

2025-0450 Public Hearing and Request for Conditional Use Recommendation for alcoholic beverage sales for onsite consumption that is ancillary to an otherwise permissible use (cafe/restaurant) for the Highland Room, located within Unit #1 of the newly constructed Gerald building, on the south side of Auburn and west of Dequindre, zoned BD Brooklands District, Parcel ID# 15-36-230-001 (formerly 1760 E. Auburn); Mike (Manish) Chaudhary, the Highland Room (RH), LLC, Applicant

(Staff Report dated 10-15-25, Applicant's Letter dated 9-18-25, Proposed Floor Plan, Menu received 10-2-25, Environmental Impact Statement, Development Application and Public Hearing Notice had been placed on file and by reference became a part of the record hereof.)

Present for the applicant were Mike Chaudhary, Applicant for the Highland Room LLC, and Hassan Haider, DMC Group Consultants.

Chairperson Hooper introduced this item as a request for conditional use recommendation for alcoholic beverages for onsite consumption ancillary to an otherwise permissible use for the Highlands Room located within one unit of the newly-constructed Gerald Plaza on the south side of Auburn, west of Dequindre in the Brooklands District. He invited the applicants forward.

Mr. Chaudhary indicated that he is the applicant for the special use permit, and Mr. Haider will be the banquet manager. He commented that they should be looking for a certificate of occupancy for their residential units in the Gerald within another three to four weeks.

Mr. McLeod noted that The Highland Room, if approved, would be the first tenant within the Gerald Plaza. He pointed out the location of the Plaza relative to the neighboring properties and uses, and noted that building parking for this particular use would not only be on the street, but would be within the City parking lots immediately south of the proposed use. He commented that it has been a long time coming for that part of the city. He reviewed the proposed layout for the Highland Room, noting that it is a very limited space of one unit at approximately 1,260 square feet with limited capacity of approximately 33 people. He reviewed the proposed hours of operation as 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., and noted that a full range of breakfast, lunch and dinner options would be provided. He mentioned that they were asked to clarify their menu options as they seemed a little light initially. He noted that staff originally thought they would be bringing in a liquor license, and found out earlier today that they will be asking for a quota license from the City.

Chairperson Hooper noted that this item requires a Public Hearing, opened the Public Hearing at 7:32 p.m., and stated that he did not receive any cards and sees no one wishing to speak. He then closed the Public Hearing. He asked Mr. Chaudhary to respond to Mr. McLeod's comments.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that they have gotten a lot of calls regarding the residential units; however, most people want to see one of the units finished so they will be staging one of the units in the commercial space next week. He mentioned that they received a call regarding locating a physical therapy

location there, which he is personally not in favor of having as they want local businesses. He stated that they are going to be pushing a big marketing campaign for the commercial and residential spaces soon.

He stated that they have already invested a lot of money into the plaza, and the idea is to bring some fusion cocktails and finger foods. He commented that he learned that there is an opportunity for a quota license available and noted that they just acquired a license for a location in Wayne County.

Chairperson Hooper noted that he serves on the Liquor License Technical Review Committee, and pointed out that in order to obtain a quota license, they would have to have a recommendation from that body as well. He stated that they have not met regarding a request. He stressed that he did not want to give the applicants any false impression that they would just apply and get a quota license. He explained that the number of licenses is based on population and only so many are allocated every ten years.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that he understands, and that this is all based on the quota license. He stated that if he does not get the quota license, he will be dropping the plan.

Ms. Brnabic asked for an explanation of the hours, noting that it was mentioned that for the daytime hours it would be a non-alcohol establishment.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. they would be opening the cafe primarily for coffee and snacks. After 4:00 p.m. they would be serving alcohol.

Ms. Brnabic noted that it was also stated that there may be social gatherings, night events, evening drinks and a cocktail lounge. She asked if the proposed seating of 33 persons is a maximum capacity.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that because the space is smaller, they are trying to offer it for professionals who can come in the evening for a quiet time. He explained that the idea is not to make it more of a sports bar, and he did not anticipate a lot of people coming. He mentioned that occasionally they might be watching a game. He stated that they are looking at 25 to 30 people for the capacity. He stressed they would be serving different kinds of fusion drinks.

Ms. Brnabic asked if there were any plans for expansion.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that at this point there were no plans. He stated that they would like to keep this at the same capacity because this would be their second cafe bar and they do plan to open in other cities.

Ms. Brnabic asked if the only access to the cafe would be the front entrance.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that it would be.

Ms. Brnabic asked if this was a mini version of the banquet cafe they opened in Highland Park.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that the Highland Park location is bigger, with 5,000 square feet of banquet space attached to a 2,200 square foot cafe they are building. He noted that they are awaiting approval to begin construction.

Ms. Brnabic stated that she does not have any problem with this and would support it.

Mr. Hetrick expressed appreciation to Chairperson Hooper for explaining that they will go to the Liquor License Technical Review Committee as a part of the process going forward. He asked staff to confirm that adequate parking was reviewed for the facility given the parking onsite is primarily for residents of the building.

Mr. McLeod responded that within the Brooklands District there is no differentiation between different types of retail or office and it is a standardized number for all uses. He commented that any non-residential use that is allowable within the Brooklands District would automatically fit within the parking calculations that were originally approved as a part of the building.

Mr. Struzik asked that a couple of typographical errors be corrected in the packet and in the proposed resolution prior to this item moving on to City Council. He commented that this building is awesome and he believes that the business would also be awesome and something he wants to see replicated along the Auburn corridor. He made the motion in the packet to recommend City Council approval of the conditional use.

Ms. Neubauer seconded the motion, and pointed out the typographical errors to be corrected, including errors on the development application itself she wanted to see corrected.

Ms. Brnabic commented that she is happy to hear that the applicants are supporting more of a mom-and-pop business, and mentioned that she is hoping for a bakery.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that the tenant will have cookies and cakes. He added that the goal is to have small businesses and the whole purpose of the building in this area is to meet the vision of the Brooklands which the City has had from day one. He commented that their goal is to make it lively and bring different vendors who have different local products so it can create employment and have a good impact locally.

He mentioned that they have another project near Wayne State University, and mentioned that this is a big concept coming up from Detroit's Midtown and downtown.

Ms. Brnabic asked if there were any plans for outdoor seating.

Mr. Chaudhary responded no.

Ms. Brnabic asked if that changed in the future whether they would have to

come back before the Planning Commission.

Mr. McLeod responded that technically outdoor seating is an ancillary use; however, with alcohol sales that changes and he would believe that they would have to come back. He commented that if it were just coffee at lunchtime, it would be able to be reviewed administratively.

Ms. Brnabic stated that outdoor seating would have to terminate at 4:00 p.m. before alcohol sales began.

Mr. McLeod responded that it would be difficult to enforce; however, they would consider a request at that time. He noted that generally speaking any expansion to the outside would probably come back before the Commission.

Chairperson Hooper pointed out that Condition No. 2 of the motion states that if the use changes it would have to return before the Planning Commission. He stated that he wanted to caution the applicants that obtaining a quota license is not a process of just making an application for it and it would be given to them.

Mr. Chaudhary responded that he understood.

After calling for a roll call vote, Chairperson Hooper noted that the motion passed unanimously. He thanked the applicants for their investment in the Brooklands.

Mr. Chaudhary commented that it was a pleasure to be before the Commission again. He mentioned that he was before the Commission 12 months ago after their site plan had expired, and he is happy to say that his team has done a great job. He commented that the elevator should be coming in shortly and that is the last piece they need to wrap up construction.

A motion was made by Struzik, seconded by Neubauer, that this matter be Recommended for Approval to the City Council Regular Meeting. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye 9 - Brnabic, Denstaedt, Dettloff, Gallina, Hooper, Neubauer, Hetrick, Struzik and Weaver

Resolved, in the matter of File No. PCU2025-0005 (The Highland Room), the Planning Commission recommends to City Council Approval of the Conditional Use to allow sales for on premises alcoholic beverage consumption associated with a restaurant/cafe use, based on documents received by the Planning Department on September 18, 2025 with the following findings:

Findings

1. The proposed use will promote the intent and purpose of the Zoning Ordinance.
2. The existing building and proposed conditional use have been designed and is proposed to be operated, maintained, and managed so as to be compatible, harmonious, and appropriate in appearance with the existing and planned character of the general vicinity, adjacent uses of land, and the capacity of public services and facilities affected by the use.

3. The proposed restaurant use should have a positive impact on the community as a whole and the surrounding area by providing additional eating and gathering opportunities within the Brooklands District.
4. The existing development and proposed use are served adequately by essential public facilities and services, such as highways, streets, police and fire protection, water and sewer, drainage ways, and refuse disposal.
5. The existing development and proposed use should not be detrimental, hazardous, or disturbing to existing or future neighboring land uses, persons, property, or the public welfare. In addition, a use of this nature falls in line with the vision of the City's redevelopment of Auburn Rd. and the Brooklands District, to make the area more vibrant and walkable, and a restaurant use will help facilitate that.
6. The proposal will not create additional requirements at public cost for public facilities and services that will be detrimental to the economic welfare of the community.

Conditions

1. City Council approval of the Conditional Use.
2. If, in the determination of City staff, the intensity of the use changes or increases, in terms of traffic, noise, hours, lighting, odor, or other aspects that may cause adverse off-site impact, City staff may require and order the conditional use approval to be remanded to the Planning Commission and City Council as necessary for reexamination of the conditional use approval and conditions for possible revocation, modification or supplementation.