



Design Review Board (DRB) Staff Report

REVISED

New Construction

- Case # 21-22: 7 Vance Avenue Apartments
7 Vance Ave
Memphis, TN 38103
- Applicant: David Lewis
7 Devco, LLC
1 Dr MLK Jr Blvd Suite 130
- Background: DRB review is required for this project because it received approval for a 19.5-Year PILOT at the February 2, 2021 CCRFC Board Meeting.
- The proposed building is a new-construction multifamily development, which will be built on the former site of the Nylon Net building at 7 Vance Ave. The building will contain 208 apartment units, 10,000 sq. ft. of ground-floor commercial space, and 246 parking spaces.
- Project Description: The proposed building will fill the block bounded by Vance Ave on the north, Wagner Place on the east, Talbot Ave on the south, and railroad tracks on west. The basement and ground floor of the building are primarily devoted to parking, although the building's Vance frontage will be lined with leasable commercial space. Ingress and egress points for the parking structure are located on Wagner Place and Talbot Avenue. Brick is used as the primary exterior material on the ground floor.
- Five residential floors will rise above the parking and commercial space at the base. These floors also feature brick as their primary exterior material, with metal and fiber cement panels deployed as accent materials. The residential units will also feature projecting balconies on every side of the building. The residential floors are recessed on the west side to form a courtyard amenity space built on top of the structured parking.
- The new building is designed in many ways to reference the historic Nylon Net building that once stood on the site. The brick proposed for the exterior has been selected to visually match the brick used on the historic structure. And a vertical brick structure on Vance, which will feature signage for the building, echoes the smokestack of the site's former building.
- Revised Design: The application for the 7 Vance Avenue Apartments project was first heard by the DRB at its April 7, 2021 meeting. The determination of the Board was to table the application in order to provide the applicant an additional opportunity to make design refinements. The Board's advice was to study

potential design refinements to strengthen the contextual appropriateness of the new building to the historic South Bluffs Warehouse District.

While staff recommended approval of the original design as proposed on April 7, 2021, the design improvements proposed by the applicant will make this an even better project for Downtown Memphis and the neighborhood. Staff is emphatically in full support of approving the revised design.

In summary, the following key design changes were made as a result of the Board input at the April 7th meeting:

1. The exterior materials at the northeast corner have been changed. Additional brick, per the Board's request, has been added along the entire height of the building at the northeast corner, to match the design of the northwest corner. Page 18 of the application conveys this change clearly.
2. The original heavy timber brackets supporting the balconies have been redesigned. The exact dimensions and design details of the brackets will be submitted to DMC staff for administrative approval prior to installation. The new wood brackets will be noticeably thinner in profile and painted a dark color. The reduced size and painted finish will give the brackets an industrial appearance more typical of a warehouse district. Staff believes that this will be a high-impact change that further solidifies the design as appropriate and compatible within a historic warehouse district.
3. The design of the west-facing wall on the ground floor at the northwest corner of the building has been revised. The two ground-floor storefront windows have been shifted north to better animate and celebrate the special condition of that corner. Additionally, the applicant will relocate the grease trap to a more appropriate location with less visibility from the public right-of-way. It is likely that the grease trap will be moved into the parking garage.

Staff Report:

The Downtown Design Guidelines encourage durable and authentic buildings that draw upon local design traditions and fit with their context. The proposed building meets these goals in a number of ways. Through its materials, scale, and other design features, the building references the historic Nylon Net building, and meshes with the historic warehouse buildings in the surrounding area.

The building also promises to enhance the pedestrian experience of the surrounding neighborhood by adding new commercial frontage on Vance Ave. The combination of active frontage, and a substantial number of new residents, will represent a significant increase in vibrancy for the neighborhood.

While decisions about architectural design and contextual appropriateness will always involve some degree of subjectivity, taste, and personal preference, staff firmly believes that the revised project meets the pertinent Design Guidelines. The building is appropriately pulled up to the sidewalk and greets the public realm with an active and pedestrian-friendly ground-floor. The height and mass of the overall building presents a simple rectangular form typical of a warehouse district as seen from the north, east, and south. The building features a significant amount of exterior brick, the predominant exterior cladding material found in the district. The composition of the north, east, and south elevations is intentionally evocative of the previous warehouse building as evidenced by the landmark chimney feature and shape of the arched storefront windows.

Simply put, the Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines ask that new construction in a historic area respects its surrounding context and serves as a good neighbor while still being a product of its own time. Staff believes that the revised design for the 7 Vance Apartment project meets this goal and will be a great addition to the growing momentum and development activity in the South Main neighborhood.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of the revised design, with the condition that the applicant provide design details for the wooden brackets under the balconies prior to installation for administrative approval. Additionally, future plans for exterior signage, art, and lighting will be submitted to the DRB as a separate application at the appropriate time.