 years since the City of Detroit declined to renew its lease. Originally owned by William & Associates Title Agency, Inc., the site is now owned by 557 E. Jefferson LLC. Transient populations have caused damage due to unauthorized use over the years. Several attempts to obtain demolition permits were stalled due to zoning regulations requiring review by the City Planning Commission (CPC) and City Council. In 2019, after failed attempts to repurpose or maintain the building's façade, the owner contracted CM McCormick Architects to pursue demolition, following proper review procedures. In 2020, the City Planning Commission voted against the proposed demolition. Their concerns included the potential impact of destroying a historic building and losing the street wall. Additionally, they were worried about the transient populations who sought shelter at the Pope Francis Center, which operates out of Saints Peter and Paul Jesuit Church, located to the east of the subject building. In 2022 the Pope Francis Center began development in the Core City neighborhood of Detroit to build a 40-unit Bridge Housing Campus to temporarily home transient populations in need, expanding its current services and reach. With this transition, prior hesitations on development due to the transient population are no longer a concern.



Front façade of the building facing Jefferson circa October 2023

Between 2020 and 2023, 557 E. Jefferson Avenue transitioned in ownership with the aim to redevelop the site as a new restaurant and bar facility with minor changes to the exterior façade. The proposed development is seeking to add new roof deck dining with surrounding rooftop railing, standing at a height of four feet. An initial PCA District Review was conducted by staff where questions regarding signage and refuse area were indicated and inquired by staff to the applicant, KM Consultants, on May 22nd, 2024. KM Consultants expressed their belief that the PCA review had been completed and approved due to the lengthy duration of the process. However, there has been no action by the council nor any contact with CPC staff indicating that the review process was completed. Furthermore, no permits have been issued for this project. On the May 22nd email chain KM Consultants stated that they would follow up with the operator to obtain information on any signage and verify if any changes are proposed to the exterior facade.

KM Consulting has not responded to the staff inquiry regarding follow-up on these items, prompting an onsite staff visit on June 5th, 2024. During this visit, staff observed exterior changes outside of the indicated changes highlighted by the developer upon the applicants' initial PCA review items and materials, as described below. These changes, in addition to a lack of a signage plan, have caused this PCA review to be suspended at this time.

REVIEW

A site visit was conducted on June 5th, 2024. CPC staff observed signage installed on the building's exterior that was not approved nor reviewed through a signage plan. Additionally, staff noted a mural installation on the east side of the building which was not included in the initial request.



Signage installed on the front (Jefferson) façade of the building without benefit of a permit



Mural painted on the east façade of the building but not included in the permit application

While reviewing the refuse area, CPC staff noted that the brick masonry walls found near the refuse area were not constructed according to the submitted plan. This raises concerns about the disposal process, as it appears that a waste collector may not be able to fit through the designated area.

Prior to the CPC's findings regarding the unauthorized activities, P&DD initially supported the proposed exterior changes, as stated in their attached letter dated April 19th, 2024. On June 6th, 2024, P&DD were notified of the unauthorized exterior changes. On June 11th, 2024, P&DD indicated that

these changes would be sent for review. Currently, CPC and P&DD are waiting for more information regarding the unauthorized development at 557 E. Jefferson Avenue from BSEED.



Newly constructed brick walls at the rear of the building

NEXT STEPS

CPC staff notified the Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department (BSEED) on June 5th, 2024, regarding the unauthorized work on 557 E. Jefferson Avenue. On June 6th BSEED indicated they plan to take appropriate steps to investigate. As of June 28th, CPC staff has not received a response from KM Consultants regarding the unauthorized activities. At this time CPC will be pausing its initial PCA review until more information can be provided from KM Consultants and BSEED regarding the unauthorized development on 557 E. Jefferson Avenue.

Respectfully submitted,



Marcell R. Todd, Jr., Director
Dolores Perales, City Planner

Attachments: PDD Review

- cc: David Bell, Director, BSEED
- Eric Johnson, BSEED
- Antoine Bryant, P&DD
- Greg Moots, P&DD
- Tonja Long, Law
- Bruce Goldman, Law
- Daniel Arking, Law

Malik Washington, Mayors Office
Ken Moody, KM Consultants