


GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



Policy, Planning and Sustainability Administration

MEMORANDUM

TO: Lloyd Jordan
Chairperson
Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Samuel Zimbabwe 
Associate Director

DATE: June 3, 2014

SUBJECT: BZA Case No. 18772 - 627 H Street, NW

APPLICATION

MR Gallery Square, LLC (the "Applicant"), pursuant to 11 DCMR §3104.1 and 3103.2, is seeking a variance from the parking (§2101.1), loading (§2201.1), and court (§776) requirements and a special exception from the roof structure (§770.6 and §411) and rear yard (§774) requirements to construct a new hotel with ground floor retail in the DD/C-3-C District at premises 627-631 H Street, NW (Square 453, Lot 59). The proposed mixed-use development will be comprised of 245 guest rooms, 3,277 square feet devoted to the hotel lobby and amenity space, and 11,500 square feet of retail, of which 6,900 square feet will be located on the first cellar level.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

The purpose of DDOT's review is to assess the potential safety and capacity impacts of the proposed action on the District's transportation network and, as necessary, propose appropriate mitigations. This memorandum addresses the variance request to eliminate the parking requirement and decrease the number and size of the loading facilities. After an extensive, multi-administration review of the case materials submitted by the Applicant, DDOT finds

- A robust network of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure services the site.
- The proposed development will generate minimal new vehicle trips.
- Hotel guests and retail patrons are likely to heavily utilize non-automobile modes of travel.
- There is an adequate supply of vehicle parking spaces in garages in the vicinity for hotel guests opting to drive.
- A TransitScreen is proposed to be installed in the lobby of the hotel to provide real-time transit, car-share, and bike-share updates.
- The proposed loading space adequately serves the need of the proposed uses.

- A Valet Staging Zone, as proposed by the Applicant, is not appropriate for this location due to a conflict with a Bus Loading Zone, which is unable to be shortened or moved, and existing rush hour parking restrictions. If the Applicant would like to pursue this further, alternatives and their feasibility will be addressed during the public space permitting process.

A low level of auto use is expected to be generated by the site. This is a result of the site being located across the street from a Metro station, in close proximity to many Metrobus and Circulator routes, and Capital Bikeshare stations; absence of vehicle parking spaces, commitment to a strong Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan; and provision of adequate bicycle parking. As such, DDOT has no objection to the requested variance for parking and loading with the following conditions.

- The Applicant should participate in Capitol Bikeshare's Bulk Membership Program for hotels. DDOT recommends that the hotel provide all guests a free 24-hour Capitol Bikeshare pass for each day of the guest's stay. This benefit should be a part of the hotel's marketing materials and outlined in their TDM plan.
- Capital Bikeshare and car-sharing membership should be provided to all employees in perpetuity.
- Instead of offering a one-time \$100 SmartTrip card for initial employees only, the Applicant should provide \$20 per month to all employees in perpetuity.
- The Applicant should provide a minimum of two short-term bicycle parking racks (i.e., four spaces), the location of which will be addressed in the public space permitting process.

TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS

DDOT is committed to achieving an exceptional quality of life in the nation's capital by encouraging sustainable travel practices, constructing safer streets and providing outstanding access to goods and services. As one means to achieve this vision, DDOT works through the zoning process to ensure that impacts from new developments are manageable within, and take advantage of, the District's multimodal transportation network and ultimately discourage single occupancy vehicle trips.

Accordingly, an Applicant is expected to show the existing conditions for each transportation mode affected, the proposed impact on the respective network and any proposed mitigations, along with the effects of the mitigations on other travel modes. The Applicant and DDOT coordinated on an agreed-upon parking and loading management plan, which was submitted to DDOT on April 25, 2014 for review and comments. Updated truck turning diagrams were submitted to DDOT on May 30, 2014.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Automobile use is expected to be minimal, while transit, walking, and bicycling are expected to be the predominant modes of transportation for this development. All of the intersections and roadway network within a quarter-mile of the site provide adequate and functional facilities to promote connectivity between land uses and transit facilities.

The site is five blocks to the north of the Pennsylvania Avenue two-way protected bicycle lane (or cycletrack) that traverses Downtown; cycle tracks are also located to the northwest of the site on L Street. Additionally, all of the streets in the vicinity of the proposed development, except H Street and Massachusetts Avenue provide either on-street bike lanes or feature good cycling conditions.

The site is located within one-third of a mile from four existing Capitol Bikeshare stations, with one station approximately 550 feet to the west of the site at the intersection of 8th and H Street. Other stations are located a short walk away from the site. In order to further induce hotel guests to remain

car-free during their visit, DDOT recommends the Applicant participate in Capitol Bikeshare's Bulk Membership Program for hotels. Specifically, given the lack of parking, the number of hotel rooms, its location Downtown, and anticipated clientele, DDOT recommends that the hotel provide all guests a free 24-hour Capitol Bikeshare pass for each day of the guest's stay. This benefit should be a part of the hotel's marketing materials outlined in their transportation demand management plan.

The Applicant is proposing five secure long-term bicycle parking spaces for employees in the proposed development. In addition, the Applicant is proposing to include short-term public bicycle parking spaces. The Applicant should provide a minimum of two short-term bicycle parking racks (i.e., four spaces), the location of which will be addressed in the public space permitting process.

Transit Services

DDOT and Washington Metropolitan Transportation Authority (WMATA) have partnered to provide extensive public transit service in the District. DDOT's vision is to leverage this investment to increase the share of non-automotive travel modes with minimal infrastructure investment.

The Applicant evaluated the proximity of the subject site to the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metro Station and the adequacy of the bus service along the routes that serve the subject area. The proposed development will be located approximately 150 feet from the Metro station.

The site is currently served by 12 bus routes, including the Circulator Bus, and headways for each of the routes range from six to 30 minutes. The nearest bus stop is located in front of the site. The frequency of each of these routes provides adequate bus service to the site.

DDOT finds that the proposed development will be adequately served with the existing bus routes, as well as the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metro Station that is across the street from the proposed development. These transit facilities in close proximity to the site will facilitate car-free visits by hotel guests and likely attract guests who prefer a car-free visit to the District.

Vehicle Parking

The overall parking demand created by the development is primarily a function of land use, development square footage, and price/supply of parking spaces. However in urban areas, other factors contribute to the demand for parking, such as the availability of high quality transit, frequency of transit service, proximity to transit, connectivity of bicycle and pedestrian facilities within the vicinity of the development, and the demographic composition of the potential residents/patrons.

Zoning requires 64 vehicle parking spaces, and the Applicant is seeking full relief from the parking requirement. The subject site offers excellent non-auto travel options that facilitate car-free visits by hotel guests, retail/restaurant patrons, and employees. The proposed hotel is intended to attract guests that are unlikely to drive cars into the District or rent cars upon their arrival.

The on-street parking restrictions in the vicinity of the site encourage short-term parking during the day and evening. The location of the site Downtown, particularly in relation to transit and bikeshare facilities, and proposed TDM measures will foster transit and bikeshare use by hotel guests, retail patrons, and employees. For hotel guests who choose to drive to the site, 13 parking garages exist within one-quarter mile of the site. Additionally, 17 car-sharing vehicles are available within one-quarter mile of the site.

Given these conditions, the action's impact on the District's road network is expected to be minimal.

Transportation Demand Management

As part of all major development review cases, DDOT requires applicants to produce a comprehensive Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan. TDM is a set of strategies, programs, services, and physical elements that influence travel behavior by mode, frequency, time, route, or trip length in order to help achieve highly efficient and sustainable use of transportation facilities. In the District, this typically means implementing infrastructure or programs to maximize the use of public transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities, and reduce single occupancy vehicle trips during peak periods.

The Applicant proposes the following TDM strategies:

- **Transportation Management Coordinator** to provide transportation information to residents and coordinate all loading activities
- **Bicycle Program:** to provide five long-term parking spaces for employees and additional short-term spaces
- **Transit Screen** a digital multi-modal display in the lobby showing real-time transit information
- **Marketing Program** brochures and hotel website information to include links to CommuterConnections.org and goDCgo.com, and employees will be referred to carpool matching services
- **Non-Vehicular Incentives** the Applicant will provide one of the following employee incentives, to be elected by hotel and retail employees.
 - \$75 Capital Bikeshare membership fee for initial employees only
 - \$100 car-sharing membership fee for initial employees only
 - \$100 SmartTrip card for initial employees only

DDOT finds the Applicant's TDM measures are a good basis that would generally encourage use of alternative modes of transportation. Long-term bicycle parking is sufficient for the size of the development. The Capital Bikeshare membership incentive will allow employees to utilize and explore a transportation system that provides quick access to nearby amenities. A Transportation Coordinator will be helpful in disseminating non-vehicular information to hotel guests. Based on DDOT's evaluation of the proposed TDM program, the following are needed to strengthen the proposed program:

- As described in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities section of the memorandum, the Applicant should participate in Capitol Bikeshare's Bulk Membership Program for hotels. DDOT recommends that the hotel provide all guests a free 24-hour Capitol Bikeshare pass for each day of the guest's stay. This benefit should be a part of the hotel's marketing materials.
- The Applicant should provide bikeshare and car-share annual membership fees for the all employees in perpetuity who chose to elect this benefit.
- A one-time transit subsidy in this area will not alter travel behaviors of employees. Instead, of offering a one-time \$100 SmartTrip card for initial employees only, the Applicant should provide \$20 per month to all employees in perpetuity.

Loading

The Applicant proposed reducing the zoning required loading from one 55' loading berth, one 30' loading berth, one 20' service space, and one 100 square foot platform to one 30' loading berth, one 20' service space, and one 100 square foot loading platform located at the rear of the site off of the alley. The alley is accessed off of Eye Street. Loading for the hotel and retail/restaurant uses would be

combined at this loading zone. The Applicant has estimated approximately 4-5 deliveries per day to the site, primarily by FedEx and UPS.

DDOT finds the proposed development will not generate sufficient demand for a 55' truck, and the proposed loading space will adequately serve the need of the proposed uses. At this time, an on-street Loading Zone is not an appropriate approach to provide loading space for deliveries for this location primarily due to the site's conflict with an existing Bus Zone and rush hour parking restrictions. Additionally, eight other Loading Zones exist within a one and a half block radius of the site, including one opposite the proposed development at 622 H Street. As such, DDOT has no objection to the requested variance for loading.

Curbside Management

The Applicant proposed a Valet Staging Zone at the curb in front of the subject site, as described in the Technical Memorandum from the Applicant's traffic consultants, dated April 25, 2014. Its hours of operation are proposed for 24 hours per day.

The proposed location of the Valet Staging Zone conflicts with an existing Bus Zone. Additionally, the proposed hours of operation conflict with rush hour parking restrictions. DDOT, in coordination with WMATA, considered whether it would be possible to either shorten the Bus Zone, allowing space for a Valet Staging Zone, or coordinate with WMATA to move the bus stop flag and pole closer to the westbound stop line to allow sufficient space for a Valet Staging Zone adjacent to the Bus Zone. After examining the request, DDOT and WMATA jointly determined that neither option would be possible.

The existing Bus Zone is needed for capacity, operations, and impact reduction on the transportation network. Westbound traffic approaching 7th Street has a high volume of vehicular traffic and buses. DDOT and WMATA's bus stop guidelines call for a 190' minimum Bus Zone at this location (100' standard size bus + 20' for articulated bus + 70' for a second articulated bus, as two buses often arrive at this location simultaneously). DDOT will not accept a reduction to a 105' Bus Zone at this location because of the negative impacts it will have on bus passengers, operations, safety, and overall traffic at the intersection.

The bus stop flag and pole cannot be moved closer to the intersection of H and 7th streets because the bus shelter is intentionally placed further east of the intersection. This is one of the highest pedestrian crossing locations in the entire District, bus passengers need adequate sidewalk space to wait for arriving buses that is not directly in the crosswalk and in the way of other pedestrians. The rear doors of a bus must have space along the curb for people to exit. By relocating the bus stop closer to the intersection of H and 7th streets, the Chinese arch conflicts with the rear doors of a bus, rendering them unusable.

Permitting for a Valet Staging Zone is pursued through DDOT's public space permitting process. DDOT objects to the proposed Valet Staging Zone. If the Applicant would like to pursue a Valet Staging Zone further, alternatives and their feasibility will be addressed during the public space permitting process.

Streetscape and the Public Realm

In line with District policy and practice, any substantial new building development or renovation is expected to rehabilitate streetscape infrastructure between the curb and the property lines. This includes curb and gutter, street trees and landscaping, street lights, sidewalks, and other appropriate features within the public rights of way bordering the site. As part of this process, the Applicant must

work closely with DDOT and the Office of Planning to ensure that the design of the public realm meets current standards and will substantially upgrade the appearance and functionality of the streetscape for public users needing to access the property or circulating around it. The Applicant may refer to the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations and DDOT's Design and Engineering Manual for specific controls of public space.

The Applicant proposed locating utility vaults in the alley, adjacent to the site. DDOT finds that this location is appropriate for this site due to the site's size constraints. When utility vaults cannot be located on private space, the alley is a preferred location by DDOT. Due to the size of the sidewalk and the high volume of pedestrians at this site, utility vaults in the sidewalk in front of the site will not be an acceptable treatment of public space at this location. This will be addressed during the public space permitting process.

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