



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

Renovation & Exterior Alteration

Case # 20-03: Conwood
46 Keel Ave
Memphis, TN 38107

Applicant: Tamara Redburn
Fleming Architects
5101 Wheelis, Suite 215
Memphis, TN 38117

Owner: Billy Orgel
Tower Ventures
495 Tennessee St, Suite 152
Memphis, TN 38103

Background: DRB review is required for this project because it received a 20-Year PILOT at the December 10, 2019 CCRFC Board Meeting for the adaptive reuse of the Conwood complex into a mixed-use development including apartments, commercial space, and an office headquarters.

The Conwood complex is an interconnected set of seven factory buildings built from 1909 to 1920. The buildings are located at 46 Keel Ave (Shelby County parcel 001046 00001) in the newly-designated American Snuff Company Historic District. The Conwood complex was actively used by the American Snuff Company from 1909 until 2012, but the historic structures were never substantially altered. The component buildings are identified as follows:

- **Building A – Tin Can Factory**
A four-story building on the south end of the site, which will be used as the commercial / office component of the development.
- **Building B – Warehouse / Packing / Storage Building**
A three-story building attached to the northeast side of building A.
- **Building C – Curing Building**

A five-story building at the center of the site, which will contain the bulk of the development's residential space.

- **Building D – Grinding Building**
A three-story building to north of Building C.
- **Building E – Engineering Building**
A two-story building on the northeast corner of the site.
- **Building F – Boiler Room**
A one-story building on the northwest corner of the site.

A small additional building, **Building G**, located behind Building D, and between F and C is planned to be demolished. This is the only substantial demolition taking place to facilitate the reuse of the Conwood complex. A small outdoor porch on the west side of Building F will be also removed, to accommodate the turning radius of emergency vehicles.

Project Description:

The developer's primary approach to the exterior rehab of the Conwood will be to restore whenever possible, and to replace like-for-like if necessary. All the visible masonry and stonework will be cleaned and restored according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the treatment of historic properties. Any new brick necessary for the exterior renovation will match the existing brick. The existing windows, which are not original to the buildings, will be replaced with windows selected to closely match the original windows based on historic photographs.

The existing low-slope roof will be replaced with a code-compliant roof with functional roof drains. A new parapet wall will be added to the roof on top of the existing cornice to facilitate the new roof. The wall will be 2'5" at its highest point, and will be painted to match the cornice as well as set back slightly to reduce its visibility. New rooftop terraces will be constructed on Buildings A and C, facing the river.

The two exposed stairwells on the east and west faces of Building A will be preserved, and the east stairwell will be enclosed in a new glass curtainwall system. This will maintain the visual importance of this monumental feature, while making sure that it is also functional in the building's new configuration. A new stairwell will be added to the northwest corner of Building A. This stairwell be enclosed in brick that matches the building's existing brick, along with a glass curtainwall system.

Although some practical changes to the ground floor are necessary, the alterations will still be minimal. The location of the current

primary pedestrian entrance to Building A will be preserved. A new corrugated metal canopy will replace the existing canopy on Buildings B & C. In order to meet current egress requirements and accommodate new uses, a small number of new storefront windows and doors will be added on the ground floor. However, these elements will be located in areas where openings historically existed for garage doors and windows.

Staff Report:

The preservation of historic buildings is a top priority of the Downtown Memphis Commission, and this priority is reflected in the Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines. The Guidelines recommend preserving original building materials, and replacing materials when needed with materials that closely match the originals. Significant original architectural features shouldn't be covered, and faux-historic details shouldn't be added. Windows should be replaced with windows that match the originals, and the ratio of openings to solid wall on a historic façade should be maintained.

The proposed rehabilitation of the Conwood closely follows these preservation guidelines. Although the Conwood will be adapted for a dramatically different use, the architectural character of the building will be intact. The minor exterior alterations that will be necessary to bring the building back into active use will be in keeping with this character.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval with the condition that the applicant return with a separate application for exterior lighting, landscaping, and signage.