

# CRAIN'S GRAND RAPIDS BUSINESS

[Cuban restaurant, 17 apartments planned for Roosevelt Park neighborhood](#)

[Kate Carlson](#) -

July 3, 2024



*First-time developer Juan Lopez plans a new Cuban restaurant named Palmas, along with 17 apartments, at 1516 Cesar E. Chavez Ave. SW in Grand Rapids. Credit: Maxam Architecture*

A first-time developer is working to open an authentic Cuban restaurant, along with 17 apartment units, in Grand Rapids' Roosevelt Park neighborhood.

Juan Lopez said his Latino background and connection with the majority-hispanic community of Roosevelt Park drove his interest in developing a project in that area, he said.

Lopez, who is a contractor and owner of Exclusive Finish Solutions LLC, purchased 1516 Cesar E. Chavez Ave. SW for \$210,000 in September 2021.

Lopez was nearly finished building out a restaurant in the space that his mother would own and operate when he realized adding apartment units to the building would be the "best option" for the project, he said. Lopez initially aimed to buy the building in 2019, but the whole project was delayed by financing hurdles that were exacerbated by COVID-19, he said.

**Keep up with all things West Michigan business. [Sign up for our free newsletters today.](#)**

“I’ve been in the trades for some time now and I’ve had the spectrum of working as a subcontractor being out in the field, to dealing with a lot of the organization and managing projects,” Lopez said. “I believe I have the capability to take it a step further.”

Lopez and his family came to the U.S. in the late-1990s, and his mother, Martiza Lopez, always had a passion for cooking. This led the mother-and-son duo to pursue opening a restaurant.

The small sit-down Cuban restaurant will be named “Palmas,” and will also rely on takeout, Lopez said. They also hope to add outdoor seating in the future, he added.



*Lopez plans to add two stories to the existing building. Credit: Google Street View*

Lopez said his mother specializes in making guava pastries, which he described as similar to scones but contain fillings such as guava, coconut and cheese.

The Grand Rapids Planning Commission will consider site plans for the project at its July 11 meeting. Lopez is working with Cella Building Co. to renovate the basement and first floor of the building and construct two new upper stories. Grand Rapids-based Maxam Architecture is designing the project.

The project will be all-electric and comply with GR2030 District energy efficient standards, said Peter Skornia, Cella Building Co. president.

Site plans call for turning the basement of the building into two apartment units, as well as restaurant storage space. The first floor of the building is set to contain the 1,652-square-foot restaurant and two one-bedroom ADA-compliant apartment units. A common area, bike storage room, mailroom and the restaurant are also planned on the first floor. Two stories of new construction are set to include six apartment units each.

Site plans call for four studio apartments, 12 one-bedroom units, and one two-bedroom unit.

No new parking would be added on site, with spaces provided through an agreement with neighboring properties.

“I have been in the construction industry for some time so I’ve learned to appreciate remodeling and am just very happy I can apply that to not just something I own, but something in the area that I want to improve,” Lopez said. “I just want to proactively build our communities up and just make a better place for the community to enjoy.”