

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

**APPLICATION OF
ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL**

**BZA APPLICATION NO. 18929A
ANC 3G02**

STATEMENT OF THE APPLICANT

**I.
NATURE OF RELIEF SOUGHT**

This statement is submitted on behalf of St. John's College High School ("St. John's" or the "Applicant"), owner of property located at 2607 Military Road, N.W. (Lots 804-807 in Square 2308) (the "Site") in support of its application to the Board of Zoning Adjustment (the "Board") pursuant to 11 DCMR § 3104.1 for special exception approval under 11 DCMR § 206 to undertake renovations and expansions to the existing gymnasium area in the R-1-A District at the Site. In the event that the Board deems it necessary, the Applicant also requests special exception approval from 11 DCMR § 411.3, to relocate some of the existing mechanical rooftop units ("RTUs") and to add three additional RTUs as part of the renovations. The existing gymnasium building has had multiple roof structures since it was originally constructed in 1959.

**II.
JURISDICTION**

The Board of Zoning Adjustment (the "Board") has jurisdiction to grant the special exception requested herein pursuant to 11 DCMR § 3104.

III.
EXHIBITS SUBMITTED IN SUPPORT OF THE APPLICATION

- Exhibit A: A portion of the Zoning Map showing the Site.
- Exhibit B: Architectural plans and elevations showing the proposed renovations.
- Exhibit C: Resolution in Support from ANC 3G.
- Exhibit D: Letter of Recommendation from the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.
- Exhibit E: Outlines of Testimony.
- Exhibit F: Resume of Expert Witness.

IV.
BACKGROUND

A. Description of the Site and Surrounding Area

Square 2308 is located in the northwest quadrant of the District and is bounded by McKinley Place and residential streets to the north, Oregon Avenue to the east, Military Road to the south, and 27th Street and Utah Avenue to the west. The land to the north, west, and southwest of the Site is residential, developed primarily with single family homes. To the east and south of the Site is Rock Creek Park. St. John's has been located in its current location at the Site since 1959.

As indicated on the Zoning Map, attached as Exhibit A, the Site is located within the R-1-A District and contains approximately 1,141,004 square feet of land area. Multiple classroom buildings are located on the Site, as well as a library, dining hall, gym and training rooms, tennis courts, playing fields, a stadium, and accessory parking lots. Vehicular entrances to the campus are located from 27th Street and Oregon Avenue.

B. Proposed Project

As shown on the Architectural Plans and Elevations attached as Exhibit B (the “Plans”), the proposed project includes a phased renovation of the existing gymnasium area and an expansion that will add approximately 52,420 square feet of gross floor area to the existing building. The gymnasium area presently contains approximately 44,185 square feet of gross floor area over two levels, comprised of the original Gallagher Gymnasium constructed in the late 1950s, and the more recent Roth Gymnasium addition constructed in the late 1990s. The proposed renovation and expansion will not result in an increase to the number of students, faculty, or staff at St. John’s. The number of existing parking facilities and spaces will not be affected, and will continue to adequately accommodate the students, teachers, and visitors who are likely to arrive at the Site by automobile.

The renovation project will be undertaken in two main phases. Phase 1 involves construction of a new one-story athletic center and locker room addition over the existing tennis courts on the west (27th Street side) of the existing building; the rebuilding of existing team lockers on the west side of Gallagher Gym with a second story office addition; and the renovation and expansion of the gym’s main lobby and support spaces on the south side of the building. Phase 2 involves constructing a two-story corner addition to the southeast corner of the Roth Gym, and performing interior renovations to the upper and lower levels of the Roth Gym and to the main Gallagher Gym. A small one-story utilitarian addition will also be added to the back of the two gyms (running east-west on the north side of the building) to host mechanical and electrical equipment and to provide storage space for the gyms.

The overall project will be a modern interpretation of the campus’ existing architectural language. Brick and stone materials will match existing buildings on campus, while more

contemporary materials such as metal and glass will allow natural light into the renovated gym area. The project will seek LEED certification with the USGBC, as required by the DC Green Building Code. Furthermore, the project improves the campus' overall sustainability and the well-being of its users by incorporating extensive green roofs, bio-planter, using building materials with low-VOC and high-recycled content, replacing old HVAC and MEP systems with modern efficient equipment, providing better indoor air quality, maximizing the access to views and amount of natural light into the facilities, and using energy-efficient lighting systems and fixtures throughout.

Since filing the application in August, 2015, the Applicant has made several slight adjustments to the project in response to comments from the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts ("CFA"), which has jurisdiction to review the project due to the Subject Property's location adjacent to Rock Creek Park. For example, the Applicant slightly increased the size of the existing openings on the Roth Gym's east façade to allow more natural light into the gym spaces. The Applicant also further articulated the existing façade by creating a rhythm of larger openings, pilasters, and brick spandrels to improve the image of the otherwise utilitarian brick façade. Doing so better relates the façade architecturally with the newly renovated south façade, which is more articulated and consistent with the rest of the campus. Also in response to CFA comments, the Applicant changed the cladding materials of the south mechanical screen adjacent to the renovated lobby from metal panel to face brick, to be more consistent with the rest of the façade.

In order to meet DDOE stormwater requirements, the Applicant added a low biplanter structure along the west façade of the addition. The planter will be partially above and partially below-grade, with filtration media and low plantings that are necessary to treat runoff water from

the tennis courts and to meet the stormwater management standards. The planter will be located between the property line and the new addition. The Applicant also made minor adjustments to the proposed plantings along 27th Street to address comments from the CFA and to make the plantings more informal and consistent with the neighboring streetscape and with District standards.

Due to construction challenges related to the routing of ductwork from the RTUs to the building areas served by them, and due to the addition of air condition into the renovated building, the Applicant proposes to relocate some of the existing RTUs and to add three additional RTUs. The building has had multiple RTUs since it was constructed in 1959, and the changes to the RTUs are required only to accommodate mechanical equipment. As noted below, if the Board deems it necessary, the Applicant requests special exception approval to continue to provide multiple roof structures on the building.

Finally, the Applicant made a few signage adjustments, including removing the GALLAGHER sign above the main entry canopy, the ROTH sign above the lower entrance canopy, and the SJCHS mega-graphic from the main lobby curtain wall. The Applicant added a low garden wall with a ROTH sign at the southeast corner of the addition.

C. Relief Requested

In order to proceed with the proposed project, the Applicant requires special exception relief to allow an addition to an existing private school pursuant to section 206 of the Zoning Regulations. As shown on the Plans, the proposed project is consistent with the underlying purposes and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map.

V.
THE APPLICANT MEETS THE BURDEN
OF PROOF FOR SPECIAL EXCEPTION RELIEF

A. Standard of Review

Relief granted through a special exception is presumed appropriate, reasonable, and compatible with other uses in the same zoning classification, provided the specific regulatory requirements for the requested relief are met. In reviewing an application for special exception relief, "[t]he Board's discretion ... is limited to a determination of whether the exception sought meets the requirements of the regulations." *First Baptist Church of Washington v. District of Columbia Bd. of Zoning Adjustment*, 423 A.2d 695, 701 (D.C. 1981) (quoting *Stewart v. District of Columbia Bd. of Zoning Adjustment*, 305 A.2d 516, 518 (D.C. 1973)). If the applicant meets its burden, the Board ordinarily must grant the application. *First Baptist Church of Washington v. District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment*, 432 A.2d 695 (1981).

B. Special Exception per Section 206 to Allow a Private School in the R-1-A District

Section 206 of the Zoning Regulations authorizes the Board to allow a private school within the R-1-A District in accordance with the requirements of 11 DCMR § 3104 for special exceptions, provided that the standards set forth in 11 DCMR §§ 206.2 and 206.3 are met. 11 DCMR § 206.1. As discussed below, these standards are satisfied in this case and the Board can therefore grant the requested relief.

1. *Section 206.2 – The school shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to adjoining and nearby property because of noise, traffic, number of students, or otherwise objectionable conditions.*

As will be demonstrated more fully at the Board's public hearing on this application, the proposed renovations and additions will not result in any increase in noise, traffic, number of students, or other objectionable conditions. The proposed additions will occur completely within

St. John's campus, will be sufficiently removed from all nearby residences and streets, and will incorporate new and improved landscape buffering along 27th Street. The proposed additions are intended to better accommodate the existing activities already occurring on the campus, to provide appropriate gender separation and sufficient space for all sports and student athletes, and to improve the athletic experience and overall well-being for current and future students. All of the proposed renovations will be compatible with the height, massing, materials, and architectural design of the existing campus buildings, as described herein and shown on the attached plans.

2. *Section 206.3 – Ample parking space, but not less than that required in chapter 21 of this title, shall be provided to accommodate students, teachers, and visitors likely to come to the site by automobile.*

The existing school complies with the off-street parking requirements of section 2101.1 of the Zoning Regulations, and the proposed additions will not increase the number of parking spaces required under that section. The existing parking facilities on the Site will continue to adequately accommodate the students, teachers, and visitors who are likely to arrive at the site by automobile.

C. Special Exception per Section 411 to Continue to Allow Multiple Roof Structures

As noted above, the Applicant proposes to provide multiple roof structures on the building, whereas 11 DCMR § 411.3 requires that all penthouses and mechanical equipment be placed in a single enclosure. The gym has had multiple roof structures since it was constructed in 1959. Should the Board deem it necessary, the Applicant requests special exception approval from 11 DCMR § 411.3 to relocate some of the existing RTUs and to add three additional RTUs.

Section 411.11 of the Zoning Regulations empowers the Board to grant special exceptions from the roof structure requirements if the Applicant can demonstrate that full

compliance would be impracticable because of operating difficulties, size of building lot, or other conditions relating to the building or surrounding area that would tend to make full compliance unduly restrictive, prohibitively costly, or unreasonable, provided the intent and purpose of the Zoning Regulations are not materially impaired, and the light and air of adjacent buildings are not adversely affected. In this case, the Applicant must rearrange the location of the RTUs due to construction challenges related to the routing of ductwork from the RTUs to the building areas served by them, as well as the need to provide mechanical equipment on the roof to accommodate the proposed air conditioning and ventilation systems. Without rearranging the RTUs as proposed, it would be impossible to construct and operate the renovated gym facilities with air conditioning. Moreover, the intent of the renovations is to bring the existing building into healthy, modern standards, which includes the provision of air conditioning and air filtration systems into the building, which presently do not exist.

The proposed RTUs will not impair the intent and purpose of the Zoning Regulations and will not adversely affect the light and air of adjacent buildings. The gymnasium building has had multiple roof structures since its original construction in 1959. As shown on Sheet 17 of the Plans, the proposed RTUs will be located as close to the center of the renovated building as possible, with minimum setbacks of 22'-6" from the exterior walls of the building. Moreover, all of the RTUs will be located more than 100 feet away from the property line and 150 feet from the building's west elevation along 27th Street. The tallest proposed RTU, which is remaining in its existing location, is only 9.75 feet tall (342 feet in elevation), as measured from the top of the roof slab, which is well below the top of the existing higher roof of the academic building (357'-10" elevation). Furthermore, the combined square footage of the proposed RTUs is approximately 981 square feet, which is only approximately 1.5% of the roof area of the

renovated gymnasium building. Thus, the proposed roof structures will be almost entirely invisible from the street, will not impact the light and air of any surrounding building (including the gym building itself), and will allow for important upgrades and modernizations to provide for St. John's student athletes. Moreover, multiple roof structures have been located on the building for over five decades, such that the renovations are not changing significantly the status quo.

VI. COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Applicant has the support of Advisory Neighborhood Commission ("ANC") 3G, the ANC in which the Site is located. At its regularly scheduled, duly noticed public meeting on October 19, 2015, at which a quorum was present, ANC 3G voted unanimously to support the application. A copy of the ANC's resolution in support is attached as Exhibit C.

VII. U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

The Site is subject to the Shipstead-Luce Act due to its location adjacent to Rock Creek Park, and is therefore subject to review by the CFA. *See* 40 U.S.C.A. § 8104(b). The Applicant presented the project to the CFA on September 17, 2015, and at that meeting the CFA voted unanimously to support the project. The CFA's letter in support is attached as Exhibit D.

VIII. WITNESSES

- A. Jeff Mancabelli, President of St. John's College High School.
- B. Matthew Bell, Perkins Eastman, architect for the project.

IX.
CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, the requested relief meets the applicable standards for special exception relief under the Zoning Regulations. Accordingly, the Applicant respectfully requests that the Board grant the application.

Respectfully submitted,

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