



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

Exterior building renovation, fencing, and signage

Case # 15-90: Loflin Corner
SW corner of Carolina Ave. & Florida St.

Applicant: Loflin, LLC
c/o Mac Hopper
721 Florida St.

Property Owner: Brad Barnett
7 W. Carolina
Memphis, TN 38103

Background: The subject property consists of six (6) contiguous parcels generally located at the southwest corner of W. Carolina Avenue and Florida Street. The site contains a 2-story building to the north, known as the Key Shop, which originally housed the Loflin Safe & Lock Company. The ground floor of the Key Shop will be renovated to provide approximately 1,500 sq. ft. of commercial space with an adjacent 1,000 sq. ft. outdoor deck. A separate barn structure is located to the south.

The overall business concept is to create a neighborhood destination for a place to gather, recreate, and periodically host special events. The ground floor of the Key Shop is currently empty and will be renovated to include a bar and light restaurant. The second floor has already been renovated for residential use. The existing barn structure will be repurposed as a 5,000 sq. ft. event space to host weddings, corporate events, and private parties.

Located between the barn and the Key Shop will be a landscaped lawn. Customers of the business will be able to utilize the 10,000 sq. ft. outdoor yard for activities and games such as horseshoes, ping pong, corn hole, bocce ball, and croquet. Live acoustic music will likely be part of the regular schedule of activities. The area south of the barn structure will feature a kitchen garden and may be used for overflow parking. The applicant is proposing a rapid timetable with the goal of beginning construction in January, 2016.

The project requires DRB review because it was approved for two incentives from the Center City Development Corporation (CCDC). The property owner was approved for a Development Loan in an amount up to \$47,000 to make permanent building improvements. The commercial tenant was approved for a Storefront Improvement Grant in an amount up to \$18,425 to make exterior improvements to the Key Shop building and to add wrought iron fencing and site lighting.

Project Description:

The Key Shop is the most prominent structure on site as seen from the street corner. The exterior of the Key Shop will be cleaned, tuck-pointed, and sealed as needed. A fixed canopy consisting of corrugated metal will be added to the east, south, and west sides of the building. Window openings on the ground floor of the Key Shop have been previously filled-in with brick and will be reopened. Five (5) windows will be replaced in the original window openings on the north, east, and west building elevations. A projecting sign (10 ft. 3 in. x 1 ft. x 2 ft. 6 in.) with exposed neon will be added to help identify the business. Site improvements will include 6 ft. (h) wrought iron fencing along Carolina Avenue and enhanced site lighting.

Evaluation:

The intent of the CBID Design Guidelines is to encourage rehabilitation and new construction that is sensitive to the original style and method of construction typical for a district. The guidelines strive to avoid inappropriate design features such as blank façades and suburban development patterns, while promoting development that responds to its surroundings, maintains the established character, and reinforces the urban fabric. The proposed treatment of the Key Shop building is consistent with the CBID Design Guidelines for renovation projects. Original elements are to be repaired when possible, or replaced like-in-kind when the element is missing or irreparably damaged.

Not long ago, this site was actively used for the keeping of horses and carriage equipment. The unpleasant smells associated with livestock, as well as the overgrown nature of vegetation on site, made the property incompatible with the emerging residential character of its context. Upon purchase, the current owner took significant steps to improve the appearance of the property with the hopes of transforming it into a neighborhood asset. Staff was highly supportive of granting CCDC incentives for this project in order to help the applicant leverage their resources and make greater exterior improvements than would otherwise be possible.

Improving the appearance of this property is important given the high-visibility nature of the site. The property sits directly on the Main Street to Main Street Multi-Modal Connector route, which is expected to attract a significant number of pedestrians and cyclists. Moreover, the site is adjacent to South Junction Apartments, a key development project supported by the DMC and the Center City

Revenue Finance Corporation (CCRFC). Improving the appearance of the subject property and raising commercial property values in the area will only further stabilize the CCRFC's investment in the neighborhood. Aesthetic improvements and added vibrancy at this site will also complement the South End Underpass Public Art Project and enhance the appearance of Florida Street, a key gateway into Downtown from the south.

The applicant is utilizing a design-build approach and is still refining their plans since receiving CCDC approval. The applicant is pursuing an aggressive timetable and wants to be open in the spring/early summer. While most applicants are able to provide full architectural drawings and a detailed site plan for DRB review, this applicant strives to communicate the design intent and overall vision using the limited drawings that have been produced thus far. While this approach is atypical and would not be accepted in most cases, staff is comfortable with proceeding with this application given the narrow scope of work for this project.

Staff Recommendation: **Staff recommends approval with the condition that final signage approval is subject to the applicant submitting detailed signage plans for administrative review and approval.**