

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND POLICY ADMINISTRATION

TO: Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) *KK*
FROM: Karina Ricks, Associate Director
DATE: October 31, 2008
RE: BZA Case 17831 - Request for area variances at 14th and U Streets, NW
(southwest corner)

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APPLICATION

Georgetown Strategic Capital, the applicant, has requested zoning relief to construct a multi-family residential building with ground level commercial uses on several lots located at the southwest corner of 14th and U Streets, NW. The proposed building would contain 224 dwelling units and over 19,000 square feet of ground floor commercial/retail space. The project also includes 2 levels of underground parking with a total of 147 spaces, and a proposed 24 foot parking garage entrance off of 14th Street, NW.

RECOMMENDATION IN BRIEF

DDOT supports this project, and recognizes that it will bring vitality to this important intersection. However, DDOT opposes the proposed garage entrance on 14th Street, NW. The applicant has not proven that a garage entrance from the 30 foot alley is infeasible, which is required as part of the DDOT Curbcut Policy. DDOT remains concerned about the impact of a garage entrance on pedestrian safety and comfort, bicycle safety, and transit and roadway efficiency of this major arterial. In addition, DDOT opposes using the southbound travel lane of 14th Street, NW for the loading of large trucks.

DDOT ANALYSIS

The traffic impact study conducted for the above-mentioned development was presented to DDOT on September 19, 2008. In addition to the major role of a TIS in the PUD process, the particular issue of the placement of the parking garage entrance was to be analyzed, either in the alley or along 14th Street. DDOT tasked Gorove Slade and Associates to show that placing the garage entrance in the alley would be infeasible, making the placement of the garage entrance on 14th Street necessary. In addition, safety and comfort of pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as the efficient functioning of the

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transit and road network would not allowed to be compromised if the curbcut were to be placed on 14th Street.

This report does not show that placing the garage entrance in the alley is infeasible. The level of congestion in the alley is expected to increase somewhat, and one management solution proposed to reduce the impact is to convert Waverly Terrace (the 15' wide portions that connect to U and T Streets) to one-way operation. However, there was no analysis of the existing traffic volume that is generated by the site in the alley. This may be substantial, considering the Domino's Pizza delivery service is situated in the alley. The report states that the small volumes of vehicle trips using the 24-foot parking garage entrance along 14th Street will not create a negative impact on the sidewalk. Likewise, DDOT does not expect this volume of traffic to have a negative impact on the alley system.

Placing a curbcut on 14th Street would require the approval of a public space permit by the Public Space Committee. The curbcut would be considered new according to DDOT's proposed policy on curbcuts, published for comments on September 19, 2008 and republished on October 17, 2008, in title 24 of the DCMR, chapter 12:

- 1201.6 The public space permit expires when the activities listed below occur on the property
 - (c) Substantial improvements, in excess of fifty percent (50%) of the building's value, are made to the principal building.

Because the applicant has not shown that a garage entrance through the alley is infeasible, the parking garage entrance requiring a curbcut on 14th Street, NW would be in violation of section 1201.4:

- 1201.4 The Director may grant a public Space permit for a curb cut when the applicant for the permit submits to the Director information that demonstrates that **there is no alternative way to access on-site parking or a loading dock through existing or proposed paved alley**, or there is special need as provided in 1202.

Installing a 24'-wide curbcut on 14th Street may result in a loss of up to five on-street parking spaces, depending on the proximity to bulbouts, etc. On-street parking, in addition to being an important buffer between pedestrians and traffic, is also an important source of revenue for DDOT.

The report only explores one-way operations as management solutions. Other solutions to reduce the impact of vehicles in the alley were not proposed, such as aggressive Transportation Demand Management strategies (i.e. carsharing spaces, SmartBike and Zipcar memberships for residents, etc.) or reducing the number of off-street parking spaces, were not explored. This is especially germane considering the proximity to the U Street/Cardozo/African America Civil War Memorial Metro Station one block away, the extensive bus service on both 14th Street and U Street, the SmartBike location across the street at the Reeves Center, bike lanes along 14th and T Streets, and the excellent

pedestrian network. Councilmember Jim Graham also has tentative plans for a circulator-style bus to connect McPherson Square, Columbia Heights, and Adams Morgan. By contrast, strategies such as promoting monthly parking passes encourages the impact of personal vehicles.

In addition, DDOT has serious concerns about pedestrian and bicycle safety, as well as impact on transit on 14th Street, a major arterial. No quantitative analysis, including pedestrian volumes or level of service, has been provided. DDOT concerns include:

- Curbcuts in high pedestrian areas may pose significant safety hazards, even with low-volume vehicle activity.
- Garage entrances detract from the aesthetic comfort of the pedestrian environment.
- Garage entrances along 20-foot wide sidewalks encourage vehicles to block the sidewalk while waiting for a gap in traffic.
- Vehicles turning left into the garage pose a significant safety risk for pedestrians because of the speed and urgency needed to turn in the gap in on-coming traffic.
- Vehicles waiting to make a right turn into the garage will negatively impact southbound bicycle traffic and transit service.

Finally, accommodating large trucks in the SB lane along 14th Street is unacceptable. This absolutely may not be the official loading management plan in any street in the District, especially along a major arterial with high volumes of bus and bicycle activity. For deliveries by large trucks that cannot be accommodated through the loading zone in the alley, the property manager or developer will need to schedule these deliveries for times when the curbspace will be empty.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

DDOT supports this development and sees it as an important asset to the neighborhood and community. However DDOT opposes the garage entrance on 14th Street. The applicant has not shown that a garage entrance off of the alley is infeasible, and that a garage entrance on 14th Street is necessary. DDOT has many concerns of the impact of a garage entrance on 14th Street, including safety and comfort of pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as the efficient functioning of the transit and road network. DDOT is committed to building and maintaining a sustainable urban transportation system that can accommodate continued growth and development within the District while at the same time improve safety and mobility, and maintain neighborhood quality of life. It is a high priority of DDOT to accomplish this by acknowledging the urban nature of the District; managing our major roadways and public space to encourage an ever increasing number of trips to be made on foot, bike or transit; minimizing conflict points between modes; and managing the number of arterial access points to facilitate person through-put.

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