

The Kerbela Shriner Temple currently sits on a key location on the edge of South Knoxville and downtown Knoxville. This key location demands the highest level of scrutiny for any new development.

Firstly, there are an abundance of historical ties to the site (the ghost stairs and JFG sign chief among them) that are unique to Knoxville's persona, and these features are part of the draw for both current and incoming residents to the city. These chief historical artifacts inspire public use of the site in a way that aligns with the cohesiveness of the city. While the developers for the Kerbela site will include these in their plans, their choice of development fundamentally does not align with the cohesiveness of the city.

As a key connecting land mass between Gay St (the primary downtown entertainment corridor) and the rapidly developing South Waterfront, it is crucial that any development in this area be aware of this and be highly selective of the development that occurs here. While an active senior living development is not an issue inherently, the manner in which CR Endeavors has approached this is. The facade in the plans does not fit the style of long-lasting development that makes our downtown so inviting and valuable. The massing of the building exceeds the maximum perimeter and footprint in either of the districts the parcels belong to. Considering the elevated location of this site, this is a factor that should not be allowed under any circumstances. The Kerbela site overlooks the waterfront, the historic Gay St bridge, and Gay St. This view belongs to the community and the public, not to an individual developer. Relinquishing ownership of this quintessential Knoxville view deprives the city and its residents of that which makes Knoxville what is is. The developer and the city should work together to achieve the best version of this site, and I welcome a developer who agrees with this mentality. However, a developer who cannot understand or abide by that is not a developer we want in our city. We love our city and only want the best for it. As is, the CR Endeavors plans reduce the value of that location and our city.

Because of its key location and proximity to downtown, Kerns, and the Art Trail, this site should prioritize public engagement and amenities, public passage and connectivity, and areas that invite leisurely public activities. We should not allow our city to develop into something that is not usable by its people. Development in this location should inherently carry those core values, and any new development should aspire, at minimum, to be as good as, if not better, than the development around it. Promoting apartment deserts with no retail, construction that is an eyesore to any passerby, lack of public outdoor greenspace, and large quantities of traffic in an already congested area creates an unlivable, non-functioning city.

A detailed traffic study needs to be conducted before anything is approved by the city. Kerbela currently receives intermittent traffic related to events or community meetings. Replacing that use-case with a habitual resident use-case will have a profound impact on the already dense and over-crowded roads in South Knoxville and downtown. To avoid a detailed traffic study that produces actionable results that both the city and the developer agree to commit to is asinine at best and egregious negligence at worst. The developer and city must work together to plan for a functional city both for today and for the future.

Development in Knoxville should be highly scrutinized. Knoxville is a highly desirable location for both long term and new residents. Development not be hand-waved through for the sake of development. As a highly desirable city, we must be selective, conscientious, and considerate in how vacant land and existing buildings are developed. If we are not selective now, in only a handful of years we will find ourselves living in a city we do not recognize and no longer appreciate. It will have been depleted and stripped of the vibrancy that makes Knoxville so unique and desirable.

This is not a matter to be taken lightly, nor is it a matter to exclude the public from until late in the process. The public should have been engaged from the very beginning.

As caretakers of the city, its business, its development, and its residents, it is the city's duty to plan for the health and vibrancy of the city for both today and the many decades to come. To ignore the current community needs and desires is negligence; to ignore the future health and growth of the city is an insult to both your roles and the city you serve.