

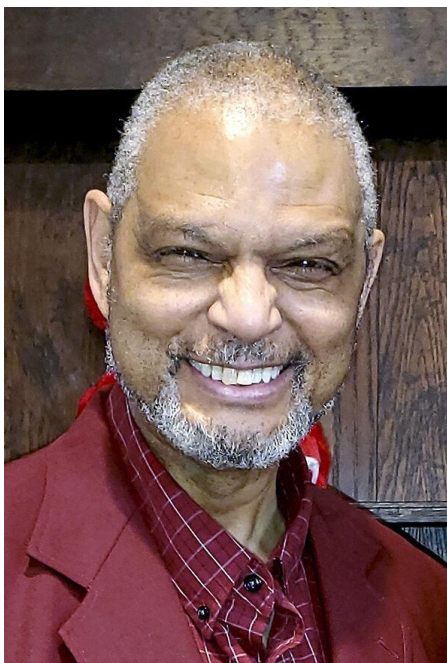
https://www.pmg-sc.com/the_lancaster_news/gay-st-er-center-faces-major-financial-setback/article_6ccbf852-6a61-51fa-be98-528ecfac29e7.html

Gay St. ER center faces major financial setback

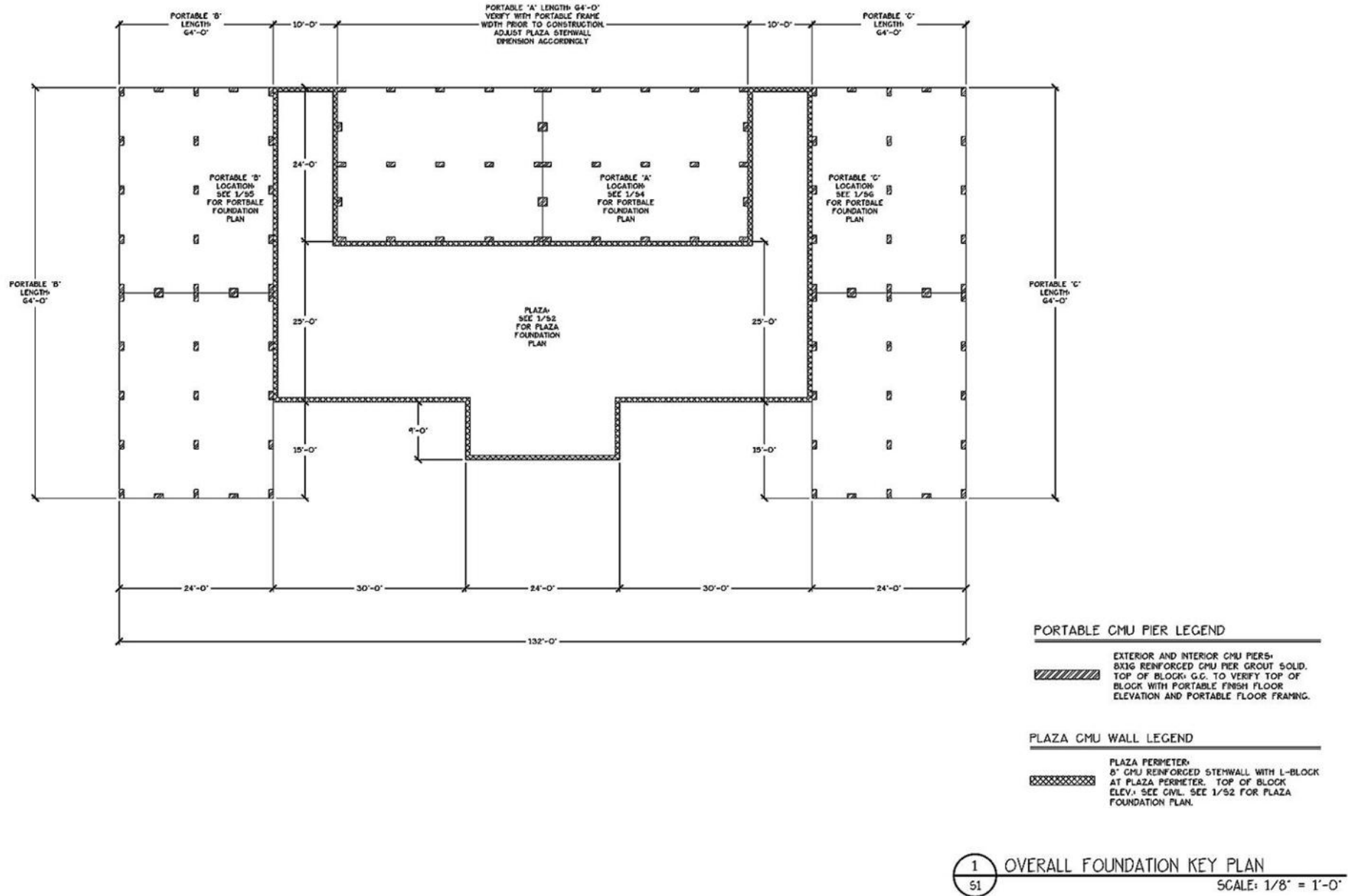
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Eddie Boykin



This sketch shows the layout of the three modular buildings that will comprise the Greater Victory Equipping Resource (ER) Center. The Rev. Eddie Boykin, pastor of Greater Frazier AME Zion Church, is spearheading the Gay Street project, which has been in the works since 2017.

Eddie Boykin

A local pastor is asking the city of Lancaster to give him a break on permit fees for a resource center it plans to open on East Gay Street.

The Rev. Eddie Boykin, pastor of Greater Frazier AME Zion Church, has been leading the work on the Greater Victory Equipping Resource (ER) Center since 2017.

During citizen's comments at the Jan. 10 Lancaster City Council meeting, Boykin said his permit fees had increased by over \$3,000 in one year.

“Our church is also responsible for building and establishing the Greater Victory ER Center over on Gay Street,” Boykin said. “We are working very, very hard to connect with local agencies about dealing with the issues that are here in Lancaster, South Carolina.”

The ER Center is in the middle of the Promise Neighborhood, a local partnership spearheaded by Partners for Youth to provide wraparound services to children and families in the Clinton Elementary School attendance zone. The Promise Neighborhood received a \$24 million federal grant over five years to improve children's educational success by addressing poverty, restoring community pride and making sure they have the same opportunities as others in the county.

The ER Center is not monetarily tied to the Promise Neighborhood, but Boykin said his church's project is trying to bring solutions to some of the issues within the neighborhood.

The church bought three modular buildings and is revamping them for the center, which it hopes to open this year. Once complete, the ER Center will provide about 4,500 square feet of ministry space along the Gay Street corridor, which Boykin previously described as “the heart of Black Lancaster.”

Boykin started by thanking the council for its devotion and continued support of his project, as the city is his second largest contributor.

“I will continue to come to you to look for help and to look for support,” he said.

However, five years into the project, Boykin said it has left him with “some increasing and increasing costs.”

“One of those costs came from the city,” he said. “The city permit system changed (from) when I started this project in 2017, and the city permit fees changed. What I thought was going to be maybe \$1,000 or \$1,500 to get my permits turned into a \$4,500 deal.”

Boykin said it took until last July to raise the money for the first permit fee increase, and by the time he had the money, the permit fees had increased again.

“I would love for the city to at least consider — I need some of that money back,” Boykin said. “I don’t know if that’s possible, but I want to continue to come (to the council), and I know I’m going to continue to get support from you all.”

Lancaster City Administrator Flip Hutfles said the permit price increase is “just the cost of business.” He said part of the fees cover salary, staff time, equipment and paperwork, and the permit fees have always been charged per building or structure, not per project.

“I wanted you all to think about it, because I’m broke now, literally,” Boykin said. “We spent every dime getting the buildings moved. I just wanted to put that before you, because I believe this city cares about what we’re bringing to this neighborhood.”

When the new permit policy came to Boykin’s attention around July, he said that instead of paying a fee for the entire project, he now had to pay a permit fee for each of the three modular buildings as separate entities instead of one building on the property.

Lancaster Building Official Louis Streater said the city reviews its fee schedule annually, as a part of the budgeting process. He said that since Boykin’s project has been in progress for six years, “obviously the fees are going to change at some point.”

“We did a site prep; we had to submit a permit to do a site prep. We have been talking about this project for all these years, so I don’t know how it became three individual projects, as opposed to one project,” Boykin said.

“I’m not real sure why a permit has to change, because a permit is paperwork,” he said. “It doesn’t cost the city any more money; it doesn’t cost them anything.”

Boykin said it is “ridiculous” for the city to charge \$4,500 for a church with just 30 people. He is looking to increase fundraising efforts through multiple avenues, but said the permit fee increase is a major setback for the project.

“The permit fee is \$1,500 per modular unit, and at the site they have three modular units, so we charged him \$1,500 per unit,” Streater said. “If he would have obtained those permits about five or seven years ago, whenever he started the project, of course, he probably would have paid the \$1,000, which is what the fees were at that time.”