

City of Detroit

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TO: City Planning Commission

FROM: Dolores Perales, City Planner

RE: **The request of Friends of Merit, LLC to rezone the properties at 9715 Burnette Street and 10141 West Grand River Avenue where an R1 (Single-family Residential) zoning classification and a B2 (Local Business and Residential District) zoning classification are shown respectively to a B4 (General Business) zoning classification.**

DATE: August 30, 2024

On September 5th, 2024, the City Planning Commission (CPC) is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the request of Friends of Merit, LLC to amend Article XVII, Section 50-17-58, District Map No. 56 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, Chapter 50, *Zoning*, to rezone the properties located at 9715 Burnette Street and 10141 West Grand River Avenue from R1 (Single-Family Residential) and B2 (Local Business and Residential District), respectively, to a B4 (General Business) zoning classification. The subject properties are generally bounded by West Grand River Avenue to the north, Burnette Street to the east, I-96 Jeffries Freeway to the south, and Prairie Street to the west.

The proposed map amendment is being requested to permit the current vacant lots to be utilized as an indoor commercial recreation facility, outdoor recreational facility, and parking area known as *Merit Park*. The existing B2 and R1 zoning classifications do not allow for larger scale recreational facilities with spectator seating.

BACKGROUND AND REQUEST

Give Merit, a nonprofit organization based on Detroit's west side, has a 12-year history of empowering young individuals in the city through innovative strategies, educational opportunities, enrichment programs, and mentorship activities via their Fate program. The organization's cohort-based approach combines project-based learning, character development, career exposure, and mentorship. Since its inception, more than 200 students have participated in the program, benefiting from over \$300,000 in scholarships, and achieving a 100% graduation rate.

To expand its impact, Give Merit has dedicated the past seven years to developing the proposed Merit Park site, a 57,500 square-foot complex focused on athletic development. Merit Park will feature an indoor regulation size basketball court, community event space, outdoor rock-climbing wall, turf field, splash pad, and obstacle course. In addition to these recreational amenities, the facility will offer mentoring programs, athletic training, sports leagues, and training in sports,

entertainment, and culinary careers. Retail and restaurant spaces will also be included. Most programs will be provided at no cost to Detroit residents. The site plan below highlights these amenities.



Merit Park aims to deliver much-needed recreational amenities and professional development services to a neighborhood that has experienced decades of disinvestment and neglect. With nearly 41% of families living below the poverty line and more than 7,000 youth lacking a space for play, sports, or personal growth, Merit Park is set to become a vital community resource.

Prior to Friends of Merit, LLC’s acquisition of the subject parcels, the property contained three buildings that had been vacant for over 40 years. In 2022, Friends of Merit, LLC gained ownership of all six parcels, and in 2023, the abandoned buildings were demolished.



The subject properties are generally bounded by West Grand River Avenue to the north, Burnette Street to the east, I-96 Jeffries Freeway to the south, and Prairie Street to the west. The location of the proposed rezoning is indicated on the zoning map below:



The proposed map amendment is requested to establish the appropriate zoning classification for the planned Merit Park recreational facility. Under the Zoning Ordinance, the proposed development is classified as a by-right public, civic, and institutional use ("Outdoor Recreation Facility") and a by-right retail, service, and commercial use ("Recreation, Indoor Commercial and Health Club").

The development is proposed on currently vacant parcels and will include an indoor commercial recreation facility, outdoor recreational spaces, and a parking area. The existing B2 and R1 zoning classifications do not allow for larger-scale recreational facilities with spectator seating, making this amendment necessary. While such uses are not permitted at the proposed scale in residential or local business and residential districts, they are allowed by right in most business-zoned districts, including B4 (General Business District), B5 (Major Business District), and B6 (General Services District).

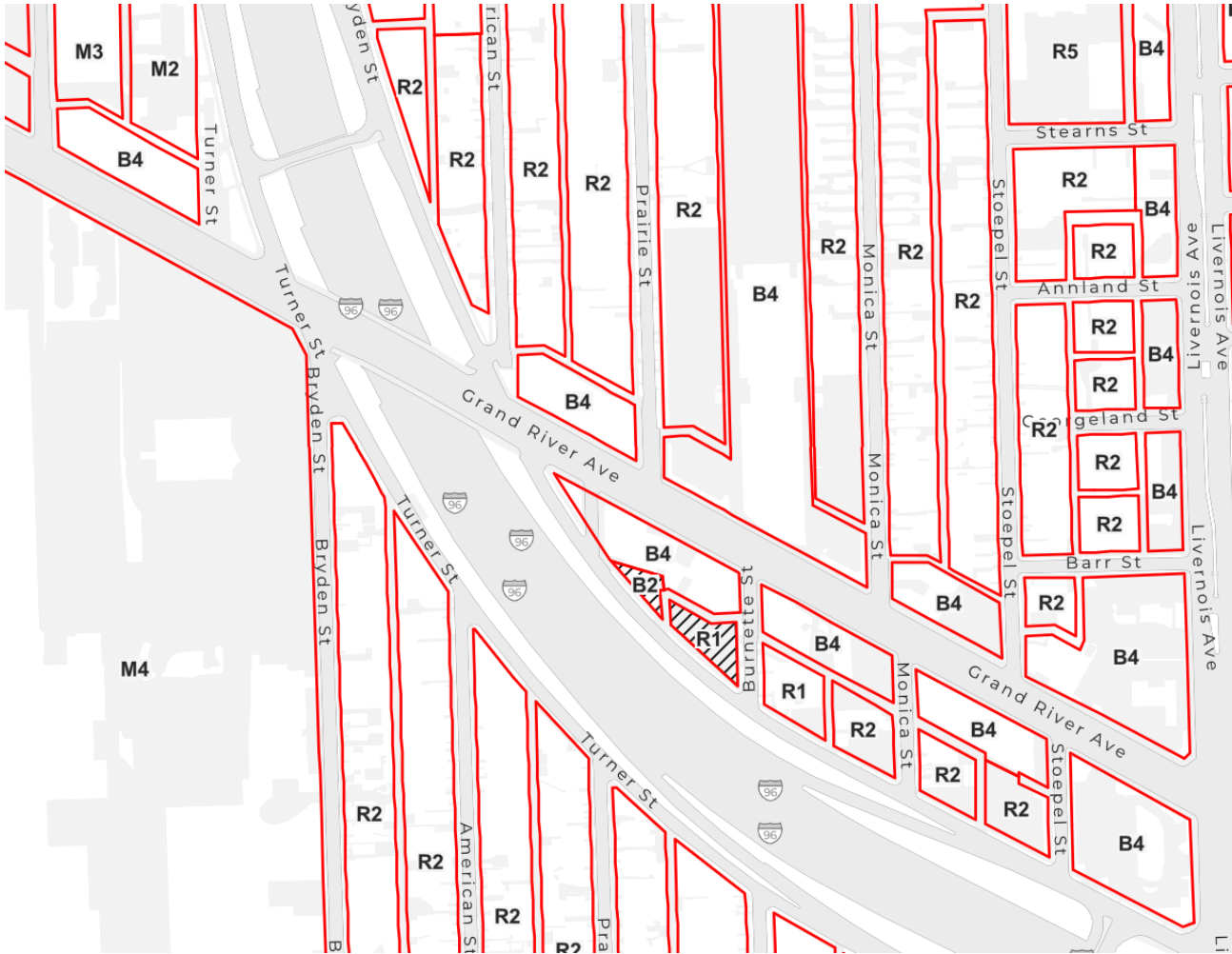
PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Surrounding Zoning and Land Use

The zoning classification and land uses surrounding the subject area are as follows:

- North: B4; developed as a religious institution and bookstore
- East: B4 and R2; developed as a childcare/head start and single-family homes
- South: R2; developed as single-family homes across the freeway
- West: R2 and M4; developed as single-family homes and industrial across the freeway

As shown on the below zoning map, parcels in the subject area are mostly B4, R2, and M4 with small amounts of other districts. The parcels located to the north and east of the subject parcel are zoned general business (B4), while a stretch of intensive industrial (M4) zoning classifications can be seen along Grand River to the west and R2 to the south on Prairie. The surrounding area is primarily business and residential.



The subject properties are generally bounded by West Grand River Avenue to the north, Burnette Street to the east, the I-96 Jeffries Freeway to the south, and Prairie Street to the west. The majority of parcels within this area are zoned B4 and R2, with the following uses:

- Two religious institutions: Straight Gate International Church and The Order of the Fishermen Ministry - The Home of Love
- Apartment buildings designated as low to moderate income housing for 20- 30 families
- A Head Start/ pre-k readiness program
- A religious bookshop
- Single-family residential homes

Zoning Classifications

The pertinent zoning district classifications are described as follows:

R1 – Single Family Residential District

This district protects and preserves quiet, low-density residential areas now primarily developed and those areas which will be developed with single-family detached dwellings and characterized by a high ratio of home ownership. The regulations for this district are designed to stabilize and

protect the essential characteristics of the district and to promote and encourage a suitable environment for activities associated with family life. To these ends, development is limited to a relatively low concentration and uses permitted by right are limited to single-family detached dwellings which provide homes for the residents of the area. Additional residential uses such as religious institutions, neighborhood centers, and utility uses necessary to serve the immediate area may be permitted on a conditional basis

B2 – Local Business and Residential District

This district is designed to provide day-to-day consumer goods and services required to serve a small residential area. High-traffic generating, and traffic-oriented uses are restricted because of their obvious undesirable influence on adjacent residential areas.

B4 – General Business District

This district supports business and commercial uses that are oriented toward thoroughfares. In addition to these uses, other businesses that may benefit from attracting clientele from passing traffic are also permitted. Certain additional uses that can be successfully integrated with the permitted by-right uses are allowed as conditional uses.

Master Plan Consistency

The proposed rezoning site is designated as *Thoroughfare Commercial* in the current Master Plan, as seen on the map below. A Master Plan Interpretation will be provided by the Planning and Development Department prior to CPC staff submitting a recommendation regarding the proposed rezoning.



Community Input

Community engagement has been at the forefront of Merit Park's project scope. The vision for Merit Park was shaped through active community involvement, such as a community brainstorming session that engaged local youth from the area comprised by the 48204 zip code. In collaboration with the Gensler architecture firm, students had the opportunity to express their ideas through live drawings, which helped bring their vision for the park to life.

Following youth engagement, the Give Merit team conducted comprehensive surveys and focus groups with both youth and adults in the community. These surveys explored residents' perceptions of the neighborhood, their level of community involvement, extracurricular interests, and their aspirations for the proposed park. Insights from these engagements directly informed the development of key features in Merit Park, such as the splash pad, farmers market, basketball court, and rock-climbing wall, ensuring the park would meet the genuine needs and desires of the community.

To maintain ongoing community involvement, participants were invited to join the Merit Park Neighborhood Council (MPNC). This council serves as a community-centered advisory board, providing valuable input on park decisions, programming, and partnerships. Once Merit Park opens, the MPNC will continue to play a vital role in facilitating community-driven programming. The council includes both youth and parents, ensuring diverse representation and a commitment to inclusivity.

In 2021, Give Merit partnered with Renaissance of Hope and Straight Gate Church on a master planning exercise to further engage the community. This plan, developed over a seven-month engagement process, incorporated input from various community organizations and was led by RVSN Studios, a Black woman-owned design firm. The plan was aligned with Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan's city-wide goal of creating walkable neighborhoods, and focused on activating vacant land, reducing blight, enhancing neighborhood identity through placemaking, and improving access to local amenities.

Most recently, the team has continued to engage the community by speaking with residents, distributing door hangers with information about site demolition, and hosting a groundbreaking event for Merit Park in May 2024.

Staff will provide a recommendation including results from the public hearing at a future meeting.

Attachments: Public hearing notice
Application for zoning change
Community Engagement Report

cc: Antoine Bryant, Director, P&DD
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