

Developer's request for a 12-story building behind the Basilica moves to City Council as Hamilton County Planning Commission recommended to deny the rezoning - Jan. 12, 2026

Mayor Weston Wamp normally delegates his seat on the Hamilton County Planning Commission to an appointee, but today took his seat on the Commission in order to oppose a proposed 12-story apartment building new building behind the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul that has caused controversy.

This was the second hearing of the Hamilton County Planning Commission to consider the rezoning of the property behind the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul to allow a 12-story apartment building with no parking, less than 10 feet away from the Basilica. At the first hearing on December 8, the Planning Commission had voted to defer their decision to give the developer time to show there is sufficient parking in the area to support a new building with 266 residential units.

Prior to the meeting, the Regional Planning Agency staff had again recommended that the commissioners vote to defer the rezoning request for another 30 days in order to give the developer more time to build their case.

Fr. Carter and James Poston, Professional Engineer (and Basilica parishioner) each argued the reasons for the Basilica's opposition, and they both asked that the agency move forward to recommend that the Commission deny the rezoning request.

Fr. Carter appealed to the Council to include the sacred in the city's vision, acknowledging the good of responsible development, and the widespread public opposition to a 12-story building on this particular site. There is a petition circulating, and it already has over 2,300 signatures.

Mr. Poston summarized his three reports on the real dangers of the drilling required to stabilize a 12-story structure behind the Basilica. He pointed out that Chattanooga has unique considerations, including limestone, shale, tunnels built during the Civil War and caves, with the potential for vibrations, soil settlement, and water table alteration. He explained that the deep drilling required for a building more than 6 stories high would deliver vibrations equivalent to a 6.5 magnitude earthquake, far beyond what federal standards allow in close vicinity to a Class IV historic building: a sure threat to the Tiffany stained glass windows, the Basilica's remaining remaining east tower, the historic pipe organ, and the Basilica's foundation, all of which are priceless and irreplaceable. Mr. Poston also discussed his shadow study that revealed that the Basilica's campus would be overshadowed all four seasons, most of the day, including our daily worship services.

The Commission noted that the Nashville developer, Evelyn Capital, had again failed to appear at the meeting. His attorney, Hannah-Claire Boggess, presented information that parking within a 1/4 mile radius, but many of the parking spots they reported are only available nights and weekends, not 24/7, and are several blocks away. The developer's attorney suggested that many people who live in the new apartments would not need parking during the daytime hours.

Mayor Weston Wamp's arguments centered on the importance of the Basilica to the history of Chattanooga, and that it is worth fighting for. Having been inside the Basilica, he claimed that the natural light and structural integrity are necessities for the Basilica's existence. He moved for the Commission to deny zoning. The Commission then voted 8 to 4 to recommend that the Chattanooga City Council deny zoning.

The rezoning petition is now forwarded to the Chattanooga City Council for a hearing on February 10 at 3:30pm.

Meanwhile, Fr. Carter and the Basilica staff are planning to meet with the developer to discuss potential solutions.

More information, including Mr. Poston's three engineering studies, and the online petition opposing the 12-story building overshadowing the Basilica, is available on the Basilica's website:

<https://stspeterandpaulbasilica.com/news/proposed-12-story-building-would-overshadow-the-basilica>