



**Design Review Board (DRB)  
Staff Report**

Exterior Renovation

Case # 20-67: Kemmons Wilson Headquarters  
40 Huling Ave  
Memphis, TN 38103

Applicant: Katie Hunt  
LRK Inc.  
50 S. B.B. King Ste 600  
Memphis, TN 38103

Property Owner: Kemmons Wilson Companies  
8700 Trail Lake Dr. Suite 300  
Memphis, TN 38125

Background: DRB review is required for the exterior elements of this project because it received a PILOT from the Center City Revenue Finance Committee (CCRFC) at its April 14, 2020 meeting.

The subject property is the remaining portion of a 1-story warehouse (ca. 1905), which was partially demolished and renovated into a Spaghetti Warehouse restaurant in 1987. Since closing as a restaurant in 2017, the building has remained vacant. The building is now owned by Kemmons Wilson Companies, a local investment and hospitality firm. Kemmons Wilson Companies plans on renovating the building as its new corporate headquarters.

Project Description: The exterior renovations planned for 40 Huling focus on increasing natural light in the building by dramatically expanding existing openings with new modern windows, and adding additional windows on what are currently blank walls.

On the south side of the building, which is the building's primary façade on Huling, the former Spaghetti Warehouse entrance will be replaced by a new monumental glass entryway. The new entryway will be served by a new accessible concrete ramp and stair combination. Six additional existing openings will be expanded into larger modern windows. A "front porch" covered by a canopy will run from the end of the glass entry way to the north end of the building.

On the north side of the building, 11 new windows will be added in the place of existing openings, or on wall panels that were previously blank. The four central windows on the north side will be replaced with new windows that match the dimensions of the existing window openings.

Eight windows will be added the west side of the building, facing the adjacent railroad tracks. This entire wall was formerly blank. The east side, which formerly had six small (currently covered) openings, will have nine new windows in their place.

Staff Report:

The subject building at 40 Huling represents a challenging case for historic preservation and adaptive reuse. Although the building is over a century old, the original character of the building has already been permanently altered by its previous use as a Spaghetti Warehouse restaurant. Most notably, the Huling façade of the building was created for the restaurant in 1987 – a necessity after the southern portion of the original building was demolished to add surface parking. The Downtown Design Guidelines contain extensive advice on retaining and restoring the primary façade of historic commercial buildings, but in this case, there is no historic façade to preserve.

The remaining sides of the building, although less fundamentally altered, are clearly not conducive to the proposed office use. Most of the small openings that exist on these sides have been long boarded up, since the previous occupant did not have a great need for natural light. Even while it was operating as a restaurant, pedestrians approaching the building on Talbot or Wagner could have easily mistaken 40 Huling as a vacant property – a far cry from the inviting street presence for commercial buildings encouraged by the Downtown Design Guidelines.

In cases where it is not feasible to faithfully restore the original character of a building – due to both past alterations and practical necessities – staff believes that the best path forward is to alter the building with authenticity, rather than attempting to create new “historic” features. This is exactly the path taken by the applicant in this case. Although historic building materials are preserved and restored whenever possible, the new entrance, porch, and windows are contemporary in design, and do not attempt to create historic-looking details that never existed. The added transparency on every side of the structure will make the renovated building a much more inviting space, and a better neighbor for the South Main community.

**Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends approval, with the condition of additional approval for signage and additional site work / landscaping at a later date.