

Deutsches Haus building on Bayou St. John moves forward amid city's questions about building design

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The bayou facade of the proposed Deutsches Haus building on Moss Street (via Mathes Brierre architects)

The Deutsches Haus received a positive recommendation from a city panel Tuesday afternoon for its plan to rebuild on the banks of Bayou St. John, but New Orleans city planners raised questions about how the 'Germanic' design of the building will fit into the surrounding neighborhood.

After the former Deutsches Haus building on South Galvez was appropriated into the new University Medical Center site, the state found the land at 1700 Moss Street (the vacant former site of the NOPD Third District station) and gave it to the German cultural organization for a new headquarters. The land is zoned residential, however, so a private club there requires City Council permission — which begins with [a trip through the city planning commission](#).

The city planning staff generally found the plan to be acceptable, because the site itself is large enough to accommodate the 17,000-square-foot building and adjoining biergarten, and because the bayou and City Park serve as buffers between it and the surrounding neighborhood. (The request also had the support of the Faubourg St. John Neighborhood Association.) The staff included a number of recommendations in its report, most of which dealt with minor issues such as landscaping, lighting, trash and signage.

The Deutsches Haus leadership asked that two of the recommendations be modified, and the City Planning Commission quickly agreed. The hours of operation will be 7 a.m. to midnight, earlier on

both ends than the city staff's recommendation, to allow for business-breakfast type events. Further, the wording of one condition was slightly broadened: Where the staff originally wrote that alcohol could only be sold to non-members during permitted special events (such as Oktoberfest), the club tweaked the language to limit alcohol sales to the "general public" — in other words, allowing its 500 members to serve alcohol to invited guests during regular functions.

A third recommendation, however, drew more discussion — the city is requiring Deutsches Haus to "revisit the overall building design and submit a revised plan subject to further review and approval of the City Planning Commission staff." That condition, city staffers said, is based on the concern that the building does not stylistically fit into the surrounding neighborhood, particularly in the way the roof looks.

"Some of the big pieces of it, such as the roof treatment and the patterning on the roof — while they're sort of Germanic, there's not really a precedent for that in New Orleans," said planner Stephen Kroll, suggesting various modifications to those elements. "We're trying to get at different ways of accomplishing the goals they have, but in a way that works for us as well."

Deutsches Haus leaders said that the architecture is intended to represent the Black Forest area of Germany. They worked closely with the Mathes Brierre firm, they said, to create a design that visually represents German culture.

"We've gone through many different design concepts for our building, and we feel that this is best represents the Germanic heritage that we would like to represent to the city," said Deutsches Haus president Keith Oldendorf.

From an architectural standpoint, the building technically conforms to the bungalow structure common in the neighborhood — where most of the interior is contained in the ground floor, and any second-story is worked into the roof structure, said Todd James of Mathes Brierre. The brickwork follows the tradition of German brick masons in New Orleans, added Angela Morton of Mathes Brierre.

"We had a preeminent architectural firm in New Orleans design us a Germanic building, and this is what the preeminent architectural firm says is a Germanic building," said Deutsches Haus member George Mahl. "So we'd like to keep what we have on paper."

Planning Commissioner Kyle Wedberg acknowledged that Deutsches Haus performed a “civic service” to the city by its expropriation for the medical center site and subsequent move to Bayou St. John. He said he would leave the design issues to the city planning staff to work out with the Deutsches Haus architects, however, and the commission then voted quickly for approval, 7-0.

“To my eyes, the renderings look very reasonable and professional, and actually I thought were really good-looking,” Wedberg said. “But I’ll defer to staff to come to a final conclusion with the Deutsches Haus membership.”

The request next moves to the City Council for final approval. After the meeting, Oldendorf said that after city approval is secured, the project will be put out to bid. The best-case scenario for opening is late 2016, but 2017 is more likely, Oldendorf said.



A rendering of rear view of the new Deutsches Haus building proposed for Moss Street, designed by Mathes Brierre Architects (via nola.gov).