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May 16, 2024

HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

RE: Special District Review for the request of Anderson Eckstein and Westrick, Inc., on behalf of the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority and Huntington Place to approve the proposed extension of Second Ave. from Congress St. south to Steve Yzerman Drive (Atwater) (**RECOMMEND APPROVAL**)

The City Planning Commission (CPC) is in receipt of a request from Anderson Eckstein & Westrick, Inc., on behalf of the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority (Huntington Place) to approve the proposed extension of Second Ave. from Congress St. south to Steve Yzerman Drive (Atwater). Attached hereto please find the application, project narrative and drawings. This proposal initially came before the Commission for an informational presentation on January 4th of this year. It returned before the Commission for Special District Review on Thursday, May 2, 2024.

As you know, Huntington Place is located on land bearing the PC (Public Center) and PCA (Public Center Adjacent/Restricted Central Business District) zoning classification which calls for City Council approval of the location and design of any exterior changes following the review and recommendation of CPC and the Planning and Development Department (Sections 50-11-66) and 50-11-96 of the Zoning Ordinance).

BACKGROUND

For the past few decades, the City and in more recent years the Authority have been concerned with the size, configuration and appearance of the convention center as it relates to the capacity of Huntington Place to host, stage and compete for various events. The facility has undergone a number of expansion, renovation and improvement efforts as a result. For the past eight years or so, the City, the Authority and others have been focused upon expending available State bond capacity on, among other things, a westward expansion to provide additional parking, improved loading and access, while presenting an enhanced appearance as the convention center links to and addresses the abutting former site of the Joe Louis Arena (JLA). This effort in conjunction with the Sterling Group, the developer of the former JLA site, has resulted in the proposal to re-establish and extend Second Ave. from Congress St. to the River.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The attached documents detail what is essentially a road construction project. Second Ave. will be re-established and extended as an internal roadway with a public easement to provide vehicular and pedestrian access. The roadway will provide a lane of vehicular traffic flowing each way to and from Yzerman Drive with a third lane along the northern segment of the road providing additional capacity for truck staging and access to the Huntington Place loading dock. The roadway will also facilitate pedestrian and non-motorized traffic flow inclusive of landscaping, lighting, signage, art, seating and other street furnishings yet to be finalized.

As alluded to above, there are other improvements which will eventually come before the Commission, the Second Ave. extension represents the first phase of that work. The project covers the PCA and PC zoned land south of Congress and north of the W. Jefferson right-of-way below the project at freeway level, and the B5 (Major Business District) zoned land where the Water Square development of the Sterling group is underway. The B5 portion of this work is included in the package before you, as the proposed roadway is one, running through the three zoning districts from north to south. However, the B5 portion is not directly subject to the Commission's and Council's authority under zoning.

REVIEW

This proposal is the manifestation of long envisioned and awaited enhancement to the western extent of the Convention Center, particularly now given the redevelopment of the Joe Louis site. Staff is pleased to see the provisions being made for public and service-related access in the area and the intent to provide both a functional and aesthetically pleasing setting. Relatedly, the Planning and Development Department's (PDD) review of the proposal notes that the slope of the roadway, while within ADA guidelines, may present a challenge for some users and therefore seating and other furnishings along the path may be of benefit. The petitioner is sensitive to this concern and has responded with the intent to provide such furnishings.

In accordance with the PC and PCA provisions of the Zoning Ordinance (Sections 50-11-67 and 50-11-97), reviews of proposed changes should be conducted in light of the relevant criteria. The proposal fulfills the applicable criteria. Below staff highlights four of the criteria and staff's analysis following in italics:

- (6) Adequate public and private open space should be provided for light and air, landscaping, and, where appropriate, for passive and active recreation; *While this is not a recreational site per se, the Commission did raise concern with the way in which light will interact with the new corridor given the height of adjacent structures. The petitioner has provided a shade and shadow analysis as well as a wind analysis included in the attached documentation. That analysis indicates similar resulting conditions as we would find along other north/south oriented streets downtown or close to the riverfront.*
- (8) Public access should be provided where appropriate, including provision of adequate right-of-way for the continuous pedestrian/bicycle pathway being developed along the Detroit River; *As noted above, one of the particular benefits of this proposal is the creation of this passageway creating new public access ways and linkage to existing pathway and newly created green space. Staff also notes that some segments of the combined pedestrian and bike path would benefit from pavement markings and/or change in paving materials to delineate the pedestrian way from the bicycle or non-motorized portion of the path.*
- (15) Urban design elements of form and character should be carefully considered; such elements include, but are not limited to: richness/ interest of public areas through the provision of storefronts, window displays, landscaping, and artwork; color, texture and quality of structural materials; enclosure of public spaces; variations in scale; squares, plazas and/or "vest pocket parks" where appropriate; continuity of experience, visual activity and interest; articulation and highlighting of important visual features; preservation/enhancement of important views and vistas; *The modification as previously stated is essentially a road construction project. However, the final landscape, lighting, signage, art and other furnishings will require further scrutiny as the project progresses.*

- (16) Special attention should be given to amenity and comfort considerations such as provision for outdoor seating, restrooms for public use, bicycle storage, convenience of access points and protection from harsh weather through such features as enclosed walkways and arcaded pedestrian areas; *Consistent with above noted comments of PDD we expect the petitioner to continue to be sensitive to the needs and opportunities to ensure the creation of a thoughtful and responsive setting for the users of this corridor.*

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed modifications are in keeping with the spirit and intent of the PC and PCA zoning districts. These modifications provide much needed and improved access for the public and those servicing and supporting activities at Huntington Place. This will be done in such a way as to lessen the back of house appearance of present day and effectively extends downtown towards and provides great connectivity to the west riverfront. The Planning and Development Department has also reviewed and supports the project as noted above. Therefore, CPC staff recommends approval with the following stipulations:

1. That CPC staff working in conjunction with PDD be authorized to finalize the plans and remaining details (landscaping, lighting, signage, street furnishings and artwork) with the petitioner, and
2. That the petitioner submit final, site plans, elevations, landscape, lighting and signage plans to CPC staff for review for consistency with approved plans prior to the issuance of applicable permits and/or in accordance with the progression of construction.

Respectfully submitted,

DONOVAN SMITH, CHAIRPERSON



Marcell R, Todd, Jr., Director

Attachments

Resolution
Application
Project Narrative
Drawings

cc: Antoine Bryant, Director, PDD
Gregory Moots, PDD
David Bell, Director, BSEED
Conrad Mallett, Corp Counsel
Bruce Goldman, Chief Assistant Corp. Counsel
Daniel Arking, Senior Assistant Corp Counsel

**A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING AN EXTENTION OF SECOND AVE. ACROSS
BOTH PC AND PCA ZONING DISTRICTS AT HUNTING PLACE**

BY COUNCIL MEMBER _____ :

WHEREAS, the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority and the City of Detroit have spent the last several years exploring improvements at Huntington Place (formerly the Cobo Center) and determined to pursue, among other things, the Extension of Second Ave. south of Congress toward the riverfront; and

WHEREAS, in pursuit of the Second Ave. extension the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority and the City of Detroit have worked in conjunction with the Sterling Group, which is redeveloping the abutting B5 (major Business District) zoned, former site of the Joe Louis Arena; and

WHEREAS, Huntington Place is located within a PC (Public Center) with some peripheral aspects situated in the PCA (Public Center Adjacent) zoning district; and

WHEREAS, work to be performed within the PC and PCA zoning districts requires Special District Review and the PC and PCA zoning district classifications are described as follows:

*The **PC Public Center District** includes areas used or to be used for governmental, recreational, and cultural purposes of particular or special civic importance. All construction or other improvement within this district requires that the Planning and Development Department and the City Planning Commission review and make recommendation to City Council, as provided for in Article III, Division 6, of this chapter so as to ensure a completely harmonious, pleasing, and functional public center.*

*The **Public Center Adjacent District (Restricted Central Business District)** includes property in close proximity to the Public Center District, and the controls specified in this division are designed to prevent any uses or structures within the district from having a deleterious effect upon the public center. Uses in this district shall include, to the maximum extent possible, ground-floor commercial space or other space oriented to pedestrian traffic, to enhance the public streetscape and street-level activity; and*

WHEREAS, the City Council has received the CPC staff recommendation of support in the report dated May16, 2024 as well as the Planning and Development Department report; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has reviewed the application, the project narrative and the drawings presented by the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority and prepared by Plant Moran Realpoint, Anderson Eckstein & Westrick, Inc, Mannik Smith, TVS, Grissim Metz Associates and Riese and Illuminart dated May 2, 2024; and

WHEREAS, the City Council has reviewed the submission and concurs with the CPC findings and recommendation, **NOW THEREFORE BE IT**

RESOLVED, that the Detroit City Council hereby approves the proposed extension of Second Ave. and related exterior alterations as presented in the submitted plans referred to above and in the above referenced CPC report with the following conditions:

1. That CPC staff working in conjunction with PDD be authorized to finalize the plans and remaining details (landscaping, lighting, signage, street furnishings and artwork) with the petitioner, and
2. That the petitioner submit final, site plans, elevations, landscape, lighting and signage plans to CPC staff for review for consistency with approved plans prior to the issuance of applicable permits and/or in accordance with the progression of construction.