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Revised plans for Frostop announced

‘Premium’ apartments could surround beloved landmark

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Three months after community backlash torpedoed plans to demolish the Ted’s Frostop to make way for student housing, developers have revised their plans for an apartment building on the South Claiborne Avenue site.

The Robert family, which owns

the Frostop building and surrounding properties, is now proposing to preserve the midcentury diner and construct a scaled-down complex that they say addresses concerns around parking, preservation, density and traffic.

The plan, which is still preliminary, envisions keeping the diner and its parking lot intact, while erecting a three-story apartment

building beside it, camelback-style, on the site of a former drive-thru bank and pizza shop, with 26 units instead of the 39 originally proposed.

“The current version of the revised site plan centers around the existing Ted’s Frostop building with newly built dining space for the diner and premium multifamily construction set behind the din-

er,” Matthieu Robert, principal of the family’s real estate company, said in a statement. “This site plan embraces Ted’s Frostop, preserving its familiar home and paving the way for its long-term success. The project reflects a commitment to revitalize a legacy commercial property in a mixed-use environment.”

In July, the Roberts, owners of Robert Fresh Market, filed documents with the city outlining their revised plans for the property. It

follows the withdrawal of their appeal of the Historic District Landmark Commission’s denial of their demolition request earlier this spring.

In May, Tulane University, which was slated to become the primary tenant of the development, announced it would “pause its potential involvement” in the plan to “reexamine the project’s scope, design and engagement process.”

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On Thursday, a university spokesperson said they had nothing new to add.

While Tulane's role in the revised project is unclear, Robert did not rule out the possible use of the "premium market-rate apartment units" for student housing.

A neighborhood group convened a meeting Wednesday night, inviting supporters of the diner to discuss the new plan. No media was permitted to attend.

Richard Martin, who lives about 1,000 feet from the site and did not attend the meeting, said he and other nearby residents don't want any apartment building on the site, even if it isn't leased to Tulane students. He said neighbors are concerned the building would tower

over nearby single-family homes and exacerbate existing parking challenges.

"It's like saying, 'The cancer we're going to inject in your body is just going to be in your arm and not in your thigh.'" Martin said. "It's the same deal. I live in the middle of Versailles Boulevard on the opposite side of the street, but I'm going to still have a parking problem."

Possible protection

Potentially further complicating the situation, the Louisiana Landmarks Society and a local attorney have applied with the HDLC to grant historic landmark status to the Ted's Frostop building, its signage and the freestanding root beer mug sign that was toppled by Hurricane Katrina before being reinstalled more than six years later.

"It is one of the last intact examples of the mid-twentieth-



STAFF FILE PHOTO BY DAVID GRUNFELD

After backlash to proposed demolition, the owners of Ted's Frostop on Calhoun Street near the Tulane campus in New Orleans have proposed building a scaled-down apartment complex around it.

century drive-in restaurants that once proliferated along America's highways," Sandra Stokes, Louisiana Landmarks Society advo-

cacy chair, said in her request to the commission. "Its Googie-influenced signage, wraparound windows, and 14-foot revolving

root beer mug represent a rapidly disappearing typology of roadside commercial architecture."

If the HDLC decides to accept the nomination in November, any exterior alterations would require its approval. A subsequent vote to designate it as a landmark would make it permanently illegal to demolish or modify the exterior of the building without the commission's permission.

Petite Rouge Cafe co-owner Julie Pieri, who has operated a business down the block on Calhoun Street for about eight years, said the area could use a lively face-lift.

"It's nice to see that they're going to keep Ted's, and I think it would be great if they put student housing, or any housing, or a retail building there," Pieri said. "I'm down for any development."

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