



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

New Construction

Case # 19-149: Poplar Art Lofts  
1935 Poplar Ave.  
Memphis, TN 38104

Applicant: Christopher Speltz  
9700 Village Circle Suite 100  
Lakeland, TN 38007

Owner: Vince Smith  
355 Tara Lane  
Memphis, TN 38111

Background: DRB review is required for this project because it received a 15-Year PILOT at the April 9, 2019 CCRFC Board Meeting for the construction of a new 111-unit apartment building.

The subject property consists of five parcels located at the southeast corner of Poplar Ave and Tucker St, which were previously the site of a series of buildings owned by the Memphis College of Art. The total area of the property is approximately 1.1 acres.

A proposed design for the new building at this site was presented to the Design Review Board at its February 5, 2020 meeting. The Board requested that the applicant return with a revised application that met a number of specified conditions. This current proposal has been modified to fulfil the Board's conditions.

Project Description: The proposed building features four residential floors built on top of a ground-floor parking structure, for a total of five floors. In addition to parking space, the northwest and northeast corners of the ground floor feature commercial space that will either be leased or used by the building owner as leasing offices or amenity space. The northwest corner space is recessed from the street, forming a modest plaza that can be used for outdoor seating. An entrance on the Tucker side of the building will serve as the primary residential entrance.

Although the ground floor of the building will be primarily used for parking, a small gallery will be built behind the four central ground-floor windows, giving passers-by a glimpse of art, rather than just a garage. The corner retail spaces are framed by black metal canopies.

The primary façade of the building facing Poplar is divided into three horizontal bands using three distinct exterior materials. The ground floor and portions of the first residential floor feature an ivory-colored RockCast Buffstone veneer. Red brick veneer is the dominant façade material, used for most of the first residential floor and extending to the majority of the third floor. The lofted fourth floor is lined with white Hardi Panels, and six of the fourth floor windows feature functional balconies. These materials were selected specifically to match the traditional aesthetic of the building's Midtown location. The division between the building's material bands are further accented by masonry detailing, including brick soldier courses.

On the south face of the building, the same materials are used, but in different proportions: the ground floor features the stone veneer, the first residential floor is faced with the brick, while the three remaining floors are lined with the white Hardi Panels. The south side of the building also features a residential amenity in the form of a pool deck built above the ground floor garage. A surface parking lot to the south of the building will provide 53 additional parking spaces to complement the building's 67 covered spaces.

Landscaping for the site will include new tree plantings on every side of the building. Gingko trees will line the Poplar frontage, while the surface lot to the south will be screened by holly trees, crepe myrtles, and a variety of shrubs. The surface lot will also be screened by a fence, and the sidewalks surrounding the site will be entirely rebuilt and expanded.

Staff Report:

The proposed project demonstrates consistency with the Downtown Memphis Design Guidelines and Principles in a number of ways.

The mass of the building is pulled up to Poplar, forming the kind of street wall the Design Guidelines encourage for commercial streets. The parking is screened with two commercial bays, art, and landscaping. Vertical and horizontal articulation in the form of material and height changes help to break up the primary façade and increase visual interest. The building features a main entrance that is clearly demarcated and oriented toward the primary public street, and this same entrance is accented by a small plaza, which is another

feature consistent with the Guidelines. The Design Guidelines also strongly encourage the use of durable materials like brick and masonry, which make up most of the building's primary façade.

In addition to these site-level considerations, one of the driving concerns of the Design Guidelines is that new buildings relate to their context in an appropriate way. While new buildings should not be imitations of what came before, they should strive to reflect "key features of its design context." Staff believes that the developer has made an effort to design the building using materials that harmonize with the neighborhood, without simply mimicking older buildings. The final design is the result of a dialogue with the surrounding community, and reflects many alterations and concessions on the part of the developer in order to bring the design closer in line with its physical context and the community's desires.

The goal of this revised application was to meeting the conditions set by the Board at its February 5, 2020 meeting. Among the board's key recommendations were to harmonize the design with OPD's Planned Development approval conditions, including the provision of functional balconies, and to provide more consistency with the design previously shown to neighbors of the property. DRB staff are satisfied that the resubmitted plans meet these conditions.

**Staff Recommendation:** **Staff recommends approval with the condition that the applicant return with a separate application for exterior lighting, public art, signage, and additional landscaping.**