MEMORANDUM

TO:          Historic Preservation Commission
FROM:        Janice Talley, PP/AICP
RE:          APP. #2817 – JESSE Y. SAYAGH, LLC
             260 BELLEVUE AVENUE (Block 1711, Lot 38)
DATE:        April 16, 2024
STATUS:      Complete.

This development application has been filed with the Planning Board for site plan approval. This report is based on a review of the following information submitted in connection with this application:

1. Montclair Township Application for Development received 8/30/22.

Site Description

The subject property is located on the south side of Bellevue Avenue adjacent to the access driveway to the Upper Montclair Plaza parking lot as shown in Figure 1. The subject property is a corner lot that is 12,713 square feet in size with 72.2 feet of frontage along Bellevue Avenue and 160 feet of frontage along the driveway to the parking lot. It contains a historic building comprised of a front 2-1/2 story building that historically contained retail stores and the theater lobby attached to a larger two-story building that contained the theaters. Most recently while operating as a theater, the building had 885 theater seats in 4 theaters and 5,000 square feet of personal service retail space, and no onsite parking. The building has been vacant since 2017.
Figure 2: Aerial photo of subject property. Google Maps

The property abuts the driveway to the Upper Montclair Plaza municipal parking on the east, a two-story office building to the south and a realtor’s office to the west. A sidewalk extending from Bellevue Avenue to the municipal parking lot is located on the east side of the building.

The portion of the building that fronts Bellevue Avenue previously contained the theater lobby and a hair salon. It also contains a large marquee sign that identifies the entrance to the theater. The building abuts the eastern property line along the driveway to the Upper Montclair Plaza parking lot. A partial sidewalk is provided along the side of the building in the Township right-of-way. Two doors open directly onto the sidewalk. A nine-foot-wide setback is provided on the west side of the building. Access to this area is provided via a curb cut from Bellevue Avenue. This area previously contained the dumpster that served the movie theater. The alley serves as emergency egress to Bellevue Avenue for theater patrons. Parking associated with the adjacent realtor office abuts the southwest side of the building.
Figure 3: Subject property as viewed from Bellevue Avenue. February 2024.

Figure 4: Subject property viewed from parking lot driveway. February 2024.
Figure 5: View of the existing sidewalk on the east side of building. February 2024.

Figure 6: View of west facade of building.
Figure 7: View of west facade of building.
Figure 8: View of west building facade where trash enclosure is proposed.
Figure 9: View of the west side of the property.
Historic Significance

268 Bellevue Avenue, the Bellevue Theatre, located in the Upper Montclair local historic district, was surveyed as part of Preservation Montclair in 1981. It was designed by J.H. Phillips, and constructed in 1921 in the Tudor Revival style, popular in this commercial district. It is 2 ½ stories in height and the exterior comprises brick, stucco and half-timbering, and slate roofing.

Master Plan and Zoning

The property is included in the Bellevue Theatre Redevelopment Plan which was adopted on June 3, 2022. A movie theater, retail stores, and multi-family dwelling units above the first floor are permitted uses in the redevelopment plan. The project meets the bulk regulations for the property established in the Redevelopment Plan which are as follows:

A. Maximum Density. 28 dwelling units per acre.
B. Minimum lot size: 10,000 square feet.
C. Minimum street frontage: 70 feet.
D. Maximum Building Height. 40 feet.
E. Maximum Number of Stories: 3.
The project meets the minimum setback requirements for the building established in the Redevelopment Plan which are as follows:

A. Front yard setback: 0 feet
B. Side yard setback - East: 0 feet
C. Side yard setback – West: 5 feet.
D. Rear yard setback: 0 feet

Additional requirements include the following:

A. A minimum of 50 percent of the gross floor area must be used for movie theater use. **Status: Requirement met.**

B. Onsite parking is not required for the property if 50 percent or more of the building is used as a movie theater. **Status: Requirement met.**

C. Affordable housing is required pursuant to Article XXVI of the Montclair Code. **Status: Applicant not required to provide affordable housing onsite but will be required to pay a development fee pursuant to Montclair Code §202-42A(1).**

D. One marquee sign above the entrance on Bellevue Avenue is permitted pursuant to Montclair Code §297-51. Otherwise, signage pursuant to Article XVIII of the Montclair Code is applicable.

In addition, the redevelopment plan requires the following:

1. The sidewalk along the east side of the building must be smooth, accessible, and free of obstructions. Additional lighting must be provided to illuminate the area. Public art is encouraged to improve the visual quality of the building wall and provide a more welcoming entrance to the Upper Montclair Plaza area. **Status: These improvements are not shown on the site.**

2. All leaders draining stormwater from the building must be connected to the storm sewer and not drain directly across sidewalks. **Status: These improvements are not shown on the site.**

3. A trash enclosure comprised of a masonry material or similar material that matches the building shall be provided on the west side of the building pursuant to Montclair Code §281-8.1H, unless all refuse is kept inside. **Status: Details of the trash enclosure are not provided.**

4. A pedestrian pathway must be provided on the west side of the building to ensure safe emergency egress. All obstructions shall be removed from the sidewalk and lighting shall be provided for safety. **Status: Not shown on the site plan.**

5. External fire escapes shall be removed and replaced with new internal stairs or enclosed. **Status: The external fire escapes have been removed. Applicant must show that new internal stairs or enclosed stairs meet fire code.**
Project Description

The application to the Planning Board is for site plan approval to convert the upper floors in the front of the building to create three dwelling units. The plan includes two 2-bedroom apartments and one 1-bedroom apartment. In addition, the applicant proposes to convert part of the theater space facing the driveway to the parking lot to three retail storefronts. The application proposes a new trash enclosure on the west side of the building and the removal of the external fire stairs on the east and west facades of the building.

The applicant previously received approval from the Historic Preservation Commission to install a new storefront for the retail space to the right of the building entrance from Bellevue Avenue and to repair/improve the exterior façade of the building.

The application has been referred to the HPC to advise on the east façade improvements/additions that include the following:

- Proposed wall-mounted lights to be installed. A total of eight fixtures of three different types.
- Proposed Art installation on the East masonry elevation. The size and theme are undecided because funding, theme, and artist are being explored.
- Proposed storefront signage for three retail stores which are 3 feet in height.
- Proposed storefront retail spaces of varying heights.

Planning Considerations

1. The applicant must be prepared to answer questions about the mural and a description of the process to finalize the mural.

2. Details of the proposed material for the east façade must be shown on the site plan.

3. The plans must provide the dimensions of the three retail storefronts.

4. It shall be noted that the maximum permissible height of the wall signs is 2 feet. Signs attached to the same building must be of similar shape, size, color, and height.