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**TO:** City Planning Commission

**FROM:** Marcell R. Todd, Jr., Director

**RE:** **Special District Review of the request of Anderson Eckstein and 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)**

**DATE:** May 1, 2024

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 was the subject of an informational presentation before the Commission on January 4<sup>th</sup> of this year.

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 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, but this is 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. However, the B5 portion is not directly subject to the Commission's authority.

## **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 public 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 toward 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 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.

Attachments