



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.** [231681](#)

**Location:** 108 East Wells Street, on the east side of the Milwaukee River, north of East Wells Street and west of North Water Street.

**Applicant/  
Owner:** Eppstein Uhen Architects on behalf of Milwaukee Repertory Theater

**Current  
Zoning:** Downtown – Mixed Activity (C9D) and Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay Zone (SPROZ)

**Proposed  
Zoning:** Site and exterior building changes within the Riverwalk SPROZ

**Proposal:** This file refers to site and exterior building changes to the Milwaukee Repertory Theater located at 108 East Wells Street as part of a larger remodeling project that fall within the Riverwalk Site Plan Review Overlay Zone (SPROZ) boundary.

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater has been located at 108 E Wells Street since the 1980's. Per the applicant, the theater is undertaking a significant remodeling project to redesign the theater complex in order to engage the community and meet the needs of its growing audiences. While the majority of changes will be internal, a few of the exterior changes fall within the Riverwalk Overlay Zone:

- New access door on the south façade of the building, adjacent to the Riverwalk.
- New rooftop mechanical penthouse
- Modifications to the existing curb cut along Wells Street (within the right-of-way)

The new entrance along the south façade of the building will lead to the new Education and Engagement Center space on the interior, allowing the company to expand outreach and accommodation. This entrance will provide direct handicap access to the Riverwalk, and the Milwaukee Rep intends to create an outdoor patio space for staff and visitors, allowing events to also utilize the

outdoor space. The entrance and adjacent seat wall are approximately 18' – 6" from the river's edge and will not encroach into the minimum 8' wide clear walkway along the river.

The new rooftop mechanical penthouse is necessary to support the significant air handling equipment, and the placement of it falls partially within the Riverwalk overlay zone. The penthouse is set back approximately 23 feet from the south edge of the building, and 16 feet from the west face. It will be 14' – 4" tall, screened with a façade of horizontal prefinished corrugated metal with a continuous array of louvers on the west façade. The louvers are articulated by an A-B mullion pattern, complimenting the rhythms of the historic façade and the new Wells Street entrance (located outside of the Riverwalk overlay zone).

The project is designed to comply with the National Park Service historic preservation guidelines. A Part II submittal for historic tax credits has been approved, including the new mechanical penthouse and accessible entrance. A copy of that letter is included in the exhibit.

**Adjacent Land Use:**

The subject site is within the Mixed Activity (C9G) zoning district and is bordered by the Milwaukee River to the west and the Associated Bank River Center to the north. The Pabst Theater is east of this site, and commercial uses are to the south, across Wells Street.

**Consistency with Area Plan:**

The project is within the boundaries of the Downtown Area Plan, adopted by the Common Council in 2023. The Downtown Area Plan recommends to reinforce Downtown as the region's center of art, culture and entertainment and supports new and existing cultural facilities and entertainment venues of all types and sizes throughout Downtown. The plan emphasizes the importance of connecting to the Milwaukee River, and encourages active uses and pedestrian friendly facades along the Downtown Riverwalk. The plan also encourages the preservation, restoration and reuse of historic buildings.

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater is a long-time anchor in the center of Downtown and a key piece of the City's Downtown Theater District. The proposed improvements will allow the continued use of this facility as a live performance theater and provide additional activity along the Downtown Riverwalk, consistent with the goals of the Downtown Area Plan. The design has been reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office and is consistent with the Milwaukee Riverwalk Guidelines. The proposed improvements are consistent with the recommendations Downtown Area Plan.

**Previous City Plan Action:**

None.

**Previous Common Council Action:**

None.

**Recommendation:**

The proposed new entrance and seat wall along the south side of the building will allow activation of a fairly passive Riverwalk section and provide accessible access from the building to the Riverwalk, which aligns with the goals and standards of the Riverwalk overlay zone. The mechanical penthouse is necessary to support the air handling equipment for the building, and has been designed in a way that is sensitive to the building and context. For these reasons, staff recommends approval of the subject file.