

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF PLANNING



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## Memorandum

**TO:** District of Columbia Zoning Commission

**FROM:** Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director Development Review & Historic Preservation  
Office of Planning *JS*

**DATE:** October 31, 2008

**SUBJECT:** Setdown Report for Zoning Commission Case 08-27, American Institute of Architects & American Architectural Foundation  
Consolidated Planned Unit Development and Map Amendment

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### APPLICATION

The American Institute of Architects & American Architectural Foundation filed an application for a Consolidated Planned Unit Development (PUD), and PUD-related map amendment from SP-2 to C-3-C, to allow them to renovate and rehabilitate the AIA's National Headquarters building.

### SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) **recommends that the application be set down for public hearing.**

### DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

The subject property (Square 170, lots 38 & 39) is located just west of the White House and a few blocks north of the National Mall. Large commercial and federal office buildings are located in the immediate area. The site is currently located in the SP-2 District. Surrounding properties to the north are zoned C-3-C and SP-2, and those to the west, south, and east are zoned GOV.

There are two existing buildings onsite: the historic Octagon House, located at the intersection of 18<sup>th</sup> St. NW and New York Ave. NW, and the AIA Headquarters Building, which occupies the northeast section of the site. A plaza separates the two structures. Parking is provided underground, accessed from New York Avenue NW. All proposed changes apply only to the Headquarters Building; there are no proposed changes to the Octagon House.

The current development received BZA relief for rear yard setback, courts, and roof structure setback in 1970 (BZA Order #10463). At the time, the property was zoned SP which permitted an FAR of 5.5 and a height of 90 feet. The SP zone was subsequently split into SP-1 and SP-2, and this property was zoned SP-2.

ZONING COMMISSION  
District of Columbia

CASE NO. *08-27*

EXHIBIT NO. *10*

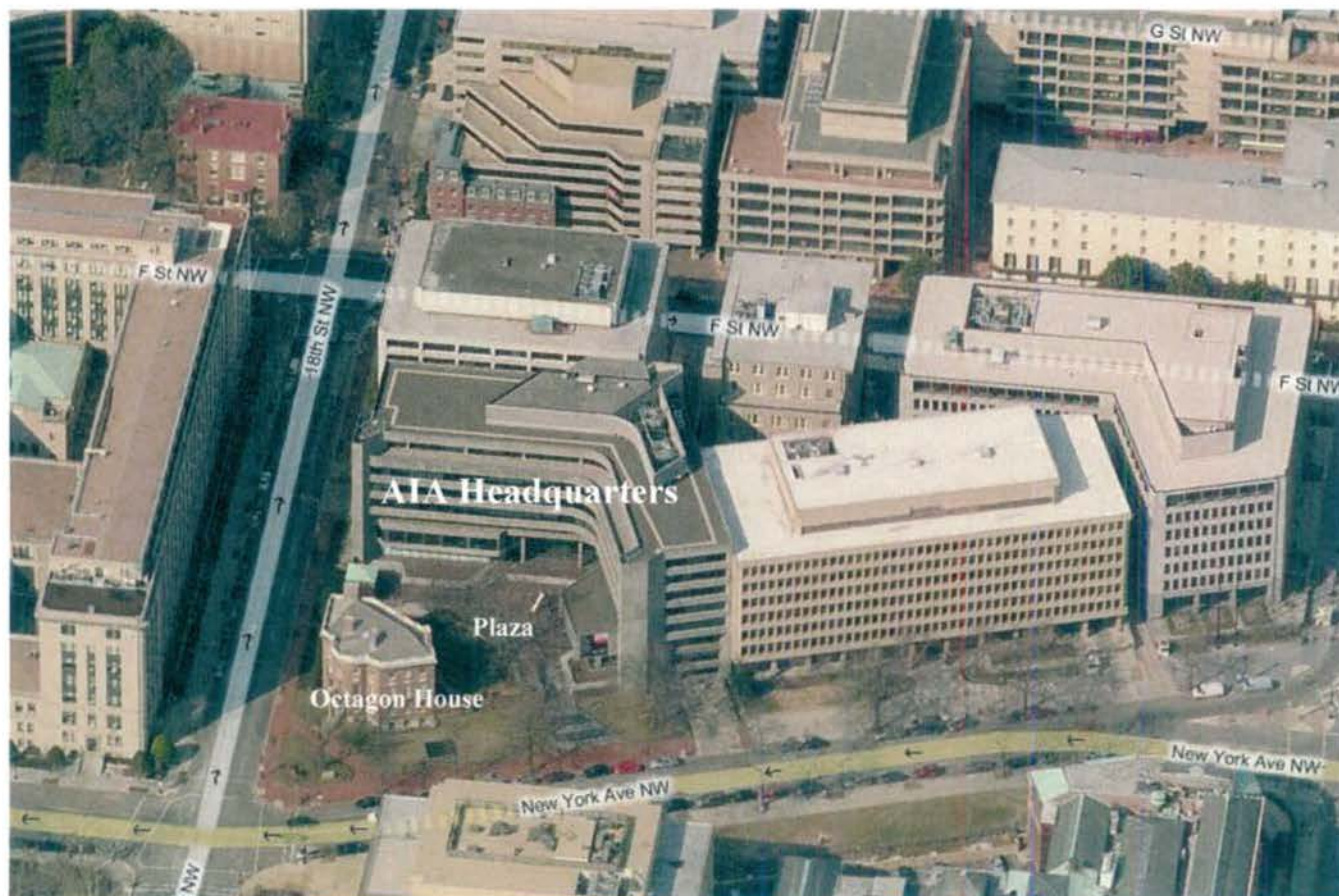


Figure 1: Aerial View

## PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to modernize the Headquarters Building, originally constructed in 1973. The renovated building would serve a demonstration project for sustainable renovations for existing commercial buildings. It is intended to achieve LEED Platinum certification, and attain carbon neutrality by 2030. To attain these ambitious goals, the applicant intends to readapt and refurbish several aspects of the existing Headquarters Building including:

- Installation of four vertical shafts with rotating light deflectors which will permit natural ventilation and light distribution throughout the building
- Use of recycled materials and reuse of building materials onsite
- Installation of cisterns which would collect rainwater for reuse in the building
- Installation of a green roof on lower levels which will retain stormwater outfall on site
- Installation of heat-reflective, operable windows
- Installation of solar thermal equipment and a photovoltaic array on the main roof to reduce dependence on carbon-producing energy sources

These improvements would result in significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and savings on energy costs of up to 60% for the applicant and other tenants.

The applicant also proposes to convert between 3,750 and 4,500 square feet of first floor office space to retail uses, such as a coffee shop and bookstore. This is intended to enliven the plaza between the Octagon House and the Headquarters Buildings, as well as facilitate additional street activity along 18<sup>th</sup> St. NW.

## ZONING

The site is currently located in the SP-2 District. Although the proposal does not involve significant additions to the existing headquarters building, ground floor retail uses are not permitted in the SP-2 District, so the applicant is pursuing a zoning map change from SP-2 to C-3-C for the subject property.

### Zoning Tabulation

|                   | Existing        | SP-2                                                                            | C-3-C PUD                                                                                                                                                | Proposed                                                                      |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Minimum lot area  | 39,546 sq ft.   | None                                                                            | 15,000 sq ft. minimum                                                                                                                                    | No change                                                                     |
| FAR               | 4.54            | 6.0 for residential<br><br>3.5 for commercial                                   | 8.0 maximum                                                                                                                                              | 4.51, a slight reduction from existing, but greater than currently permitted. |
| Height            | 86.6 ft.        | 90 ft. maximum                                                                  | 130 ft. maximum                                                                                                                                          | 86.6 ft., no change                                                           |
| Lot Occupancy     | 71%             | 80% maximum                                                                     | 100% maximum                                                                                                                                             | 71%, no change                                                                |
| Rear Yard Setback | None            | 2.5 in. depth per ft. of vertical distance from the mean finished grade minimum | 23 ft. (2.5" per ft. of bldg. ht.; not <12ft.) minimum                                                                                                   | Relief granted previously by BZA                                              |
| Penthouse Height  | 15 ft.          | 18.5 ft.                                                                        | 18.5 ft. maximum                                                                                                                                         | See analysis below                                                            |
| Parking Ratio     | 74 total spaces | Office use: 1 space for every 1,800 sq ft. beyond 2,000 sq ft. = 46 spaces      | Office use: 1 space for every 1,800 sq ft. beyond 2,000 sq ft. = 46 spaces<br><br>Retail use: 1 space for every 750 sq ft. beyond 3,000 sq ft. = 1 space | 74 total spaces, no change                                                    |

## FLEXIBILITY

There is no proposed increase in FAR, height, or lot occupancy. The proposal would continue to exceed parking requirements. The following flexibility has been requested:

#### Rear yard setback

In Application #10463, the BZA granted relief to rear yard setback requirements measured to the mid-point of New York Avenue, as permitted for through-lots. The applicant is not proposing to reduce the rear yard further, and is not increasing the height of the existing building. Therefore, the applicant requests that this approval be carried forward in this application.

#### Rooftop structures

BZA Application #10463 also granted approval for rooftop structures not set back from all exterior walls of the building at a 1:1 ratio. Therefore, where applicable, the applicant requests that this be carried forward in this application as an existing condition.

The proposed renovations also include additions to the non-confirming roof structure already in place. The applicant has requested relief from Section 411.3 (rooftop structures not set back from all exterior walls of the building at a 1:1 ratio) for a single proposed rooftop shaft. The shaft, at 20.5 feet in height, also exceeds the 18.5 ft. maximum allowed, although the building, with the shafts, is well under the height permitted under The Height Act of 1910. Additionally, because the proposed rooftop shaft measures 20.6 ft. in height and the existing penthouse measures 15.0 ft. in height, the applicant may need relief under the specifications of Section 411.5, equal height of rooftop structures. The other three proposed shafts satisfy the specifications of Section 411.3.

However, the rooftop shafts are necessary for achieving significant sustainability goals, and both The Height Act and the zoning regulations allow shafts to exceed the otherwise permitted height limits, so OP believes that relief is not required.

OP further notes that, although the proposal reduces FAR slightly, the existing building is non-conforming to current FAR standards – it conformed to the zoning at the time, but the zoning was subsequently changed.

#### **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND PUBLIC POLICIES**

The Comprehensive Plan includes the subject property in Central Washington, which includes the following pertinent provisions:

##### Chapter 16, Central Washington Area Element

##### *Policy CW-1.1.2: Central Washington Office Growth:*

*Retain Central Washington as the premier office location in the Greater Washington region... A range of office space should be planned to meet the needs of high-end, mid-range, and low-end office space users. 1608.2*

##### *Policy CW-1.1.13: Creating Active Street Life and Public Spaces:*

*Promote active street life throughout Central Washington through the design of buildings, streets, and public spaces. This should include:*

*d. Providing streetscape improvements that make Downtown streets more comfortable and attractive;*

*e. Encouraging active ground floor uses, and discouraging wide building entrances, large internal lobbies, and street-facing garage entrances and loading areas;*

*f. Creating and managing well-designed public spaces that provide space for spontaneous performances, programmed entertainment, and social interaction. 1608.14*

The proposed PUD is consistent with these policies. The project will offer a newly-renovated office building with an urban space in the form of ground-floor retail and public plaza.

### Chapter 3, Land Use Element

*Policy LU-2.4.10: Use of Public Space within Commercial Centers:*

*Carefully manage the use of sidewalks and other public spaces within commercial districts to avoid pedestrian obstructions and to provide an attractive and accessible environment for shoppers. Where feasible, the development of outdoor sidewalks cafes, flower stands, and similar uses which “animate” the street should be encouraged. Conversely, the enclosure of outdoor sidewalk space with permanent structures should generally be discouraged. 312.14*

The project’s provision of ground-floor retail and an open plaza is consistent with this policy.

### Chapter 6, Environmental Protection Element

*Policy E-2.2.5: Energy Efficient Building and Site Planning*

*Include provisions for energy efficiency and for the use of alternative energy sources in the District’s planning, zoning, and building standards. The planning and design of new development should contribute to energy efficiency goals. 610.7*

*Policy E-2.2.6: Energy Efficiency at Major Employment Centers*

*Continue efforts that enable major employers in the city, including the government, institutions, schools, and the private sector to implement energy conservation measures. 610.9*

*Policy E-3.1.1: Maximizing Permeable Surfaces*

*Encourage the use of permeable materials for parking lots, driveways, walkways, and other paved surfaces as a way to absorb stormwater and reduce urban runoff. 613.2*

*Policy E-3.1.3: Green Engineering*

*Promote green engineering practices for water and wastewater systems. These practices include design techniques, operational methods, and technology to reduce environmental damage and the toxicity of waste generated. 613.4*

*Policy E-3.4.1: Mitigating Development Impacts*

*Take measures to ensure that future development mitigates impacts on the natural environment and results in environmental improvements wherever feasible. Construction practices which result in unstable soil and hillside conditions or which degrade natural resources without mitigation shall be prohibited. 616.3*

The refurbishing of the Headquarters Buildings would result in a LEED Platinum certified building. This proposal is consistent with the environmental policies set forth above.

#### Chapter 9, Urban Design Element

##### *Policy UD-2.1.4: Architectural Excellence*

*Promote excellence in the design of Downtown buildings and landscapes. Particular attention should be focused on ground floor (street) levels, with greater architectural details used to improve visual image. 909.12*

##### *Policy UD-3.1.8: Neighborhood Public Space*

*Provide urban squares, public plazas, and similar areas that stimulate vibrant pedestrian street life and provide a focus for community activities. Encourage the “activation” of such spaces through the design of adjacent structures; for example, through the location of shop entrances, window displays, awnings, and outdoor dining areas. 913.15*

The project will offer a unique combination of sustainable design components with particular attention paid to historic preservation of an existing office building. These elements will make the renovated Headquarters Building the hallmark of green commercial architecture. In addition, the plaza will enliven the area with a new public gathering place.

#### Chapter 10, Historic Preservation Element

##### *Policy HP-2.4.2: Adaptation of Historic Properties for Current Use*

*Maintain historic properties in their original use to the greatest extent possible. If this is no longer feasible, encourage appropriate adaptive uses consistent with the character of the property. 1011.7*

The historic Octagon Building would be retained and not affected by the proposal. The Headquarters Building could also be considered historically important in the future, and the applicant has preserved those elements of the building's construction which are considered historically relevant.

### **PUD EVALUATION STANDARDS**

The purpose and standards for Planned Unit Developments are outlined in 11 DCMR, Chapter 24. Section 2400.1 states that a PUD is “designed to encourage high quality developments that provide public benefits.” The applicant is proposing to refurbish the existing Headquarters Building as a LEED Platinum building, which represents one of the highest levels of sustainable design currently possible and will set a new benchmark for environmentally-conscious design in the city. Further, the proposed renovation would facilitate needed additional pedestrian activity throughout the day. In order to encourage pedestrian activity in and around the applicant's property, retail space is proposed to occupy between 3,750 and 4,500 square feet of the first floor of the Headquarters Building. However, this use is not permitted in the SP-2 District. In order to bring the proposed use into conformance with the zoning regulations and be compatible with the surrounding community, the applicant is requesting a PUD-related map amendment from SP-2 to C-3-C for the subject property.

*2400.2 The overall goal is to permit flexibility of development and other incentives, such as increased building height and density; provided, that the project offers a commendable number of quality public benefits and that it protects and advances the public health, safety, welfare, and convenience.*

The proposed development brings with it a number of qualities that will benefit this neighborhood including environmental and aesthetic benefits, enlivening the corridor along 18<sup>th</sup> St. NW and New York Avenue NW.

Section 2403 further outlines the standards under which the application is evaluated.

*2403.3 The impact of the project on the surrounding area and the operation of city services and facilities shall not be found to be unacceptable, but shall instead be found to be either favorable, capable of being mitigated, or acceptable given the quality of public benefits in the project.*

The renovation of the building and site would have a positive impact on the continued improvement of the area, without further burdening city services such as water, sewer, and roads.

#### **PUBLIC BENEFITS AND AMENITIES**

Section 2403.9 provides categories of public benefits and project amenities for review by the Zoning Commission. The objective of the PUD process is to encourage high-quality development that provides public benefits and project amenities by allowing applicants greater flexibility in planning and design than may be possible otherwise.

*2403.9 Public benefits and project amenities of the proposed PUD may be exhibited and documented in any of the following applicable categories:*

- (a) Urban design, architecture, landscaping, or creation or preservation of open spaces;*

By providing retail space easily accessible to 18<sup>th</sup> St. NW, the public plaza between the Headquarters Building and the Octagon House would function as a neighborhood destination and gathering spot not currently available in the immediate vicinity. Further, the retail space would provide an easily-accessible shopping experience for pedestrians in the area.

- (b) Site planning, and efficient and economical land utilization;*

The retention of the plaza by the applicant and the buffering of the Octagon House is appropriate for the efficient and economical land use on the site, particularly since it is in an area which is otherwise devoid of pedestrians for many hours of the day.

- (d) Historic preservation of private or public structures*

The applicant has met with the Districts' State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to review the proposed PUD project and its treatment of the Headquarters Building. The SHPO did not have any concerns regarding the proposed renovation.

- (h) *Environmental benefits, such as stormwater runoff controls and preservation of open space or trees;*

The proposed refurbishing of the site would result in a LEED Platinum-certified building. The numerous design elements being proposed include natural lighting and ventilation, reduced energy consumption, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and use of recycled and salvaged materials.

Pursuing LEED certification and providing ground floor retail options in downtown are beneficial to the city. OP will continue to work with the applicant to provide additional information to clarify the design, green building features, and the amenity package prior to a public hearing.

#### **AGENCY REFERRALS AND COMMENTS**

OP and the applicant will work with DDOT to review the site design, loading, and parking. If this application is set down for a public hearing, it will be referred to the following District government agencies for review and comment:

1. Metropolitan Police Department
2. Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department
3. Department of Public Works
4. Water and Sewer Authority
5. Department of Housing and Community Development
6. Department of Transportation
7. Department of Environment
8. Department of Small and Local Business Development

#### **COMMUNITY COMMENTS**

The applicant has indicated that they have met with community representatives to discuss this project.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

OP believes that the proposed PUD is not inconsistent with the elements of the Comprehensive Plan and recommends that the application be set down for public hearing. OP will continue to work with the applicant towards a more detailed amenities package and design refinements prior to the public hearing.

SFV/sv  
Stephen Varga, Development Review Specialist