

**BEFORE THE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Application of

Rock Creek-650 H LLC

STATEMENT OF THE APPLICANT

I. NATURE OF RELIEF SOUGHT

Rock Creek-650 H LLC (the “Applicant”) submits this application, pursuant to 11 DCMR § 3103.2, for a variances from the parking requirement of section 2101.1, the parking space size requirements of 2115.2 and the loading requirements of section 2201.1, and pursuant to 11 DCMR §§ 3104.1 and 1325.1 for a special exception to allow an addition that increases the gross floor area of an existing building by more than 50% on a lot that has 6,000 square feet or more of land area, in the H Street Northeast Neighborhood Commercial Overlay (“HS”) District in the HS/C-2-B District at premises 646-654 H Street, N.E. (Square 858, Lots 1, 2, 800, 801, and 802.) for a new mixed-use (residential/retail) project (the “Project”) at premises address of 646-654 H Street, N.E. (Square 858, Lots 1, 2, 800, 801, and 802) (the “Property” or “Site”).

II. JURISDICTION OF THE BOARD

The Board of Zoning Adjustment has jurisdiction to grant the requested special exception and variance relief pursuant to Sections 3103.2 and 3104.1 of the Zoning Regulations.

III. EXHIBITS IN SUPPORT OF THE APPLICATION

This application includes the following additional materials:

Exhibit A: Surveyor’s Plat showing the Property and proposed improvements and Survey Plat showing existing site conditions

Exhibit B: Zoning Map showing the Property outlined in red

Exhibit C: Project Plans showing proposed improvements on the Property

IV. BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

A. Property, Site and Vicinity Characteristics and Zoning

1. The Property

The Property which is the subject of this application is located at 646-654 H Street, N.E. on the northwest corner of the intersection of H and 7th Streets N.E. (Square 858, Lots 1, 2, 800, 801 and 802). As shown on the attached surveyors plat issued by the District of Columbia Office of the Surveyor, it is roughly square in shape with approximately 85 feet of frontage along H Street, N.E., 82 feet of frontage on 7th Street, N.E. and a lot area of approximately 6,970 square feet (Exhibit A). The Property is zoned C-2-B as well as HS-H, the H Street Northeast Neighborhood Commercial Overlay (see attached Zoning Map, Exhibit B). It is located within the boundaries of Advisory Neighborhood Commission (“ANC”) 6C and across 7th Street from ANC 6A. The Property is currently improved with five, low rise commercial buildings that are devoted to retail uses.

2. Square 858 and Vicinity

Square 858 is located in the rapidly evolving H Street corridor. The square is bounded by H Street, N.E. to the south, 1 Street N.E., to the north, 6th Street N.E. to the west and 7th Street N.E. to the east. A narrow, 8 foot east-west public alley abuts the Property to the north. The immediate neighborhood is developed with a variety of residential and commercial uses. Immediately to the west of the Property is a two-story commercial building which houses a sushi restaurant. Further west is the site of a recently approved, mixed-use PUD project (Z.C. 12-18; The Apollo) which will include a Whole Foods grocery store as well as other retail uses and approximately 432 housing units. That PUD project will have a maximum height of 90 feet. To the north of the PUD site is a two-story brick building owned by the District and operated as a

community residential facility. To the east of that building, along 7th Street are residential row dwellings. To the northwest are also residential row dwellings which front on 6th Street and I Street. These are in the R-4 district. Across H Street are commercial properties in the HS-H/C-2-C District.

The Property and the area is well served by public transportation. The Property is located 0.7 miles from the No-Ma metro station and 0.8 miles from the Union Station Metrorail station. The new streetcars are expected to begin operations along H Street soon.

3. Subject Property and Area Zoning

As indicated above, the Property is located in the C-2-B zone and the HS H Street Northeast Overlay zone. More specifically, the Property is located in the Housing Sub-District of the HS Overlay zone.

The C-2-B zone is a mixed use residential/commercial zone typically mapped along arterial streets, in uptown centers, and rapid transit stops. It permits a maximum height of 65 feet and a maximum FAR of 3.5 with nonresidential uses limited to 1.5 FAR.

The HS Overlay zone was established by the Zoning Commission and mapped over lots fronting on H Street, N.E., between 2nd and 15th Streets, N.E., to encourage and foster the revitalization of the H Street corridor. The overlay seeks to protect the historic scale and character of the area within it, to encourage the reuse of existing buildings as well as the development of new residential and commercial uses. Along with the text amendments used to implement the overlay, map amendments were adopted upzoning from C-2-A to C-2-B several lots fronting the north and south side of H Street. The stated purpose of the Housing Sub-District is to encourage housing (Section 1321.1.) New construction in the Sub-District that preserves an existing façade constructed before 1958 is permitted to use an additional 1.0 FAR for a maximum nonresidential density of 1.5 FAR for nonresidential uses (Section 1321.3.)

Matter-of-right development permitted with HS-H/C-2-B zoning includes residential and commercial uses to a maximum height of 75 feet and a maximum FAR of 4.7 with nonresidential FAR limited to 1.5. Parking is required at a ratio of 1 space per 3 units for residential development and 1 space per 750 square feet of gross floor area for commercial development in excess of 3,000 square feet. A special exception is required in the HS District to construct a new building or enlarge the gross floor area of an existing building by 50% or more on a property with a land area of 6,000 square feet or more (1320.4(f).)

B. The Proposed Project

The Applicant proposes to construct a new 75 foot high apartment building with 26 units and ground floor retail uses ("Project"). (See Exhibit C, Schematic Project Plans.) Affordable units will be provided as required by the inclusionary zoning ("IZ") requirements. The Project will total approximately 32,646 square feet of gross floor area on the 6,970 square foot lot, resulting in a building density of approximately 4.7 FAR which is the maximum permitted FAR (with the 20% IZ bonus) in the HS-H/C-2-B District. The Project meets all of the Overlay design requirements as well as the HS-H/C-2-B height and density standards. However, due to the small size of the lot, parking and loading relief is needed to develop the Project. In addition, a special exception is required because the Project is enlarging the gross floor area of the existing buildings on the 6,970 square foot Property by more than 50%.

V. ZONING RELIEF REQUESTED

A. HS-H Special Exception

Section 1325 sets forth the following criteria for special exception relief in the HS Overlay:

- (a) The project is consistent with the design intent of the design requirements of § 1324 and the design guidelines of the H Street N.E. Strategic Development

Plan;

- (b) The architectural design of the project shall enhance the urban design features of the immediate vicinity in which it is located; and, if a historic district or historic landmark is involved, the Office of Planning report to the Board shall include review by the State Historic Preservation Officer and a status of the project's review by the Historic Preservation Review Board;
- (c) Vehicular access and egress shall be located and designed so as to encourage safe and efficient pedestrian movement, minimize conflict with principal pedestrian ways, function efficiently, and create no dangerous or otherwise objectionable traffic conditions;
- (d) Parking and traffic conditions associated with the operation of a proposed use shall not adversely affect adjacent or nearby residences;
- (e) Noise associated with the operation of a proposed use shall not adversely affect adjacent or nearby residences; and
- (f) The size, type, scale, and location of signs shall be compatible with the surrounding corridor and consistent with the design guidelines of the H Street N.E. Strategic Development Plan.

Section 1325.3 also provides that the Board may impose requirements pertaining to design, appearance, signs, massing, landscaping, and other such requirements as it deems necessary to protect neighboring property and to achieve the purposes of the H Street Overlay District.

The requested special exception meets all of the aforementioned special exception criteria.

B. Parking Variances

Pursuant to section 2101.1 of the Zoning Regulations, a total of seventeen (17) off-street parking spaces are required to be provided in the Project.¹ The Project will provide 6 surface, compact size spaces at the rear of the Project to be accessed off of 7th Street via the adjacent public alley. A variance from section 2101.1 to reduce the parking requirement accordingly is

¹ Section 2101.1 provides the following parking requirements (1) for apartment houses in C-2-B zones: one space for every 2dwelling units; and (2) for retail 1 space for each 750 square feet in excess of 3,000 square feet.

requested. Further, Section 2115.2 provides that an accessory parking area containing twenty-five (25) or more required spaces may provide up to 40% compact spaces. Since the Project is providing only six spaces and all of them are compact size, a variance from the 25-space threshold requirement and the 40% limit of Section 2115.2 is also requested.

C. Loading Variance

A variance from the loading requirements of the C-2-B zone is also needed to develop the Property. One 30-foot deep berth is required but the Property is too small to provide it. Given the small amount of retail and residential space in the Project and the adjacent alley located to the rear of the site which may be used for loading and unloading, no adverse impact is anticipated. The Applicant will also be widening this alley by two feet to bring it up to a standard 10 foot alley width. Further, utilization of the alley in this manner is not expected to create any significant conflicts with other property owners in the square. The alley is a dead end alley which only serves the Property, the adjacent, small restaurant to the west of the Property, and the Apollo PUD property. However, the Apollo PUD project is using the larger alley system in the square for their loading and delivery traffic. Further, DDOT has required that PUD to include a loading lane at the 7th St and H St corner adjacent to the Property.

V. THE APPLICATION MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS FOR VARIANCE RELIEF FROM THE ZONING REGULATIONS

The burden of proof for variance relief is well established. The Applicant must demonstrate that its property is affected by an exceptional or extraordinary situation or condition that will cause the strict application of the Zoning Regulations to result in a practical difficulty to applicant, and that the granting of the variance will not cause substantial detriment to the public good nor substantially impair the intent, purpose, or integrity of the Zone Plan. *Palmer v.*

District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment, 287 A.2d 535, 541 (1972). As set forth below, the Application meets this three-part test for area variance relief as established in Section 3103.2.

A. The Property is Affected by an Exceptional or Extraordinary Situation or Condition

The Property has several unusual conditions which give rise to an exceptional situation. First and foremost, the site is exceptionally small for a mixed-use development. Further, the Property is located adjacent to a large, 90 foot high PUD project which really begs for a substantial redevelopment project on the Property from an urban design standpoint. Finally, the HS Overlay zone objectives of preserving existing structures and providing active retail uses as well as new residential uses (especially affordable residential) are additional factors which create an exceptional situation with respect to the redevelopment of the Property. The small size of the lot does not permit a below grade floor plan which can accommodate the required parking and loading along with the required aisles, ramping for lower level parking trash facilities, utilities, and columns which also have to be located on this level.

B. The Strict Application of the Zoning Regulations Would Result in a Practical Difficulty

In order to qualify for an area variance, a property owner must demonstrate peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties which would result from strict compliance with the applicable regulation. Furthermore, these difficulties must be related to a property's exceptional circumstances.

In this case, the small size of the site coupled with the HS zone objectives to preserve existing structures and facilitate both ground floor retail and new residential uses creates a practical difficulty should strict adherence to the parking and loading standards be required.

C. Variance Relief Can Be Granted Without Substantial Detriment to the Public Good and Without Impairing the Intent, Purpose and Integrity of the Zone Plan

The Application can be approved by the Board with no substantial detriment to the public good and with no impairment to the intent, purpose and integrity of the Zone Plan, as set forth below.

1. Public Good

The grant of variance relief to allow the development of the Project with less on-site parking and compact size spaces will not create any detriment to the public good. In urban areas, many residents opt for compact cars for ease of parking on city streets and maneuvering in and out of city traffic and market trends indicate that parking demand in close in revitalizing area of the City is moderating. Further, the Property is located within walking distance to two Metrorail stations and will also be well served by the new streetcar. Finally, the adjacent Apollo PUD project potentially offers an opportunity for additional off-street parking, if needed for the Project. According to the record of that PUD case, parking is being provided in excess of the zoning requirements. The retail requirement for the PUD project is 125 spaces and 209 spaces will be provided and the residential requirement is 144 spaces while 216 will be provided. The Applicant will explore the possibility of utilizing any excess spaces in the future, if necessary.

Regarding loading as indicated above, the small alley to the rear of the Property can be used for the limited loading requirements of the Project. The Applicant will improve the alley by widening by two additional feet and it will be available given that it only serves the Property and the small restaurant located next door to the Project site. Further, as indicated above, DDOT required that that PUD provide a loading zone along 7th St and H St corner adjacent to the Property.

2. Zone Plan

The grant of variance relief in the present case will likewise not impair the District's zone plan. As discussed above, the Project is consistent with the HS overlay objectives and standards. Further, we note that current public policy with regard to parking in the District of Columbia is to encourage smaller, more fuel-efficient cars and to discourage automobile traffic.

For all of these reasons, the Applicant satisfies the requirements of Sections 3104.1 and 3103.2 of the Zoning Regulations for requested special exception and variance relief.

VI. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, the requested relief meets the applicable standards of the Zoning Regulations and can be granted without substantially impairing the intent, purpose, and integrity of the Zoning Regulations. The Applicant therefore requests that the Board grant this application.

Respectfully submitted,

SAUL EWING LLP

By 
Cynthia A. Giordano
1919 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 550
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 333-8800