



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

Lafayette L. Crump
Commissioner

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Deputy Commissioner

Ald. Pérez
12th Ald. District

CITY PLAN COMMISSION
ZONING REPORT

File No. [231808](#)

Location: 733 W Historic Mitchell Street, located on the south side of Historic Mitchell Street, east of 8th Street and west of 7th Street.

Applicant/
Owner: Voces de la Frontera

Current
Zoning: Local Business (LB2) and within the Historic Mitchell Street Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Zone ([NC](#))

Proposed
Zoning: Request for deviation from Historic Mitchell Street Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Zone use list to allow social service use exceeding the allowable first floor frontage within the building located at 733 West Historic Mitchell Street.

Proposal:

The Mitchell Street Neighborhood Conservation (NC) Overlay was approved by the Common Council in 2015. The purpose of the overlay is to preserve the first floor of commercial buildings as lively and contributing spaces for the Historic Mitchell Street corridor. To accomplish this, the overlay establishes a list of prohibited uses for the first floor of commercial spaces within the boundary as a means to guide street level uses that are considered to be active and contributing to the vitality of the area.

The applicant, Voces de la Frontera, purchased the 2-story building at 733 W. Historic Mitchell Street, and intends to provide several services at this site such as citizenship classes, legal services, and referral services, which are classified as a Social Service use. The zoning overlay allows a social service use to occupy the first floor of a building provided the frontage does not exceed 30 feet. The building is 60 feet wide, and Voces de la Frontera would like to occupy the entire building as a social service use. A deviation from the overlay's prohibited use list is necessary to allow the use to occupy more than 30 feet of frontage along Mitchell Street.

Per the applicant, the entire street frontage along the first floor of the building will be reserved for active spaces, and private uses will be located to the rear of the space. The existing storefront windows will remain open and unobstructed. This site is locally designated as historic, and the applicant plans to work with the Historic Preservation Commission in the future to open the windows on the second level. The exterior signage will also be upgraded.

Business Improvement District #4 and Common Council President Perez, both of whom spearheaded the establishment of this neighborhood conservation overlay zone, have submitted letters of support for this application.

Deviation Criteria:

Following is a summary of the applicant's responses to the four criteria set forth in the zoning code with respect to a deviation. DCD staff has reviewed these responses and concludes that they have been met:

1. The purpose of the overlay zone is met

- The applicant states the previous tenant of the space was a retail store that had much of the street facing frontage blocked with display cases.
- The applicant intends to re-engage the interior of the building at the street level by leaving unobstructed views into the space creating a welcoming space for the public to inquire about the services they offer the community.
- As the owner and occupant of the building, the applicant has an invested interest in the preservation and rehabilitation of the building structure as a long-term investment for the community.

2. The deviation improves the aesthetic of the site.

- The applicant will remove the existing display cases that currently block views into the space. All private functions will be moved to the rear of the building beyond the exposed street frontage to allow for privacy.
- The applicant will be adding new exterior signage.
- The applicant plans to expand services to the second floor of the building and at that time the second level windows will be restored and will remain in style with the historic architecture of the building.

3. If applicable, the deviation addresses one or more unique site factors that make application of the standard impractical

- The applicant intends to utilize the street level for their reception area/open gallery. By re-engaging the interior of the building at the street level, it allows the community to interact with the organization and for the applicant to conduct its services, away from the street front. The applicant hopes to expand their operation to the second floor of the

building and the activation of the street level will allow for the building to be a hub of social services for the community.

4. The deviation is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

- “This site is within the Near South Side Plan area, which recognizes and supports the continuation of Mitchell Street to serve as a community-wide shopping district with a “high quality main street or downtown retail look and function,” although Voces’ does not function in a retail capacity, their storefront windows will maintain the aesthetic of the corridor. While this Social Service use is limited in the overlay zone’s use table, Voces de la Frontera has committed to maintaining a completely open and active street frontage along Historic Mitchell Street to allow an engaging space at this important corner of the district. All private uses that would require window coverings will be located at the back of the space, away from the street. The existing plan calls for maintaining a mix of retail stores and services at the street level. Voces de la Frontera adds to that mix of uses in a way that offers great services to the community.”

Adjacent Land Use:

There is a mix of commercial uses to the north, east and west of the site. A surface parking lot is to the south.

Consistency with Area Plan:

The site of the proposed deviation is within the Near South Side Area Plan area. The Near South Side Area Plan was adopted in 2009 and amended in 2016. In the Plan, the Historic Mitchell Street commercial district is envisioned to provide a broad range of goods and services for the entire Near South Side area and the regional market (p. 78). The future viability of Mitchell Street depends on maintaining this high quality main street or downtown retail look and function. The following bullets recommend how to fulfill this retail vision (p. 79). The plan focuses on a “pedestrian-oriented shopping zone” comprising the street level of buildings on properties with frontage on either side of Mitchell St. between 5th St. and 13th St. (p. 79). This includes maintain and promoting an economically vibrant mix of retail stores and services at the street level, while discouraging uses that do not directly contribute to a high quality shopping experience (p. 81).

The plan details that non-retail uses should generally be located outside of or above this pedestrian-oriented shopping zone (p. 81), as a strong effort to discourage uses that avoid uses that do not activate their storefronts, however this is given the focus on high standards for storefront design and signage, and a strong pedestrian experience fostered by inviting, active, and vibrant storefronts. The proposed use includes plans to activate the storefront area of the building with active uses with open and unobstructed windows. Given this, the proposed deviation from the Historic Mitchell Street Neighborhood Conservation Overlay

Zone for 733 W. Historic Mitchell Street is consistent with the Near South Side Area Plan.

Previous City

Plan Action:

2/16/2015 – City Plan Commission recommended approval of a substitute ordinance creating the Historic Mitchell Street Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Zone and approving the neighborhood conservation plan and use list for the area generally on the north and south sides of West Historic Mitchell Street between South 6th Street and South 13th Street, in the 12th Aldermanic District. (FN [121132](#))

Previous Common

Council Action:

3/24/2015 – Common Council approved a substitute ordinance creating the Historic Mitchell Street Neighborhood Conservation Overlay Zone and approving the neighborhood conservation plan and use list for the area generally on the north and south sides of West Historic Mitchell Street between South 6th Street and South 13th Street, in the 12th Aldermanic District. (FN [121132](#))

Recommendation:

Voces de La Frontera provides important services to the community, and has committed to an interior layout of their building that will actively engage the entire Historic Mitchell Street frontage, as the overlay intended. Staff believes that the four deviation criteria have been met. Because of this, staff recommends approval of the subject file.