

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
FROM: Karen Thomas, Case Manager
 JL Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review
DATE: March 27, 2015
SUBJECT: BZA Case 18972, 3605-3615 Minnesota Avenue, S.E.

I. OFFICE OF PLANNING RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the following:

- **Special exception relief** from § 353 to permit a new apartment building for 60 senior rental units in the R-5-A District; on condition that a transit screen is provided in the lobby area, and the adoption of proposed TDM measures described herein; and
Variance relief from:
 - § 2201 – Loading (55 ft. loading berth required, 30 ft. provided; 1 platform @ 200 ft. required, 1@100 ft. provided, and 1 20-ft service delivery space required, none provided); on condition that the loading and trash dumpster area are screened with opaque fencing, due to the area's proximity to the single-family homes to the north; and subject to any other conditions that may be stipulated by DDOT.

II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Address	3605-3615 Minnesota Avenue, S.E.
Legal Description	Square 5410, Lot 800
Ward/ANC	7/ANC 7F
Lot Characteristics	The property is triangular shaped with variable grade changes. The topography of the site inclines upward 10 feet from Minnesota Avenue.
Zoning	The subject property and the surrounding area are in the R-5-A district, which permits new multi-unit residential development through the special exception process.
Existing Development	The lot is developed with three apartment buildings of 26 units and 18 parking spaces constructed since 1941.
Adjacent Properties	The lot is bounded by recently developed single family homes in the square and other apartments across Minnesota Avenue and B Street SE, all owned by the applicant.

Surrounding Neighborhood Character	The surrounding neighborhood is a mix of low to moderate density apartment homes and single-family dwellings in the Greenway Neighborhood.
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III. APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

Proposal	Greenway Apartments L.P. (Applicant) proposes to demolish the existing three small apartment buildings and construct a new 3-story (with basement) residential development consisting of 60 rental housing units for seniors, with a surface parking area for 12 vehicles. Up to 54 rental units would be made affordable for residents at or below 60% AMI, including units for special needs residents who will be eligible for rental subsidies and supportive services. This is the first phase of a potential multi-year, multi-phased project to redevelop Meadow Green Courts. The entire community is composed of 462 apartments in 53 buildings.
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IV. ZONING REQUIREMENTS and RELIEF REQUESTED

R-5-A Zone	Regulation	Existing	Proposed	Relief
Height § 400	40 ft. max.	40 ft.	40 ft./3 stories	None required
Lot Area § 401	None prescribed	37,543 sf.	37,543 sf.	None required
FAR § 402	0.9 (1.08 IZ) 33,789 sf (40,456 sf max.)	Not provided	1.08	None required
Lot Occupancy § 403	40 % max.	“	40 %	None required
Rear Yard § 404	20 ft. min.	“	20 ft.	None required
Side Yard § 405	8 ft. min.	“	10 ft.	None required
Parking § 2101	1 space per 6 units (min.)	14	12 spaces	None required
Loading § 2201	Berth: 1@ 55 ft. deep Platform: 1@ 200 sf Delivery Space: 1@ 20 ft.	N/prov.	1@30 ft. 1@100 ft. None	Relief required
Bike Parking	N/A	None	4	None required

- Special exception review to construct a new 3-story (with basement) residential development consisting of 60 rental units in the R-5-A District; and
- Variance relief from Section 2201.1 - Loading, to allow a reduction in the size of the loading berth and platform without a service delivery space, as discussed below

V. OP ANALYSIS

a. **Special Exception Relief pursuant to § 353 (New Residential Developments (R-5-A))**

New residential development within the R-5-A districts is reviewed by the Board pursuant to § 353 as follows:

353.1 In R-5-A Districts, all new residential developments, except those comprising all one-family detached and semi-detached dwellings, shall be reviewed by the Board of Zoning Adjustment as special exceptions under § 3104.

The property is proposed for a new multi-unit senior apartment building in the R-5-A District.

353.2 The Board shall refer the application to the D.C. Board of Education for comment and recommendation as to the adequacy of existing and planned area schools to accommodate the numbers of students that can be expected to reside in the project.

The application was not forwarded to the DC State Board of Education (DCSBOE) as required, as school-aged children are not anticipated to reside in this building. However, if children were to be present, the available public elementary, middle and high schools in the area would absorb students who may reside in the building. Kimball Elementary School is within a mile south on Minnesota Avenue, and Sousa Middle School is within a mile south off Anacostia Road. Both are considered in-boundary schools (www.dcps.dc.gov).

353.3 The Board shall refer the application to the D.C. Departments of Transportation and Housing and Community Development for comment and recommendation as to the adequacy of public streets, recreation, and other services to accommodate the residents of the project and the relationship of the proposed project to public plans and projects.

The Board's referral to District Department of Transportation's (DDOT) is noted as Exhibit #12 of the record. The applicant produced a traffic study, which was submitted to DDOT. The proposal would provide the required number of on-site parking spaces in a surface parking area at the rear of the site, via an existing curb cut off Anacostia Road. Ten bike spaces would also be provided to promote alternative transportation among the site's employees. The Minnesota Metro Station and the Benning Road Station are within a mile from the location and major bus routes traverse Minnesota Avenue. There is an existing bus stop on Anacostia Road, along the site's east frontage. DDOT's report would be submitted under separate cover to the record.

The applicant has stated that subordinate debt funding from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will be pursued, and the DC Housing Finance Agency (DHA) will assist with tax-exempt bonds and 4% tax credits. The rental units would be available to future residents at 60% AMI or lower. Based on information provided at OP's request, the applicant will offer on-site relocation, at cost to the applicant, to all residents of this first phase of its multi-year redevelopment project of Meadow Green Courts. It is proposed that residents of the 26 existing units would be accommodated in other vacant

apartments within the larger complex. Those who prefer to relocate will be offered relocation to other apartments owned by the applicant in other DC neighborhoods. Initial move-outs are not anticipated until late 2016/2017.

Comments from DHCD were not included in the record at the writing of this report.

This project would be supportive of the District's [Office on Aging's 2017 Strategic Plan](#), including the Age-Friendly DC initiative of providing a wide range of housing options for older residents, in response to "the significant trends of urbanization and population aging."¹

353.4 *The Board shall refer the application to the D.C. Office of Planning for comment and recommendation on the site plan, arrangement of buildings and structures, and provisions of light, air, parking, recreation, landscaping, and grading as they relate to the future residents of the project and the surrounding neighborhood. In addition to other filing requirements, the developer shall submit to the Board with the application, four (4) site plans and two (2) sets of typical floor plans and elevations, grading plans (existing and final), landscaping plans, and plans for all new rights-of-way and easements.*

The property is currently improved with three brick apartment buildings with 26 units, originally constructed around 1941. The proposed site plan seems to follow the general layout and orientation of the existing buildings, given the site's existing topography and irregular shape. Re-grading of the site is minimized by siting the proposed building, so as to retain as much of the existing grade as possible. The shape of the site creates a design challenge for a double loaded corridor, and the result reflects the best outcome to provide entrances, as well as light and air to units within a single building. Alternating brick and siding materials would be used, consistent with the pattern of some older and newer residential structures within the neighborhood.

The proposed redevelopment should not have an impact on adjacent residences to the north regarding light and air, as existing buildings on the site, currently do not. The proposed building would be closest to the single family home closest to a portion of the building's south elevation by an effective separation of approximately 18 feet. Otherwise, the single-family development would be effectively separated from the building through the rear courtyard area, where two large shade trees currently exist and would be retained, as shown on the submitted site plan (Page 2 of submitted plans).

Up to sixty (60) rental units would be provided, including eight (8) efficiencies; forty-five (45) one-bedroom units and seven (7) two-bedroom units, ranging between 450 sf to 825 sf in area. The location of the site is almost equidistant to the Fort Chaplin Park and Fort Dupont Park for recreational purposes. Common use areas for use by future residents are shown in the:

- Basement floor plan – Media room, Community room, Fitness room and E-lounge;
- First floor plan – Library, front and rear terraces;
- Second floor – Game room; and
- Third floor - Roof terrace.

¹ New Community Living. 2017 Strategic Plan, Goal 1, DC Office on Aging.

A landscaped exterior courtyard with a walking loop and benches would also be provided at the rear for residents' relaxation. Low shrubs will be provided around the parking area, and some trees to shade a portion of the parking lot. The site plan includes a landscape plan to satisfy the GAR standards under § 3400 of the Regulations, (GAR 0.40 minimum). Stormwater management and retention would be developed on-site and would conform to the District's standards, as would be reviewed by DDOE.

An existing ornamental fence currently separates the subject property from the abutting single family development north of the site. While the location of the dumpster is proposed in the same general area as its current location for the existing residences, *OP recommends a brick or appropriate opaque, three-sided enclosure be placed around the dumpster and loading area as a screen for the single-family residential development abutting the site.*

Parking and loading would be accessed via an existing curb cut and driveway from Anacostia Road. All of the required parking spaces would be provided in the general area of the existing surface parking on the lot, to minimize the project cost for underground parking and an extensive retaining wall system. Four (4) bike spaces would be provided off the parking area to accommodate visitors and the building's employees. The Applicant has committed to a Transportation Demand Management ("TDM") plan to encourage future use of non-automobile travel options, including:

- Offer of a one-year Capital Bikeshare and car share membership for the initial term of lease for new apartment residents;
- Posting of all TDM commitments on-line and provision to each initial resident with links to goDCgo.com, WMATA Metrobus routes, and [DC Bicycle](http://DCBicycle.com) maps; and
- Including a property manager as the project's TDM Leader to advertise and build awareness of programs to residents.

OP suggests the provision of an information lobby screen with train and bus arrival times of the nearby Metrorail stations and Metro buses on the various routes are included to facilitate the use of alternative transportation modes by employees and visitors.

No new rights-of-way or easements will be created as part of the proposed development. The project would remain a part of Meadow Green Courts, as the first of multiple phases of a redevelopment including future PUD applications for properties within the surrounding squares (Square 5411, 5412, 5413 and 5413N).

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

The proposal is in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations, as the proposal is for an anticipated use and satisfies all other bulk requirements of the Regulations.

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

The apartment building would be compatible with the scale and height of other apartment buildings in the area and would provide up to sixty (60) affordable rental units for seniors and/or handicapped persons, where none currently exists. The proposed development would not adversely impact the use of neighboring property with respect to light and air as it would be well separated from the closest single-family home to the north by an effective separation of at least 18 feet from the building's south elevation. Privacy of the single-family homes is not anticipated to be adversely affected, as three apartment buildings currently exist, and no information has been provided that it is a nuisance to the single-family home owners. In addition, OP does not anticipate noise and undue adverse impacts due to traffic due to the future senior/disabled residents, who are the intended occupants of the proposed residential building.

b. Variance Relief from § 2201 (Loading)

i. Exceptional Situation Resulting in a Practical Difficulty

For an apartment of fifty or more units, a fifty-five foot loading berth, a 200 square-foot platform and a 20 foot deep service delivery space are required. A 30-foot loading berth and a loading platform (100 square feet) would be provided.

The irregularly shaped property is encumbered by a variable topography and lacks a consistent expanse of level ground, which limits the size and number of the required loading facilities for the proposed development. These facts in combination create a practical difficulty in redeveloping the lot within the required area provisions for loading. A larger loading berth and platform would be unreasonably costly to an all-affordable project and could not be provided on the lot without impact on the available area for the development. The existing parking area would be modified to provide a loading area and platform for the proposed single building, in order to:

- Minimize the disturbance/removal of the mature trees in this area on the site;
- Maintain an adequate area for the resident's passive recreation; and
- Provide an efficient footprint for residential uses within the building.

ii. No Substantial Detriment to the Public Good

It has been well documented that larger loading berths are not necessary for the units' sizes of efficiency and one bedroom apartments, which would be approximately 91% of the units proposed. Therefore, the proposed size of loading berth would be adequate to serve the needs of the future residents. Move-in and outs are encouraged to be controlled by the future building's management.

The proposed development would increase the number of new and improved affordable rental units in the District, in keeping with the District's goals of providing affordable housing to the senior population.

iii. No Substantial Harm to the Zoning Regulations

The proposal is consistent with the requirements for developments in the R-5-A district as demonstrated above. The apartment building is compatible with scale and height of other apartment buildings in the area. The proposal would provide a loading area, not at the maximum size required, but commensurate with the sizes of the future residential units and the needs of the targeted population. The development would satisfy the requirements under Section 353, as highlighted above.

VI. COMMENTS OF OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES

DDOT's report would be submitted under separate cover.

VII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

The ANC held its regularly scheduled meeting on March 17, 2015. The ANC's comments will be filed under separate cover.

Attachment: Zoning and Location Map

ZONING AND LOCATION MAP

