



Design Review Board (DRB) Staff Report
Prepared for the August, 5, 2026 DRB Meeting

Exterior Renovation

Case#26-50

Fifer and Associates, Inc.
238-242 Poplar Ave.
Memphis, TN 38117

Applicant:

Carlos Fifer
Fifer and Associates, Inc.
1441 S. Perkins Rd.
Memphis, TN 38117

Owner (if different):

Same Owner

Background:

DRB review is required for this project because it received Exterior Improvement Grant at the April 15, Center City Development Corporation (CCDC) Board Meeting.

The property is a two-story commercial space constructed circa 1915 and located in the Downtown Core directly across from the 201 Poplar criminal court complex. The building contains approximately 9,239 square feet and is currently utilized as bail bond and law offices. There is a surface parking lot with approximately 30 parking spaces. It is important to note that the interior of this building has undergone major renovations, and the current tenants have been in the space for an extended period.

Project Description:

For this property, customers will be provided with a safe well-lit and freshly painted space and parking lot.

The improvements include:

- Repairing damaged trim, wood weather stripping and tuck pointing to the building
- Exterior painting of the building
- Sidewalk repair
- New driveway entrance
- New iron fencing for the parking lot
- Painting of parking area strips

- Wayfinding for designated parking

Staff Report:

This section of Poplar Avenue serves as a primary gateway into Downtown Memphis. The proposed site improvements will enhance the appearance of this important entrance corridor by creating a cleaner, more vibrant, and welcoming environment for employees, visitors, and customers conducting business in both City and County government facilities. The project will improve the overall aesthetic quality of the site while providing tenants with a refreshed property that contributes positively to the surrounding streetscape.

The proposal includes installation of new ornamental fencing that is compatible with the character of the primary structure and surrounding context. The proposed fencing complies with the Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines, including the maximum recommended height of 6 feet.

The applicant also proposes painting portions of the existing brick façade. The Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines generally discourage painting historic masonry that has remained unpainted, as preserving original masonry materials is preferred whenever feasible. However, the staff believes this proposal warrants consideration as an exception to that guideline.

Over time, repair work has resulted in multiple brick types and colors being incorporated into the building, creating a patchwork appearance across portions of the façade. Attempts to match the original brick have not been successful, and the existing condition detracts from the overall appearance of the property. Rather than introducing additional mismatched masonry, painting the repaired brick surfaces would provide a consistent and unified appearance that improves the visual quality of the building while addressing the effects of previous alterations.

The Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines place a strong emphasis on preserving the character-defining features of historic buildings. Original architectural elements should be retained and repaired whenever possible, and when replacement is necessary, new materials should be compatible with the building's historic character. Staff finds that the proposal is generally consistent with these objectives. The project preserves the building's overall historic form, storefront configuration, and original window openings while making targeted improvements that enhance the property's appearance without significantly altering its historic character.

Overall, staff believes the proposal represents a thoughtful investment in a prominent Downtown property. The improvements will strengthen an important gateway corridor, improve the experience of pedestrians and tenants, and enhance the building's contribution to the surrounding urban environment while remaining substantially consistent with the intent of the Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines. Staff supports the requested exception to allow painting of the repaired and mismatched brick surfaces because it will unify the façade and improve the overall appearance of the building in a manner that is consistent with previous Board actions under similar circumstances.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends approval