



# Agenda Item #1

## Application 2025-43-CA

### DETAILS

---

**Location:**

401 Civic Center Drive

**Summary of Request:**

Approve exterior cladding panels and decorative ironwork

**Applicant (as applicable):**

Sam Matheny/Volkert, Inc.

**Property Owner:**

City of Mobile

**Historic District:**

Church Street East

**Classification:**

Non-Contributing

**Summary of Analysis:**

- The proposed building materials, as presented, are compatible with other historic buildings in Mobile’s historic districts, but also differentiate the subject structure as non-historic, as directed by the Guidelines.
- The decorative ironwork specifically uses stylized representations of several symbols of Mobile, including the fleur-de-lis, live oak trees, and azaleas.

**Report Contents:**

Property and Application History .....	2
Scope of Work .....	2
Applicable Standards .....	3
Staff Analysis.....	3
Attachments.....	4

## PROPERTY AND APPLICATION HISTORY

---

Church Street East Historic District was initially listed in the National Register in 1971 under Criteria A (historic significance) and C (architectural significance) for its local significance in the areas of architecture, education, and urban planning. The district is significant for its concentration of multiple 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural styles and because it encompasses the site of Mobile in the early 1700s. The district boundaries were expanded in 1984 and 2005.

The subject property, which recently has been subdivided to accommodate a new U.S. Army Corps of Engineers building and a six-story parking garage, is occupied by the 1964 Civic Center theater and arena and the 1973 exposition hall. The 1876 Hopkins ward map of Mobile showed the area bounded by Church, Lawrence, Canal, and Claiborne streets was densely developed with residences. The 1885 Sanborn map illustrates only the far northwest corner of the current Civic Center property, showing an area populated with one-story frame dwellings, “tenements”, and “shanties.” The entire Civic Center area is illustrated on the 1891 Sanborn map, which continues to show a densely developed residential area. Interspersed with the mostly one-story frame houses of varying size were grocery stores, barber shops, an ice cream shop, retail stores, a fire station, a church, a saloon, and a restaurant. Sanborn Maps published in 1904 and 1924, as well as the 1955 update to the 1924 map, show a similar pattern with a few exceptions. The grocery stores and barbers seem to have disappeared, and the block bounded by Madison, Claiborne, Canal, and Franklin streets had been cleared for use as a “Public Play Ground”. The two and one-half story brick Robert E. Lee Public School occupied the block bounded by Madison, Franklin, Hamilton, and Canal streets. Available aerial photographs of the Civic Center area taken in 1938, 1952, 1955, and 1960 show essentially the same development as reflected in the 1924/1955 Sanborn map.

By the time of the next available aerial photograph, 1967, more than seven blocks had been leveled to make way for the Civic Center. The only structure remaining was the public school bounded by Madison, Franklin, Hamilton, and Canal streets. The school disappeared by the time of the next available aerial photograph, taken in 1980. Demolition of the 1960s Civic Center building was completed in early 2025.

According to the vertical files of the Historic Development Department, the larger parcel, of which the subject complex was part until recently, has previously appeared eight (8) times before the Architectural Review Board (ARB). In November 1983, the ARB approved placement of a commemorative plaque on a brick base at the corner of Claiborne Street and Auditorium Drive (now Civic Center Drive). The installation of a 100’ telecommunications tower and construction of a one-story 10’x16’ accessory structure on a small parcel to the immediate north of the current site of a new office building was approved by the ARB in July 1998. The ARB approved the construction of two steel and glass bus shelters located along the Lawrence Street side of the parcel was approved in October 2009. The ARB approved construction of a six-story office building at the southeast corner of the Civic Center site over three meetings from August 2022 through April 2023. A six-level City parking garage was approved by the ARB in July 2023. In June of 2024, the demolition of the Civic Center Complex (including the theater, arena/auditorium, and exposition hall) was granted approval by the ARB. In October 2024, the ARB approved conceptual design for a new Civic Arena, with the caveat that additional design details – such as the cladding panels and decorative ironwork – would return to the Board for approval at a later date.

## SCOPE OF WORK

---

### Materials

1. The exterior walls of the main concourse and suite levels would be clad in cementitious panels laid horizontally.
  - a. Each cementitious panel will feature an irregular pattern of “blocks” of varying size, texture, and tones within the same neutral color palette.
  - b. The four panel types are as follows:
    - i. FC01 – Patina Inline P545 (with horizontal striations)

- ii. FC02 – Patina Original P545
  - iii. FC03 – Patina Rough P545
  - iv. FC04 – Patin Inline P545 (with vertical striations)
- 2. The terrace balustrade would consist of steel architectural arched panels.
  - a. Panel color: Solanum Steel
  - b. Panel fretwork pattern: a custom pattern of incorporating a fleur-de-lis and oak leaf motif, both nods to Mobile’s historic architecture and native live oak trees.
  - c. The arched ironwork screens would be assembled using hexagonal, triangular, and square modular panels. Modular panels would come in a set number of different designs that would repeat in a regular pattern across the arcade screen.

## APPLICABLE STANDARDS (*Design Review Guidelines for Mobile’s Historic Districts*)

---

1. **7.0** In order to assure that historic resources are appreciated as authentic contributing buildings, it is important that new buildings be distinguishable from them. Therefore, new construction should appear as a product of its own time, while also being compatible with the historically significant features of the area...Building materials and finishes for new structures...should contribute to the visual continuity of the district and appear similar to those seen traditionally.

## STAFF ANALYSIS

---

The subject property is a non-contributing site within the Church Street East Historic District. The application under review seeks approval for cementitious exterior cladding panels and decorative ironwork, as required by the Board’s conditional approval of the design for a municipal arena in October 2024. As part of the October 2024 decision, the Board approved the use and placement of cementitious cladding panels and ironwork screens.

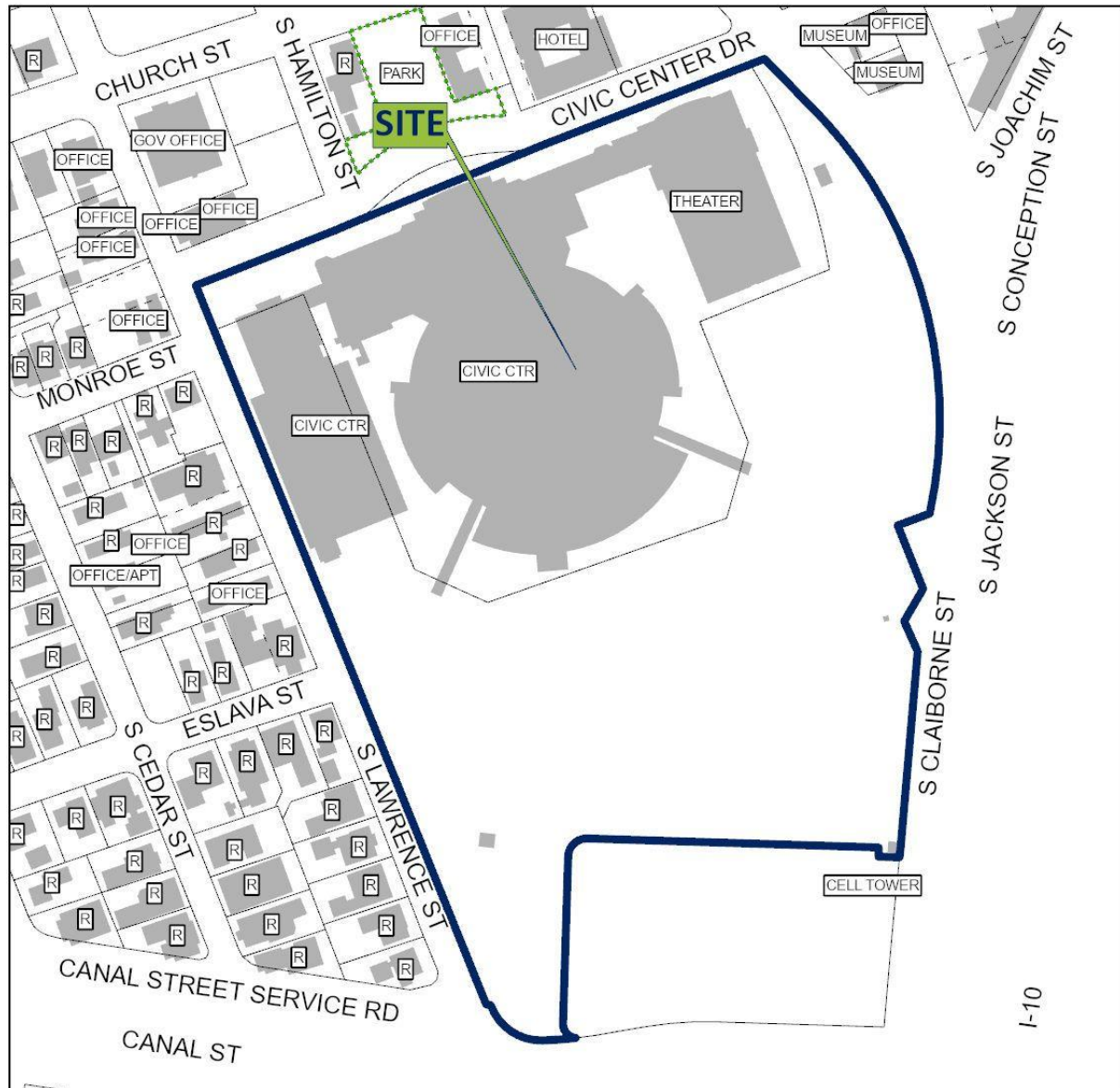
The Guidelines call for new construction projects to be distinguishable from existing contributing buildings and a “product of their own time.” However, the Guidelines also state that new construction should be “compatible with the historically significant features of the area.” On the question of modern construction materials, the Guidelines specify that building materials and finishes should “contribute to the visual continuity of the district and appear similar to those seen traditionally.” The proposed designs for the cementitious cladding panels and ironwork screen satisfy both directives by referencing Mobile’s natural and architectural landscape while remaining obviously modern.

The cementitious panels echo architectural building trends from various eras of Mobile’s history. The pattern of long horizontal blocks is a nod to the brick cladding used elsewhere in the building. It also references historic brick building found throughout Church Street East. However, instead of a repetitive bond pattern of uniform sized units, the pattern features a random pattern of elongated horizontal blocks of various sizes. This references both stone ashlar – perhaps the earliest form of masonry construction – and the irregular Roman brick veneer found on Mid-Century Modern buildings in the district, such as 210 Government Street and 112 S Broad Street. The mix of textures on the cementitious panels creates visual interest and breaks up the long expanses of windowless walls required for a large arena structure.

Similarly, the decorative iron panels reference Mobile’s architectural, cultural, and natural heritage while remaining decidedly modern in design. The staff have previously noted that “the decorative metal balustrade, which would enclose the terrace on the main concourse level, is suggestive of the cast iron galleries common in Mobile’s historic architecture.” This application adds to that a modular pattern of stylized oak leaves, azalea blooms, and fleur-de-lis. The fleur-de-lis are a clear reference to Mobile’s beginnings as a French colonial town and its identity as the birthplace of Mardi Gras. The stylized live oak leaves and azalea blossoms are less overt references to two popular symbols of Mobile. The pattern itself is a modern adaptation of the highly decorative ironwork found on nearby historic residences, including those at 359 and 407 Church Street.

## Site Location – 1558 Luling Street

## ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD VICINITY MAP



APPLICATION NUMBER 1 DATE 6/5/2024  
 APPLICANT Sam Matheny/Volkert, Inc. on behalf of the City of Mobile  
 PROJECT Demolish the Civic Center complex (theater, arena, and exposition hall buildings)





## Site Photos



**1. View of site, looking N**



**2. Decorative ironwork, 359 Church Street**



**3. Decorative ironwork, 407 Church Street**



**4. Decorative ironwork, 503 Government Street**

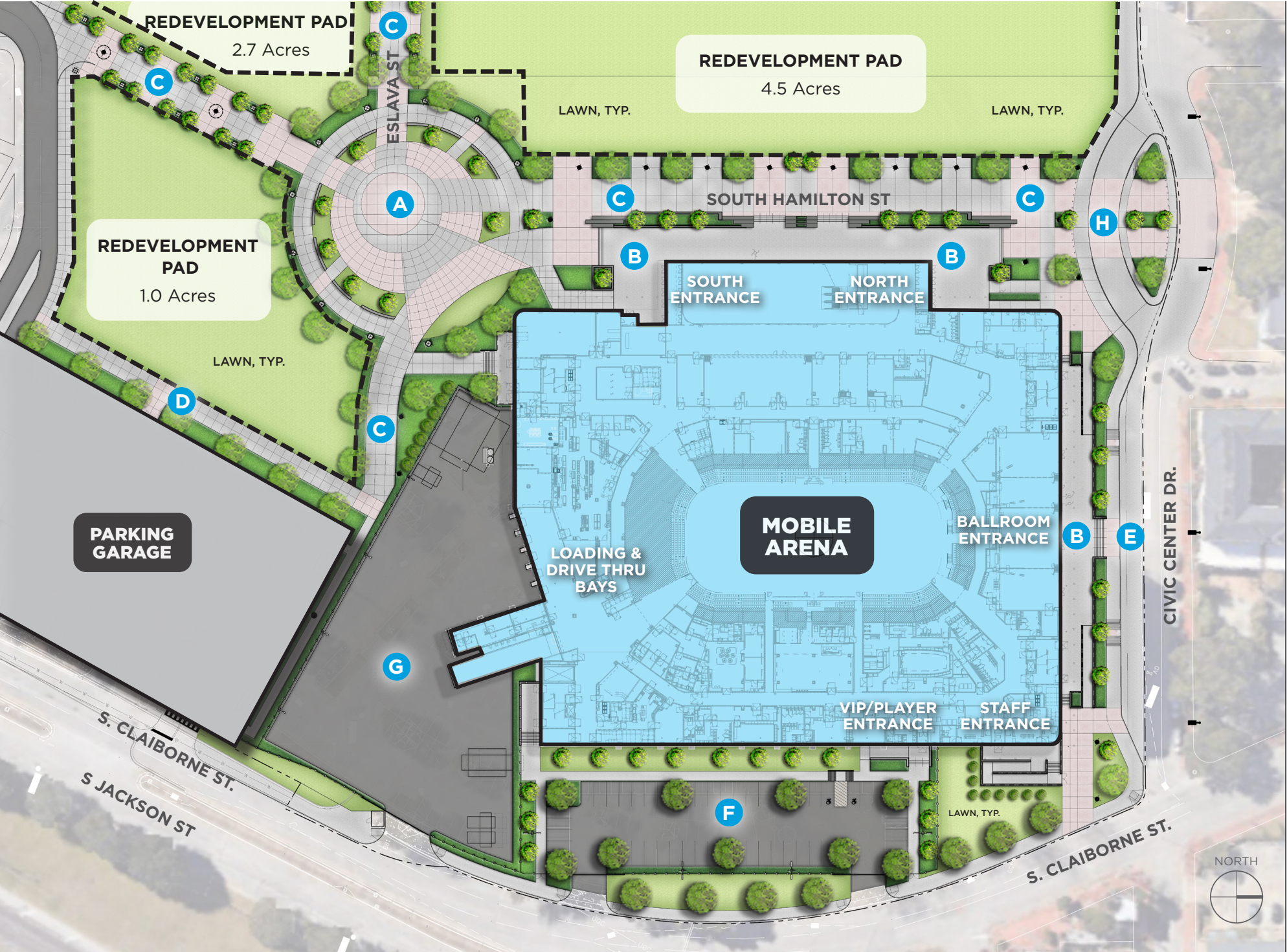


**4. Roman brick cladding, 112 S Broad Street**



**5. Detail of roman brick cladding, 112 S Broad Street**





MATERIALS  
LEGEND

	ASPHALT		CONCRETE - GREY
	COLORED CONCRETE		SHRUB/GROUNDCOVER PLANTING BEDS

LANDSCAPE  
LEGEND

	SHADE TREE (6" CALIPER MIN.)		ORNAMENTAL TREE (45 GAL. MIN.)		EVERGREEN TREE (12' TALL MIN.)
--	---------------------------------	--	-----------------------------------	--	-----------------------------------

A

PUBLIC EVENT PLAZA

B

RAISED ARENA ENTRY PLAZA

C

PEDESTRIAN PROMENADE & DRIVE LANE

D

PARKING GARAGE WALK

E

FLEX PARALLEL PARKING / TEMPORARY DROP-OFF

F

PLAYER PARKING - ±55 SPACES

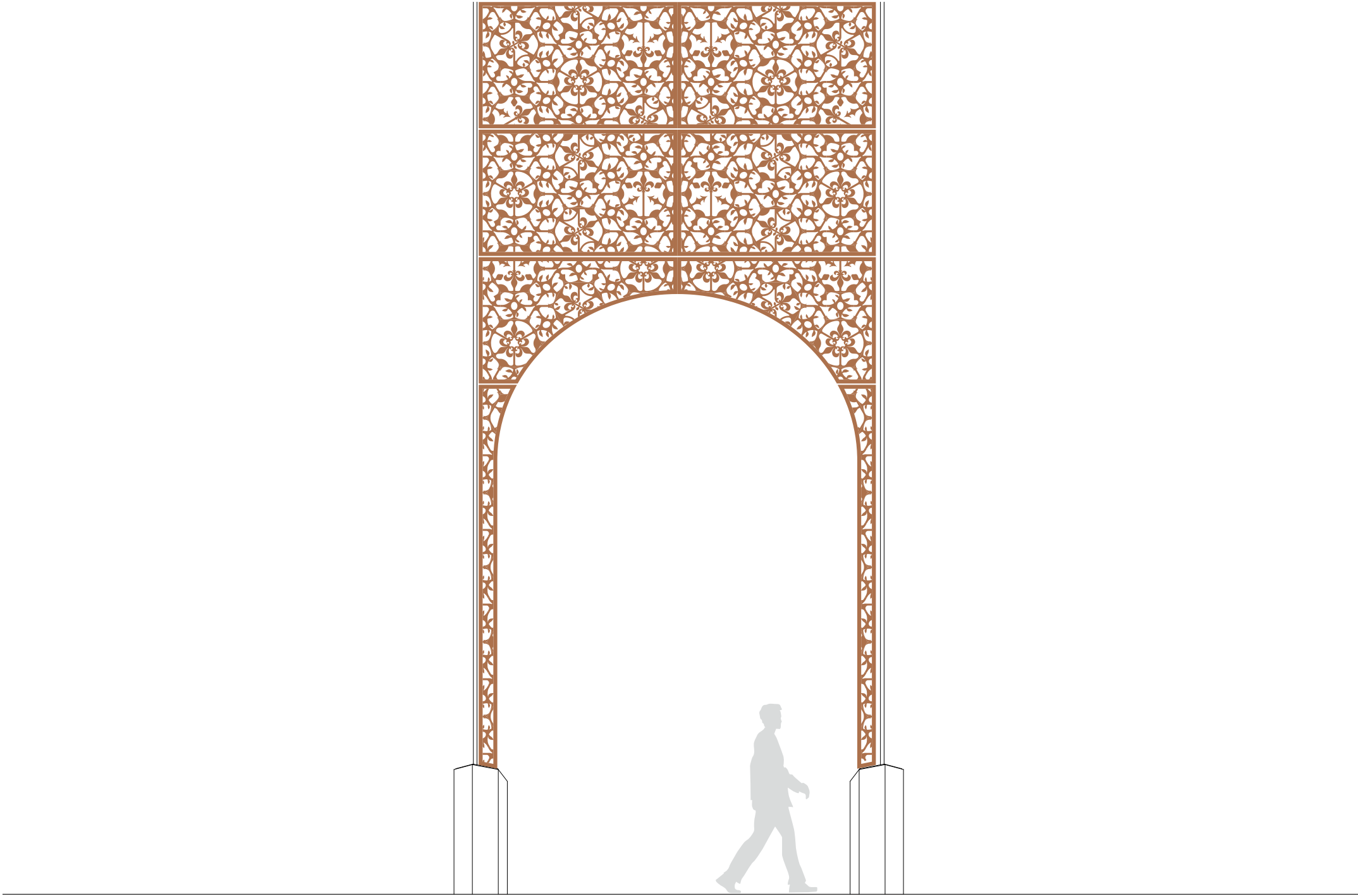
G

SERVICE/MARSHALING YARD

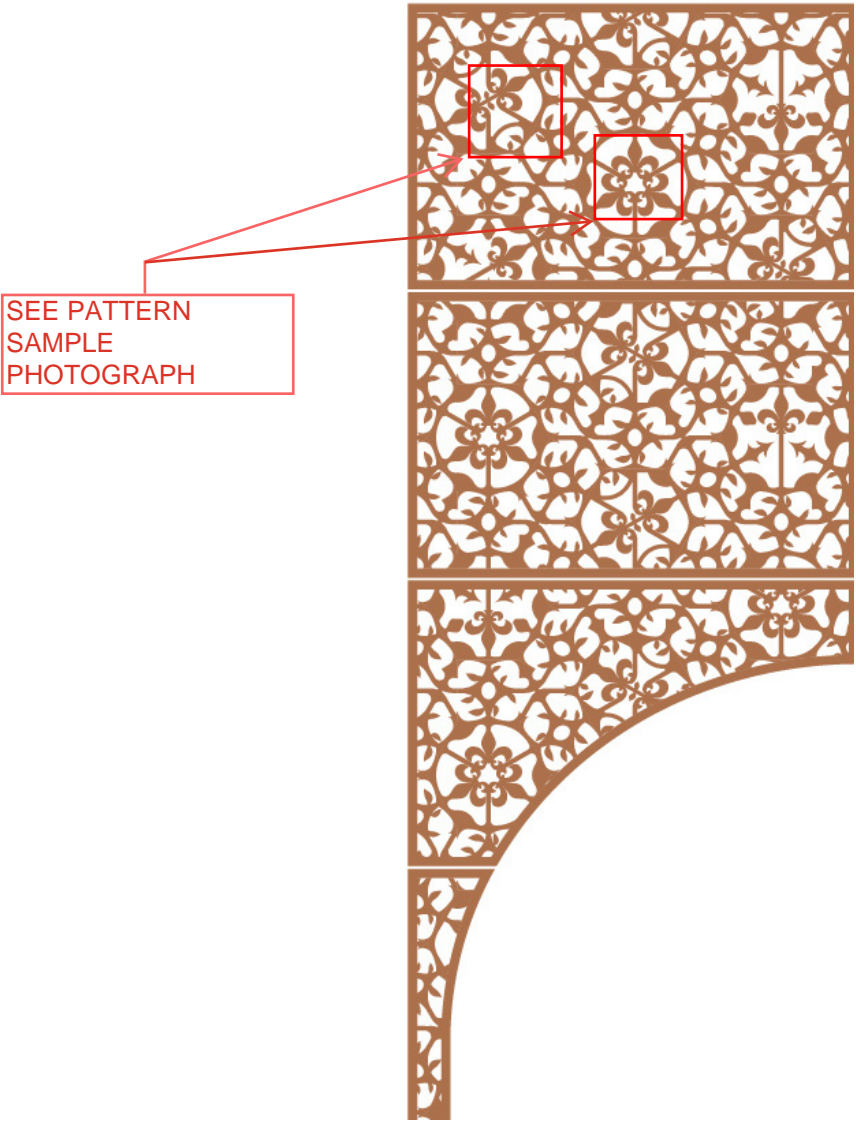
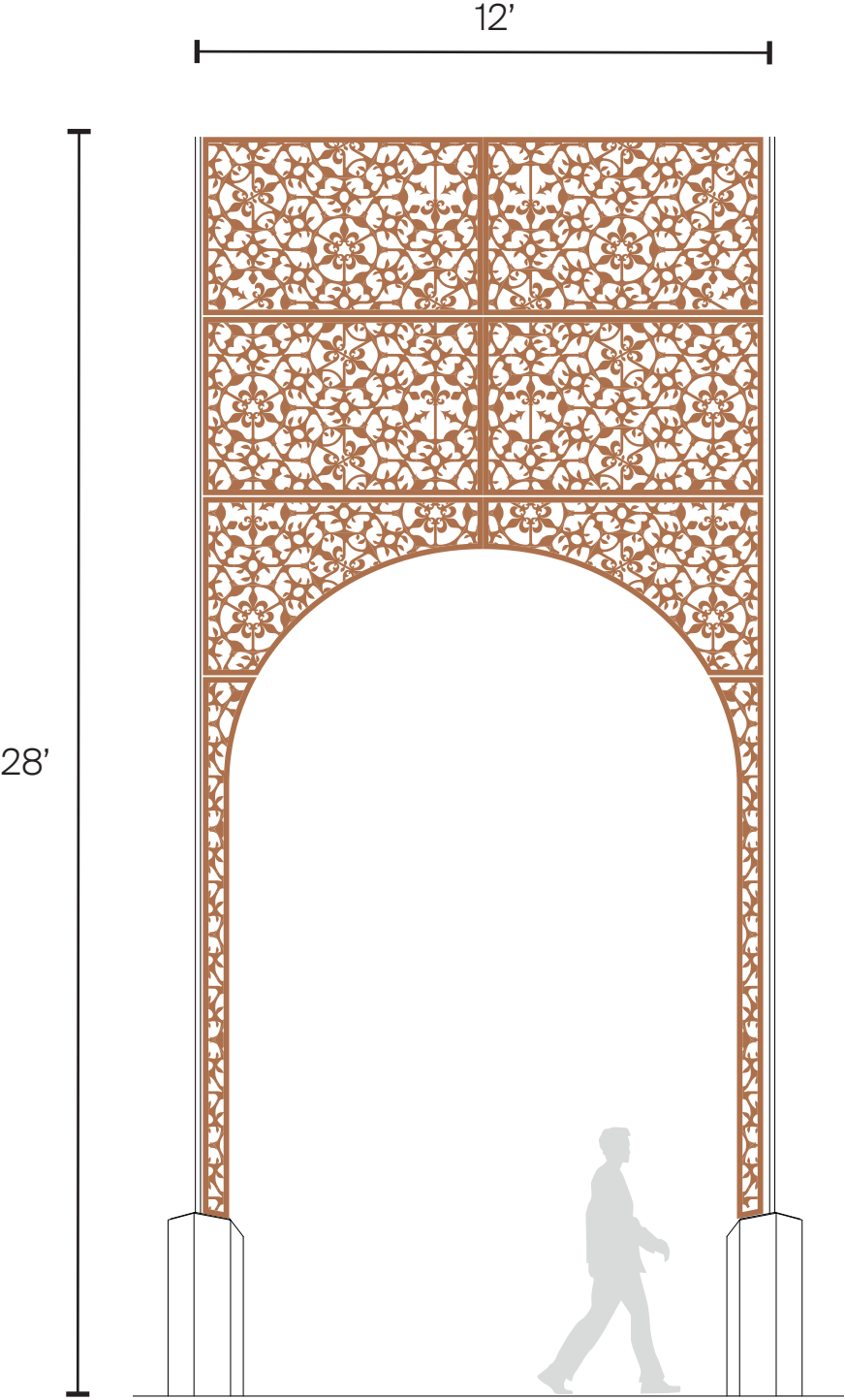
H

EVENT DROP-OFF PLAZA / TURN-AROUND

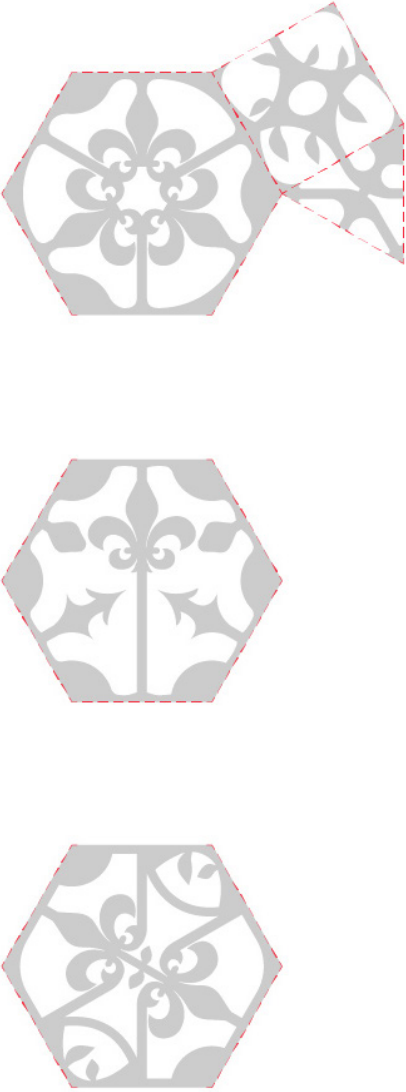




Facade Screen | Ironwork Screen



Panel Detail



Module Detail










# MOBILE ARENA CEMENTITIOUS PANEL PATTERN

### Symbol key

**MANUFACTURER: SWISSPEARL**

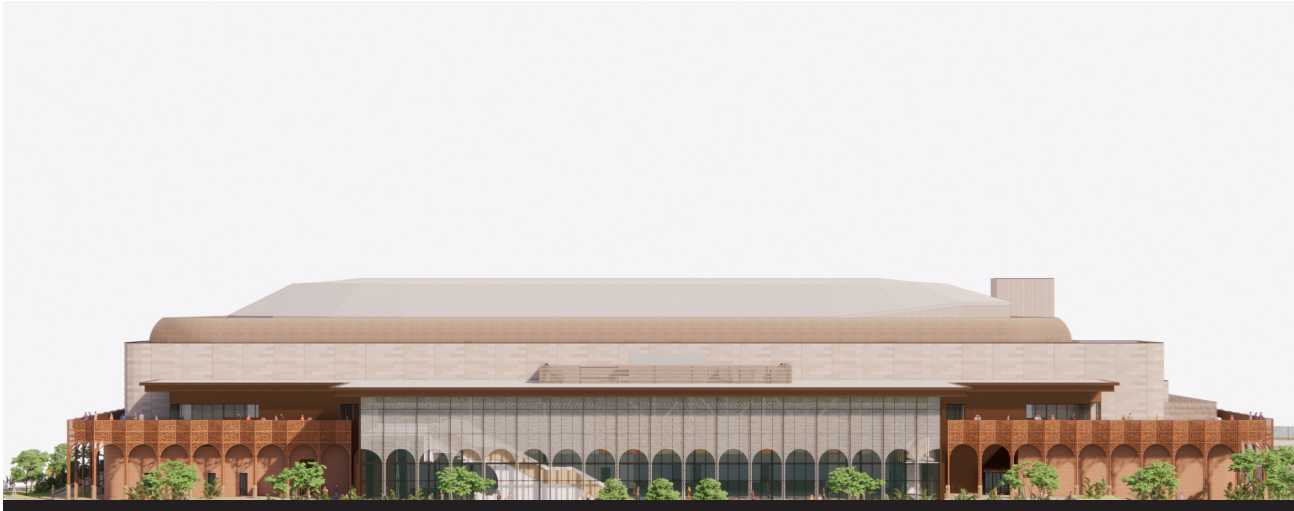
FC01 - Patina Inline P545 (horizontal orientation)

FC02 - Patina Original P545

 FC03 - Patina Rough P545

 FC04 - Patina Inline P545 (vertical orientation)

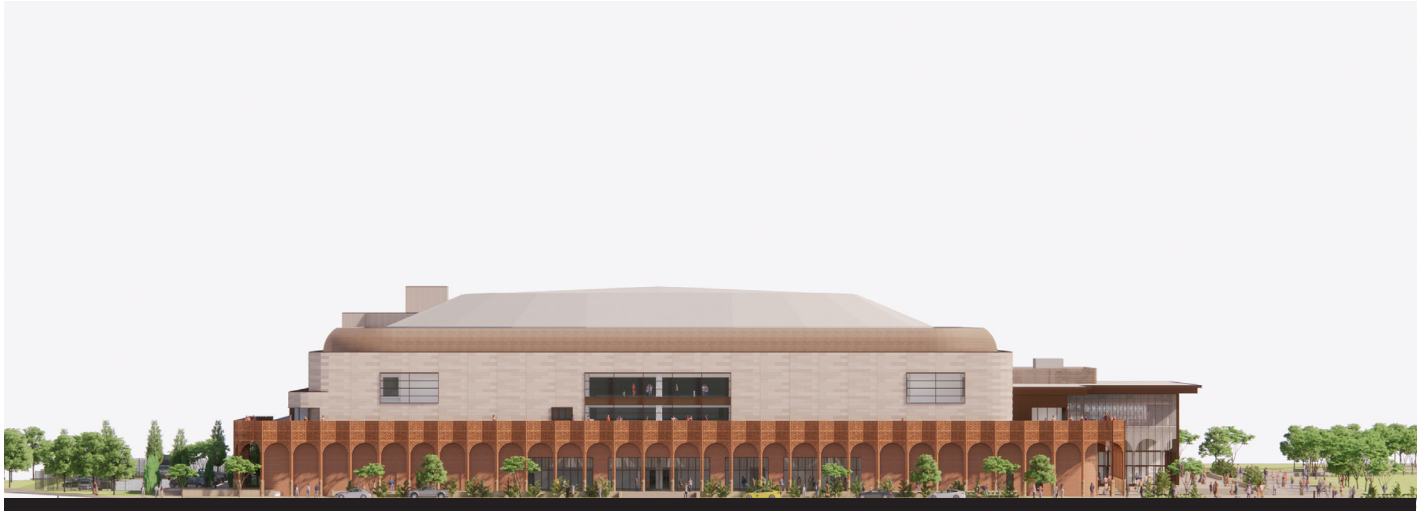




WEST ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION



SOUTH ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION



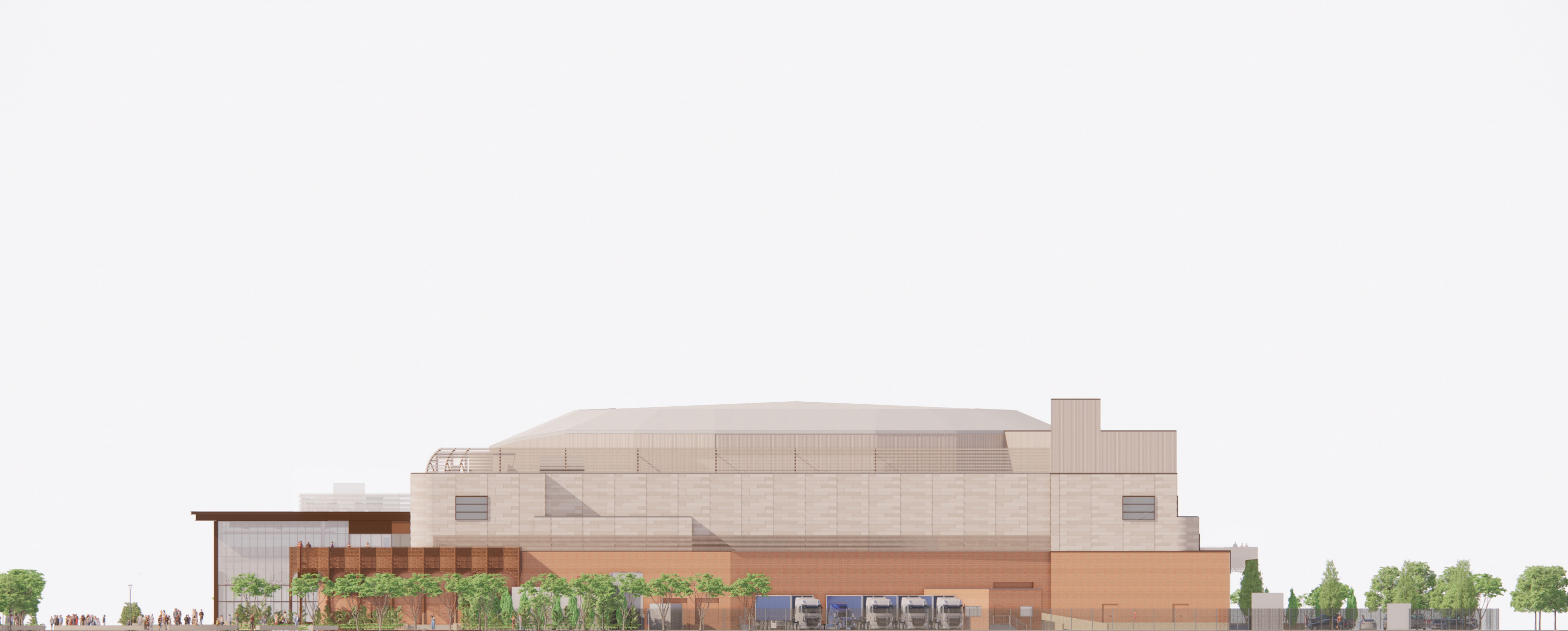


NORTH ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION





SOUTH ELEVATION



















