



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

*New construction, building renovation, and site improvements*

Case # 15-79: South Main Artist Lofts  
138 St. Paul Ave.

Applicant: Artspace Projects, Inc.  
3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. N. #500  
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Property Owner: Phillip Woodard  
509 S. Main St.  
Memphis, TN 38103

Background: The subject property is located on the north side of St. Paul Avenue in the block between South Main Street and South Second Street. The site is a single parcel that contains an empty lot on the western half and the vacant United Warehouse building on the east. The applicant, a nonprofit focused on developing and owning affordable housing for artists, plans to renovate the existing warehouse building and construct a new 4-story structure.

Artspace is recognized as a national leader in developing low-income housing and affordable space that meet the needs of artists through the adaptive reuse of historic buildings and new construction. DRB review and approval is required for this project because the applicant received a \$200,000 Development Grant from the Center City Development Corporation (CCDC) on October 14, 2015. The applicant has a goal to begin construction in February, 2016 and be completed by July, 2017. It should be noted that the DRB originally reviewed and approved a version of this project in April, 2013. The current proposal is substantially different than the previously approved version with respect to the exterior design and placement of the new 4-story building.

Project Description: The development, South Main Artist Lofts, will include 58 affordable live/work residential units, approximately 7,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, community space, and a gallery. The size of the proposed development will be approximately 91,306 sq. ft. (approximately 61,076 in the existing historic building and approximately 30,230 in the newly constructed building). The

project will also include around 52 parking spaces: 30 of which will be surface parking; and 22 will be basement-level garage parking in the warehouse building.

#### United Warehouse Building

The applicant proposes to make only minimal changes to the exterior of the existing warehouse building. The existing “United Warehouse” painted sign on the south and west elevations will be repaired. Tuck pointing will be performed where needed to address any issues with the existing brick walls. A replacement metal canopy will be added to the south elevation and the existing canopy and loading dock on the west elevation will be repaired. The loading dock will feature a removable railing to accommodate concerts, performances, and other flexible uses of the space.

New windows, designed to match the original windows, will be installed in existing window openings on each elevation. Original window openings that have been subsequently bricked-in will be reopened. An existing opening on the ground floor of the south elevation will be enlarged to allow vehicular access from St. Paul Avenue to the basement parking garage. An ADA accessible ramp with handrails will also be added to the south elevation, parallel to St. Paul Avenue.

#### New Construction

The new 4-story building will be placed perpendicular to the existing warehouse building, towards the northern half of the lot. The space between the front of the new building and St. Paul Avenue will be an outdoor arts garden with paving, grass plantings, and nine (9) trees in beds.

The principle exterior materials of the new building include prefinished metal panels, CMU block in two finishes, and brick veneer. The ground floor of the south elevation will feature operable glass doors that provide the option of combining the interior and exterior spaces for special events. A concrete plinth and metal canopy on the south elevation is evocative of the loading dock on the historic warehouse building.

The west and north elevations include more extensive use of cementitious paneling and the continuation of CMU block in horizontal stripes on the ground floor. An exposed exit stair with a solid panel guardrail is a prominent feature on the west elevation.

A decorative art fence will be placed along the south and west edges of the outdoor arts garden. The fence will range in height from a maximum of 8 ft. at the southwest corner of the site to 4 ft. at the eastern end. The fence will not continue uninterrupted and has several gaps to enable a pedestrian to pass through or at least see through. The fence consists of vertical wood slats and

chalkboard panels. A concrete base will form a bench on the inside of the fence.

#### Exterior Signage

The applicant will submit a signage application for DRB review and approval prior to installation.

#### 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 existing warehouse 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.

The Guidelines advise that new construction should be an appropriate fit for the context in which it is located. Issues such as building orientation, front setback, scale, massing, and exterior materials are all important considerations in determining the appropriateness of a new building located in a historic district. The proposed new building design adequately addresses the primary street and the new outdoor art garden feature. The building height, scale, and massing is compatible with the existing warehouse building on site.

The guidelines ask that materials, textures, and colors be appropriate for a building's architecture and surrounding context. The proposed exterior materials for the new building are industrial in character and not out of place given the history of the district as a place for warehousing and industrial uses. The guidelines do not require that new construction "look old," and clearly allow for a new building to be a product of its own time. Although the new building is contemporary in its design and appearance, staff believes that it will be an appropriate addition to the district.

**Staff Recommendation:**      **Staff recommends approval**