

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

**FROM:** Maxine Brown-Roberts, Project Manager  
*JL* Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review

**DATE:** September 18, 2020

**SUBJECT:** BZA Case 20312 – To allow an ADA-accessible elevator in the rear yard of the Ross Elementary School at 1730 R Street, NW.

**I. OFFICE OF PLANNING RECOMMENDATION**

The District Department of General Services (“DGS”) (“applicant”) is in the process of renovating the Ross Elementary School, including the addition of an ADA-accessible elevator that extends into the rear yard. To accommodate the proposal, the Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the requested special exception relief:

- Subtitle F § 4906.1, rear yard requirement for a public education building (15 ft. required; 15 feet required; 14.4 ft. existing; 6.38 ft. proposed) pursuant to Subtitle F § 4910.1 and Subtitle X § 901.2.

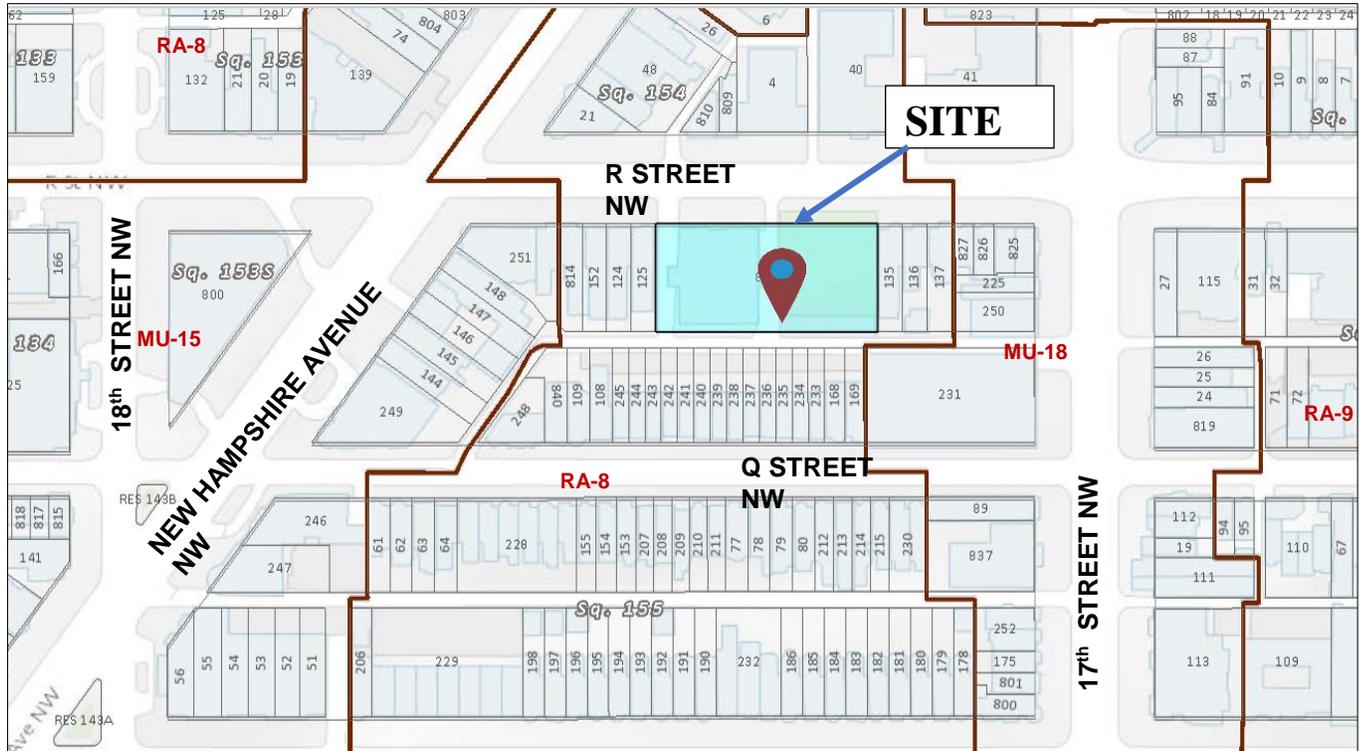
The applicant has also requested design flexibility with respect to the exterior and interior of the school building as may be recommended by the Historic Preservation Review Board and the Commission of Fine Arts, provided the changes to do not increase the requested relief or create new areas of relief.

**II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION**

Address	1730 R Street, NW
Applicant	Holland & Knight on behalf of DC Dept. of General Services
Legal Description	Square 155, Lot 821
Ward, ANC	Ward 2, ANC-2B
Zone	RA-8
Historic Districts	Dupont Circle Historic District
Lot Characteristics	Rectangular shaped lot abutting a 15-foot wide alley to the rear of the school.
Existing Development	The Ross Elementary School and school playground.
Adjacent Properties	To the east, west and south are residential row dwellings while to the north are five-story apartment buildings.

Surrounding Neighborhood Character	The neighborhood is predominantly a mixture of row dwellings and apartment buildings, with some office buildings along 17 <sup>th</sup> Street, NW to the east and New Hampshire Avenue, NW. to the west.
Proposed Development	The school is to undergo renovations which includes the installation of an ADA-accessible elevator at the rear of the building.

**III. LOCATION MAP**



**IV. OFFICE OF PLANNING ANALYSIS**

Special Exception Relief from Subtitle F § 4906.1 pursuant to Subtitle F § 4910.1 and Subtitle X § 901.2. for a reduced rear yard on a school building is required.

Under Subtitle F § 4906.1, a public education building requires a rear yard of 4 inches per foot of vertical distance from the mean finished grade at the middle of the rear of the structure to the highest point of the main roof or parapet wall, but not less than 15 feet. Based on the height of this building, that calculation would be 14.89 feet. Therefore, a minimum rear yard of 15 feet is required in this case. The existing rear yard is 14.14 feet and the proposed ADA-elevator shaft would extend approximately 7.76 feet into the rear yard, leaving approximately 6.31 feet of rear yard space.

Ross Elementary school is undergoing renovations and an elevator is required to provide ADA access to all floors and improve the accessibility for handicapped students. The applicant stated that multiple locations were considered but were eliminated. Placing the elevator on the west side of the school building was unfavorable, as it would be located on the property lot line and would require a

reconfiguration of the existing internal stairway, while the west side was eliminated as the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) was not supportive of that location. The rear of the building is considered to be the best location in terms of integration with the existing structure and the cost.

Subtitle F § 4910.1 allows exceptions to the development standards for public schools as a special exception if the requirements of Subtitle X, Chapter 9 are met.

**i. Is the proposal in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps?**

The RA zones permit multi-family residential developments along with compatible institutional uses such as schools. In the RA-8 zone, Subtitle F, Chapter 49 public schools provides special development standards to address compatibility between public school buildings and residential uses. Subtitle F § 4910, allows for special exception relief from the development standards.

The intent of a rear yard along with lot occupancy and side yards is to allow for adequate space between the uses as well as light and air circulation as the intuitional uses are often larger than adjacent residential buildings. The proposed rear yard would be reduced for the elevator, but not eliminated and most of the building width would maintain the current rear yard. The remaining rear yard and the alley would continue to provide adequate space between the residences across the alley and the school building and would therefore be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map.

**ii. Would the proposal appear to tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property?**

The elevator shaft would extend 7.76 feet into the rear yard with 6.31 feet of rear yard remaining. The elevator shaft should not affect residences to the east and west of the property and would not be viewed from R Street. The school is separated from the buildings to the south by a 15-foot alley in addition the rear yards of those houses. The elevator shaft would not affect the entire rear yard as the projection would only affect 10.66 feet of the approximately 70.24 feet width of the building. This small extension of the elevator shaft into the rear yard should not cast any significant shadows over what currently exist. The elevator shaft would not be accessed from the rear yard and therefore should not cause additional activity in the rear of the building over what currently exist. In addition, there are no windows or clear glass on the elevator that would allow additional views into the rear yard of the adjacent residences over what currently exist. Further, the elevator would not lead to a significant expansion of the building. Therefore, the reduction in the rear yard would not tend to adversely affect the use of the neighboring properties.

**V. COMMENTS OF OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES**

No comments from other District agencies were submitted to the record as of the writing of this report.

**VI. HISTORIC DISTRICT**

The building is within the Dupont Circle Historic District and is also within the Commission of Fine Arts jurisdiction and is being reviewed by both.

**VII. ANC COMMENTS**

The property is within ANC-2B. At Exhibit 34 is a letter from ANC-2B in support.

**VIII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS TO DATE**

At Exhibit 12 are letters of support from persons and organizations connected to the school.