



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

Exterior Renovation

Case # 21-33: WLOK Radio
363 S. Second St.
Memphis, TN 38103

Applicant / Owner: H. A. Gilliam, Jr.
363 S. Second St.
Memphis, TN 38103

Background: DRB review is required for this project because it received a South City Good Neighbor Grant at the April 21st, 2021, CCDC meeting.

The subject property is located on the northwest corner of South Second St. and Talbot Ave. The 10,498 sq. ft. site contains three structures. The main office, fronting South Second St., was built in 1947 as a single story, 4,128 sq. ft. building. A modular structure, used as the WLOK sales office, faces Talbot Ave. A third storage facility is located towards the back (west) of the parcel and faces Mulberry St.

“In 1977 WLOK became Memphis’ first African-American owned radio station. Established on this site, Gilliam Communications’ WLOK is a family-oriented format on which many of the nation’s top African-American leaders have appeared. Several of the nation’s leading disc jockeys started here. WLOK’s community involvement includes college scholarships and the renowned WLOK Stone Soul Picnic. The station’s call letters, WLOK-AM, are ‘A Family Tradition.’” – Tennessee Historical Commission Landmark, located on site.

Project Description: The changes funded by the South City Good Neighbor Grant include renovations to all three structures on the site. The scope of work includes exterior building repair, painting, new awnings, new fencing, landscaping, and door and storefront repair.

The main office will be repainted in vibrant colors and the storefront entry system will be updated. The existing glass block window will be filled with masonry brick and painted. An existing metal awning above the second entrance will be removed. The sales office will be painted to match the main office, new awnings will be installed

along with new stairs and railings, windows, and landscaping. The third structure will be painted in coordinating colors to create a campus-like atmosphere amongst the three buildings.

Staff Report:

The South City Good Neighbor Grant aims to strengthen the character of important places within the South City community through enhancing the pedestrian experience. A secondary goal of the grant is to help new and existing businesses succeed by enhancing their curb appeal in ways that might not be possible without assistance. WLOK is one of these important places, dually located within the boundaries of the South City Neighborhood and the CBID. The building's frontage along three Downtown streets provides ample opportunity to link pedestrian activity from the South City Neighborhood into Downtown's core and South Main.

The proposed renovations to WLOK follow our Downtown Design Guidelines in promoting creativity and enhancing the pedestrian experience. This project also supports a site that exemplifies Memphis' unique history, character, and authenticity, a goal of the Downtown Memphis Strategic Plan.

Staff is supportive of the proposed renovations and believes that the high-quality improvements bring added character and vibrancy to a street in much need of investment. The applicants original hope for the project was to add colorful, inviting colors, decrease garbage accumulation, and increase tourist interest in the site. The improvements presented meet the applicant's goals while contributing to the synergy of already approved South City projects that link the neighborhood to Downtown's core.

Staff Recommendation: **Staff recommends approval.**