



Department of City Development
City Plan Commission
Redevelopment Authority of the City of Milwaukee
Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation

Lafayette L. Crump
Commissioner

Vanessa L. Koster
Deputy Commissioner

Ald. Bauman
4th Ald. District

CITY PLAN COMMISSION ZONING REPORT

File No: [240178](#)

Location: 648 N. Plankinton Avenue, Suite 400 on the west side of the Milwaukee River, north of W. Michigan Street and south of W Wisconsin Avenue

**Applicant/
Owner:** Enerpac Tool Group (future occupant)

**Current
Zoning:** Downtown - Major Retail (C9E) and Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay Zone (SPROZ)

**Proposed
Zoning:** Exterior building changes within the Riverwalk SPROZ

Proposal: Enerpac Tool Group Corporation plans to move their global headquarters downtown Milwaukee. The company will be leasing 56,000 square feet of space within the 4th floor of the ASQ building at 648 N. Plankinton Avenue, which is located within the Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay Zone (SPROZ). Upon completion of their relocation, Enerpac will have naming rights to the building and will transition the name to the “Enerpac Center”. City Plan Commission approval is necessary for exterior building alterations and site changes within the 50’ Riverwalk SPROZ.

The existing building was formerly the Gimbel’s Department store and was renovated as a mixed-use commercial office building in the early 2000s. While the building is historically significant and within a national historic district, it is not locally designated; nor is it subject to Federal or State oversight requirements associated with the Historic Tax Credit program.

This proposal is to add a 10’ by 61’ amenity balcony to the 4th floor of the building façade that faces the Milwaukee River for use by Enerpac employees. This building alteration is subject to the Riverwalk SPROZ standards. The ASQ Building is comprised of two buildings: North and South. The proposed balcony will be on the South Building. Per the applicant’s exhibits that were submitted as part of

their application, the South Building has had a number of exterior alterations over the years and the applicant has indicated that the addition of the balcony is in line with those alterations.

The proposed balcony design utilizes materials such as architecturally exposed structural steel and IPE wood decking that relates to several areas of the Riverwalk. The railing is shown as a glass railing which includes a frit pattern to help avoid bird strikes and deaths. All proposed materials are noncombustible. Within the balcony area, two windows will be converted into a new operable stacking door and a new egress door (within an existing window opening) to provide access to the balcony. Exterior lighting will be provided at night for egress and emergencies. Lighting will be controlled to preserve the historic elements of the building.

The proposed balcony is designed to use a minimally intrusive 8 point means of attachment so that the balcony may be removed in the future, allowing for the building's façade to be restored. The two window bays that will be replaced with a window wall and new access door as part of this proposal will be preserved and stored if possible, or reproduced with historic accuracy if needed in the future. The architect has relayed that the US General Service Administration specifications for salvaging materials during demolition will be used for the windows being removed, and guidance from the federal historic renovation guidelines will be followed with respect to the removal of the terra cotta.

SPROZ Standards:

The Riverwalk SPROZ was established in the late 1990's to ensure that the Riverwalk is a safe, active and engaging space for all to enjoy. The overlay zone outlines [18 standards](#) that a proposal must meet in order to be compliant. Several of the criteria are not applicable as they relate to the ground level and this proposed façade change is to the 4th floor of the building and is not proposing any changes to the pedestrian area of the Riverwalk itself or the ground-floor area of Riverwalk zone. However, one standard is relevant:

"4. Where historic buildings exist along the river, preserve those historic elements of the built environment."

The footprint of the proposed balcony does not extend over the river or beyond the current dock line or the dock line of the original historic building. The balcony footprint is significantly smaller than, and contained within, the footprint of an existing, non-historic, ground floor building addition. The applicant does not anticipate the balcony to detract from the pedestrian experience. The balcony system has been designed to be minimally intrusive to the building façade, and is able to be removed in order to allow for the full restoration of the façade in the future if required. Per the applicant, the design and implementation of the proposed balcony was designed to be minimally disruptive to preserve the historic elements of the building, contemplates the possibility of future historic restoration activities, and creates a viable tenant space by adding a new building amenity of useable outdoor space that allows employees and visitors to take

advantage of the location along the river and contribute to the overall liveliness of the Riverwalk consistent with the goals of the Riverwalk SPROZ

While installation of an external hanging balcony in this location may not be permitted if a project was seeking Historic Tax Credits and subject to the associated preservation requirements of the National Park Service that apply to projects receiving tax credits, that higher standard of review is not required under the SPROZ.

Adjacent Land Use:

The subject site is on the 4th floor of the ASQ Building. The property is surrounded by parcels zoned Downtown - Major Retail (C9E) and Downtown - Office and Service (C9F). The Riverside Theater is to the north of the building, across Wisconsin Avenue and the Plankinton Arcade is to the west of the building, across Plankinton Av.; both connected by a skywalk. A commercial building and parking structure are to the south.

Consistency with Area Plan:

The proposed exterior building changes are within the boundaries of the Downtown Area Plan, adopted by the Common Council in 2023. The Downtown Area Plan recommends to reinforce Downtown Milwaukee as the premier business center for the state of Wisconsin and one of the top employment centers in the Midwest, and encourages new opportunities for employment in Downtown. The plan also encourages active uses and pedestrian friendly façades along the Riverwalk and the preservation and reuse of historic buildings throughout Downtown.

The relocation of Enerpac Tool Group's global headquarters to Downtown Milwaukee advances the employment goals of the Downtown Area Plan and will enable the company to better attract and retain a diverse and talented workforce. The proposed exterior building changes would add an outdoor balcony on the river facing façade, intended to further enhance the employee experience of in-person work at the new Downtown headquarters. The proposed balcony will allow for additional activity along the Riverwalk and has been designed to have minimal impact on the existing building façade. Furthermore, the new lease and overall investment by Enerpac at this location will provide a stronger financial outlook for the property as a whole, promoting the long-term sustainability and preservation of this iconic building. The proposed façade changes are consistent with the recommendations of the Downtown Area Plan.

Previous City Plan Action:

None.

Previous Common Council Action:

None.

Recommendation:

This proposal is to add a balcony to the 4th floor of an existing building to provide an outdoor amenity for the 130 employees of Enerpac Tool Group that will be relocating to this site from their current global headquarters location. No

modifications are being proposed to the ground-floor Riverwalk zone. The proposal will help ensure the long-term re-use of this historic building, and should a future historic renovation project occur, information submitted by the applicant's architect confirms that the building façade could be fully restored to its current condition at some point in the future. The building has undergone significant exterior alterations in the past and this proposed alteration is similar to and consistent with other changes that have previously been done. The addition of this balcony will allow for additional activity along the Riverwalk and has been designed to have minimal impact on the existing building façade.

For these reasons, staff finds that the SPROZ criteria are met and recommends that the City Plan Commission approves the subject file **with a condition** that final construction plans submitted during the permitting process relating to the balcony shall include notations that the US General Service Administration specifications for salvaging materials during demolition will be used for the windows being removed, and guidance from the federal historic renovation guidelines will be followed with respect to the removal of the terra cotta.