



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

Exterior Building Renovation

Case # 26-48: 48 S. Front St.
Memphis, TN 38103

Applicant/Owner: Indian Paintbrush, LLC
John Tirrill, project representative
5607 Glenridge Dr. Suite 430
Atlanta, GA 30342

Background: DRB review is required for this project because it received a \$60,000 Exterior Improvement Grant (EIG) at the July 15, 2026 Center City Development Corporation (CCDC) Board Meeting.

The subject property is a vacant 3-story historic commercial structure located on the east side of Front Street, between Monroe Avenue and Union Avenue, within the Cotton Row Historic Preservation District. Although sources differ on the exact construction date, generally ranging from 1870 to 1899, the building is undoubtably a contributing resource within the Cotton Row Historic District and is characterized by its distinctive brick façade and traditional masonry construction.

48 S. Front Street played an important role in the development of Memphis' historic Cotton Row. The building housed several prominent cotton firms, including Fulton & Sons, Frank Oakes & Co., and Covington & Smith Co., reflecting its longstanding connection to the cotton industry that helped drive the city's economic growth for years.

The property was recently acquired by the applicant and is currently undergoing rehabilitation for commercial mixed-use purposes, including ground-floor retail space and residential rental units on the upper floors. The project will also prepare a simple ground-floor shell space to support near-term pop-up activation as an interim strategy for activating the building. The upper-floor apartments are expected to be reoccupied following completion of the façade restoration and stabilization work.

Project Description:

For purposes of DRB review, the exterior scope includes the following primary components:

Repair and refinishing of the original first-floor storefront.

The current plan is to repair, refurbish, and repaint the existing wood storefront system. The existing cast iron columns will be repainted, as needed.

Replacement of all windows to match the historic openings.

New windows will match historic style and profile as required by Memphis Landmarks Commission, the State Historic Preservation Officer, and the National Park Service as part of the federal historic preservation tax credit approval process.

Exterior masonry repair

Exterior masonry cleaning, repair, and tuckpointing is planned for the building façade and rear alley elevation, as needed. The large “stairstep” crack on the 2nd floor of the façade will be repaired.

Additionally, a fluid-applied coating will be applied to the southern party (shared) wall to address ongoing water infiltration issues. The exact color of the finish is still to be determined, but the current plan is to utilize a lighter color that will accommodate digital art projection on the wall from time to time. It is currently planned that this exterior wall treatment will include a lime-based stucco parge coat and a waterproofing paint (ex. Thorocoat 400 “white”).

Staff Report:

Historic buildings and sites should be celebrated through thoughtful planning and respectful design as development continues throughout Downtown Memphis. These buildings contribute significantly to the unique character, identity, and history of Downtown. Accordingly, the DMC’s Design Guidelines place a strong emphasis on the appropriate treatment of historic buildings for renovation and adaptive reuse projects. Key considerations for this type of project include identifying and preserving the building’s character-defining features, original materials and finishes, significant building components, historic site characteristics, and other elements that contribute to its historic integrity.

The architectural features that define the overall character of an existing historic building should be preserved to the greatest extent feasible. When preservation is not possible, historic building elements should be replaced like-in-kind. In preserving, repairing, or replacing building components such as windows, doors, storefronts, and other architectural features, it is essential to carefully consider their proportions, materials, decorative detailing,

functionality, texture, and scale to ensure compatibility with the building's historic character.

In this application, the proposed improvements appropriately preserve and rehabilitate the existing ground floor storefront while restoring its historic appearance. New upper floor windows will be custom designed to match the historic style, profiles, and proportions typical of buildings from this architectural period and will be informed by available historic documentation.

Finally, the Design Guidelines recognize that creating active and engaging ground floor spaces along primary pedestrian streets is one of the most effective ways to foster a safe, vibrant, and walkable public realm. Consistent with this objective, the storefront design maximizes transparency between the interior and the public sidewalk through the extensive use of glass storefront systems, windows, and doors, strengthening the building's relationship with the surrounding streetscape while respecting its historic character.

Staff Recommendation: **Staff recommends approval with the condition that final designs for any new windows be submitted for administrative staff review prior to installation.**