

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Omi Eltzer <gnomstersteromi@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, February 27, 2017 7:35 AM
To: Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ); Cevasco, Jenna (EOM); DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ); ATD DCOZ
Subject: BZA Case No. 19450, Opposition to the requested variances and special exception requests by DGS to build a structure on the Idaho Avenue NW police station site

BZA Case No. 19450, Opposition to the requested variances and special exception requests by DGS to build a structure on the Idaho Avenue NW police station site

Dear BZA members,

I understand the urgent need to shut down DC General and I think it's important for a shelter to be built in Ward 3 so we can do our part in the city's efforts to support people who need such services. Yet, I simply cannot support the city's poorly planned selection of the Idaho Avenue site. This site is shaping up to be an expensive whale that will neither provide adequate resources for the residents nor minimize the costs imposed on the community. I am particularly troubled by the zoning exemptions that the city is seeking and I writing to urge the BZA not to approve these requests.

The city is proposing to cram a huge six-story structure onto a residential zoned street. This plan runs contrary to the BZA requirement that structures for which a builder is requesting exceptions not "substantially impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan" and must "harmonize" with the zone plan. The city has submitted images that purport to show the height of the proposed building. Unfortunately, they are drawn from a misleading vantage point, distorting the size of the structure vis-a-vis the height of neighboring buildings and trees. The reality is that the proposed building and parking structure will tower over everything around it. This is not consistent with the general intent and purpose of DC's zoning regulations.

While the city has asserted that the construction and eventual operation of the planned shelter will not compromise police operations, they have failed to provide any evidence to support this assertion. One need only consider the exemption the city is seeking regarding the loading dock requirement. The city claims that there is no need for a loading dock at the shelter as the only deliveries will be food services, which will be facilitated by parking in a designated space for temporary visitors. This assertion ignores the parking needs of the wide-array of other maintenance, utility, and delivery entities who will also need access to the building, as is customary at any large residential or commercial structure. By failing to include a loading dock and instead creating only a standard temporary parking space, the city is in effect directing such vehicles to park on the street. Presumably, many will have to double-park given the lack of available parking spots during the day. This will not only create significant traffic problems, but also pose a real danger to motorists and pedestrians, as they seek to maneuver around such vehicles. Furthermore, police vehicles entering and exiting the station will also be forced to detour around vehicles double-parked as they service the shelter – even more of a public safety hazard and potentially slowing down police response times.

In April 2016, DGS Director Weaver wrote to Councilwoman Cheh that "complicating factors ... make this site unsuitable for our purposes." Yet there appears to have been no genuine effort to seek an

alternative – contrary to the city's statements in the zoning application that an “exhaustive search” for alternative sites was carried out. I would also note that the requested environmental, noise and other such impact assessments also lack the rigorous standards associated with other city-sponsored construction projects. One need only look at the traffic assessment for which the consultant hired by the city appears to have spent one lone Thursday in January observing street parking and then used the “data” to render broad assertions.

The lack of careful study and due diligence in the selection of the site runs contrary to all tenets of good city planning. Rather than building something that will fit the scale of the lot and comply with the zoning regulations for this area - as well as take into consideration that the structure will be co-located with an extremely busy police station - the city is now trying to force a massive structure into an area that is not suited for it. The city is seeking exceptions because of its faulty planning - and this is not something the BZA should support, particularly as there has been no meaningful search for alternative sites for the proposed shelter.

I appreciate that the BZA is also hearing from many who support the shelter, the vast majority of whom do not live in close proximity to the Idaho Avenue site. While this does not make their opinion any less valid, I would comment that it appears that many individuals who have written in support of the shelter have failed to dive into the details of the proposed plan. Many of these letters rightly point out that we, as DC residents, can - and should - support the city in its important efforts to transition homeless individuals and families into temporary residences as a step towards permanent housing. Yet, this admirable goal does not excuse the poor planning and the ever-increasing costs associated with this site. Many of the letters of support appear to ignore the fact that the site is inadequate. For \$24 million (a budget which seemingly increases by the day), the city should be held accountable for developing a well-planned facility on an appropriate site to serve those needing housing assistance. In the past, the BZA has applied a strict interpretation of the mandate for projects not to “substantially impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan” when commercial builders have sought relief in this neighborhood. I would hope that this project, even though it is sponsored by the city, would be held to the same high standard, which it clearly does not meet. Accordingly, I urge the BZA to reject the city’s requests for exemptions.

Best regards,
Nomi Seltzer
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