



Design Review Board (DRB) Staff Report
Prepared for the October 7, 2026 DRB Meeting

New Construction

Case # 26-64: 272 S Main Street, Suite 101
Memphis, TN 38103

Applicant: James Gentry
870 Vance Avenue
Memphis, TN 38126

Background: DRB review is required for this project because it received an Exterior Improvement Grant (EIG) at the September 16, 2026, Center City Development Corporation (CCDC) Board Meeting.

The subject property is located on the southeast corner of S. Main Street and Dr. Martin Luther King Junior Avenue. The F&B space is on the ground floor of The Chisca on Main building, which was built in 1913 and renovated in 2015. The retail bay that applied for the Exterior Improvement Grant is a restaurant space occupied by The Lobbyist which is directly to the south of Catherine and Mary's.

Project Description: The Lobbyist opened Downtown in January 2023 and has quickly become one of Memphian's favorite places to dine Downtown. The following year the New York Times named their Corn Mash dish as "one of the 26 best dishes eaten in the US in 2024". While the main indoor restaurant space has 3,884 rentable square feet, the attached patio has an additional 1,481 rentable square feet. However, while the restaurant has grown in stature the patio has not kept up. The applicant is now looking to transform the outdoor patio from a place to sit a few extra people for some of the year, to a place that customers can enjoy year-round.

The applicant plans to do this by adding a covered commercial-grade aluminum flat-pan walkway cover with a black baked-on/powder-coated finish in between the restaurant and patio space. The walkway cover will be attached to the wall on one side and rest on four matching black structural posts on the other side. The applicant also plans to add six tall self-watering commercial planters as well as wall mounted sconces under the walkway. To keep the patio enclosed during colder and wetter days they plan to add seven motorized patio screens that are 100% solar screen material which is made with vinyl and woven fiberglass, with a dark charcoal appearance to match the patio frame. They also plan to remove the

temporary signage mounted to the white brick patio wall facing Main Street and upgrade it with permanent black, reverse-channel letter sign reading “The Lobbyist Patio” with warm-white LED halo backlighting. Lastly, the landscaping in front of the wall will get an upgraded irrigation system for new and refreshed plantings and will have eight LED warm-white low-profile landscape uplights installed in the front river-rock planting bed.

Staff Report:

These planned exterior improvements line up nicely with the Downtown Design Guidelines. Principle one of the design guidelines is “Placing Pedestrians First” and these improvements do this by creating an engaging street experience. First the ground floor, specifically the patio, will be even more activated with the six motorized patio screens helping take the patio from partial use to year-round use. The increased landscaping and a newly covered building entry not only enhances the Lobbyist atmosphere but also is a plus to the pedestrian experience and those who live at the Chisca apartments on the floors above the space.

Principle two of the guidelines is “Create Places of Lasting Value”. The warm exterior lighting mounted to the walls and in the landscaped beds help enhance and highlight the design of the building while the illuminated wall mounted signage is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

The third and last principle of the guidelines is to “Be Authentic to Memphis”. South Main is one of the most pedestrian friendly Memphis neighborhoods and the location of the Lobbyist specifically is at a critical central point within Downtown. It is both a welcoming point for South Main but also one of the key locations that can help usher people north onto Beale Street, the Orpheum, FedEx Forum or the rest of the Downtown Core. The space must continue to feel lively and welcoming. These exterior improvements increase the value of the outdoor space while still relating to the South Main neighborhood. The enhancements grow the density in a way that is not overwhelming but rather highlights the vitality of the area.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval