GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

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OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Office of the Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Andrew Altman
Director

DATE: June 13, 2000

SUBJECT: BZA Application 16581

APPLICATION

Application of 912 F Street Associates LP pursuant to 11 DCMR 3103.2 for a variance from Subsection 1707.4, the requirement that the floor area ratio for historic landmarks not exceed 6.0, to allow the construction of a 146 room hotel in the DD/C-4 District at 910-916 F Street, NW (Square 377, lots 828, 829, 847 and 848).

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning recommends approval of this application.

SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The 13,323-square foot (.306-acre) site is located in Square 377 bounded by F, G, 9th and 10th streets. The site is located on the south side of F Street, NW, between the historic 10-story Riggs Bank building (now a Courtyard by Marriott Hotel) on the east and the historic 8-story National Union Life Insurance Building on the west. It is bounded on the south by a 30-foot wide public alley that services the entire square. South of the alley there are additional historic buildings (currently proposed for a residential development fronting on E Street across from the FBI Building). To the north across F Street is located the historic retail frontage largely owned by St. Patrick's Church and recently denied a Special Merit request of the Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation for permission to demolish all but the front facades (20 feet back from the street) of those seven contributing buildings toward the construction of a high-rise office building.

The site is located in the Downtown Shopping District (Retail Core) of Downtown. It is also in the Downtown Historic District, with three of the four existing buildings on the site being either

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landmarks or contributing buildings. The contributing buildings were built as three-story residences around 1870, but were converted to commercial use within 10 to 15 years and have been used for commercial office and retail purposes ever since (910 F Street is currently vacant). The fourth building, 916 F Street, a one-story retail structure, is currently vacant. The site slopes 13 to 14 feet down from F Street on the north to the alley on the south.

APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL

The applicant is proposing to develop 912 F Street as a 146-room hotel. Originally, the applicant planned an office development for the site, but the small, 13,330-square foot footprint effectively ruled out that option. The current proposal includes a 12-story hotel tower near the rear lot lines (the site is approximately 88 feet wide and 160 feet deep), incorporating significant portions of the three "contributing" buildings into the hotel. New construction on the site of 916 F Street will provide the public entrance to the hotel and nine additional rooms above. A glass atrium will connect the lower buildings along F Street to the tower behind.

The 12-story, 110-foot high tower will be set back 67 feet from F Street and generally 15 feet from the existing historic structures along F Street. The 95,566 square foot hotel will have an overall FAR of 7.17, a lot occupancy of close to 100 percent, a required loading dock adjacent to the alley and 20 parking spaces (14 standard). The ground floor of the historic buildings along F Street will contain a retail use, probably a restaurant. It will have no function space other than a small (500 square foot) meeting room. At least two entrances are required at the ground floor per Paragraph 1701.5(b) of the Zoning Regulations and are indicated generally on the plans.

EXISTING ZONING AND RELIEF REQUESTED

The site is located in a DD/C-4 zone district. The DD/C-4 District in this retail core area allows office, retail, hotel, housing and mixed uses to a maximum height of 120 feet, a maximum lot occupancy of 100 percent and a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) for historic structures and districts of 6.0. Parking is required according to the formula of one space for 8 rooms, except that no spaces are required for a historic landmark or a building or structure located in a historic district which is certified by the State Historic Preservation Officer as contributing to the character of that historic district, which is the case here.

The hotel will have an FAR of 7.17, a height of 110 feet, a lot occupancy of close to 100 percent, the requisite loading dock off the alley to the rear and 20 parking spaces with access from the alley. Thus, the applicant requires variance relief from the FAR provisions of Subsection 1707.4 of the Zoning Regulations.

ANALYSIS

Compliance with Subsection 3103.2

According to Subsection 3103.2, the Board of Zoning Adjustment may grant an area variance if the following tests are met:

1. There is something unique to the property itself or other extraordinary or exceptional situation or condition which would create a practical difficulty for the owner to develop the property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and, therefore, deprive the applicant of reasonable use of the property;

2. Substantial detriment to the public good would not occur; and

3. The intent, purpose, and integrity of the zone plan, as embodied in the Zoning Regulations and Map, would not be impaired.

Practical Difficulty

The applicant cites the depth and shape of lot, size of lot, amount and superior manner of historic preservation and topography of site as being factors unique to this project that meet the practical difficulty test. The Office of Planning (OP) generally agrees with these arguments. The lot is almost 160 feet deep but only 88 feet wide. This configuration, coupled with 8- and 10-story historic buildings on the side lot lines, essentially means that any use of the building requiring access to light and air must build in a court or atrium somewhere near the midpoint of the lot, notwithstanding all the costs and inefficiencies resulting from that solution. In addition, because the site is so small (13,330 square feet) and all within the historic district, it cannot amortize the loss of FAR due to the 6.0 historic cap imposed by DD over a larger mixed historic site, as was possible for instance with the Old Hecht's site in Downtown.

The proposed design of the hotel project saves and reuses two of the contributing historic buildings on the site and also saves most of the third, providing an essential 15-foot deep glass-covered separation between them and the tower set back 67 feet from the street. While not the most efficient use of the site, it turned out to be the difference between this project and the St. Patrick's project across F Street that was denied by the Mayor's Agent because it was able to save only a 20-foot depth of the historic structures fronting on F Street. Finally, the topography of the lot results in an additional .34 FAR for parking, which would normally be below grade and not charged to FAR. (An additional .16 FAR results from the glass connection.)

Area Impacts

The 6.0 FAR limitation for development in historic districts was made a part of the DD regulations at a time when new office development posed a serious threat to the scale and character of historic buildings. The 6.0 figure was a compromise that was believed would allow reasonable development and redevelopment while reducing demolition pressures on historic buildings. In this instance, it is important to note that the proposed 12-story, 7.17 FAR hotel can be accommodated within essentially the same envelope (bulk) as could a 10-story, 6.0 FAR office building because a hotel requires substantially lower floor-to-floor heights (approximately 8 feet-8 inches vs. 10 feet-6 inches for offices). Thus the additional hotel FAR does not violate the original intent of the restriction on bulk. The Historic Preservation Review Board and Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation have agreed with this premise.

The Historic Preservation Review Board gave conceptual approval to the proposed 12-story hotel, accepting the height and bulk of the tower addition as being an essential part of the hotel project and consistent with the purposes of the preservation law because of its high level of preservation and considerable setback from F Street. The Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation subsequently concluded that the granting of a partial demolition application (for the two-story addition at the rear of two of the historic buildings) was necessary in the public interest, noting that the project "will contribute to the existing character of the historic district, is an adaptation of the site for current use, and that both the proposed alteration of the existing structures and the proposed new construction are each compatible with the current character of the historic district."

Impact on the Zoning Regulations and Map

The granting of an area variance to enable the proposed hotel project to go forward will have little or no impact on the Zoning Regulations and Map. The unique circumstances noted above leave the general 6.0 FAR limitation in place to encourage adaptive reuse of historic and contributing buildings along with compatible alterations and compatible new construction. The limitation will continue to reduce demolition pressures on historic buildings.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan contains a number of policies for the Retail Core that re supportive of the proposed hotel, including the following:

925.2(c) Encourage hotels in and adjacent to the Retail Core;
925.2(l) Retain buildings that are designated landmarks;
925.2(m) Encourage new development to respect the character of adjacent landmarks through appropriate use of materials, building scale and mass, and architectural detail; and
925.2(n) Emphasize and encourage pedestrian movement in the Retail Core.

Perhaps the most important guidance for development in Downtown comes from the following" major policy" which references a "Living Downtown:"

900.2 The key land use concept for Downtown is a balanced mixture of uses to attract a variety of persons, such as District residents, suburban residents and out-of-town visitors. The most important uses are retail, hotel, residential, and arts and culture. Although private office space will also be important, the concept of a "Living Downtown" recognizes that special efforts will be needed to attract the other desired uses.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS

The site is located within the jurisdictional boundaries of Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 2C. The ANC voted unanimously to support the application before the Mayor's Agent.

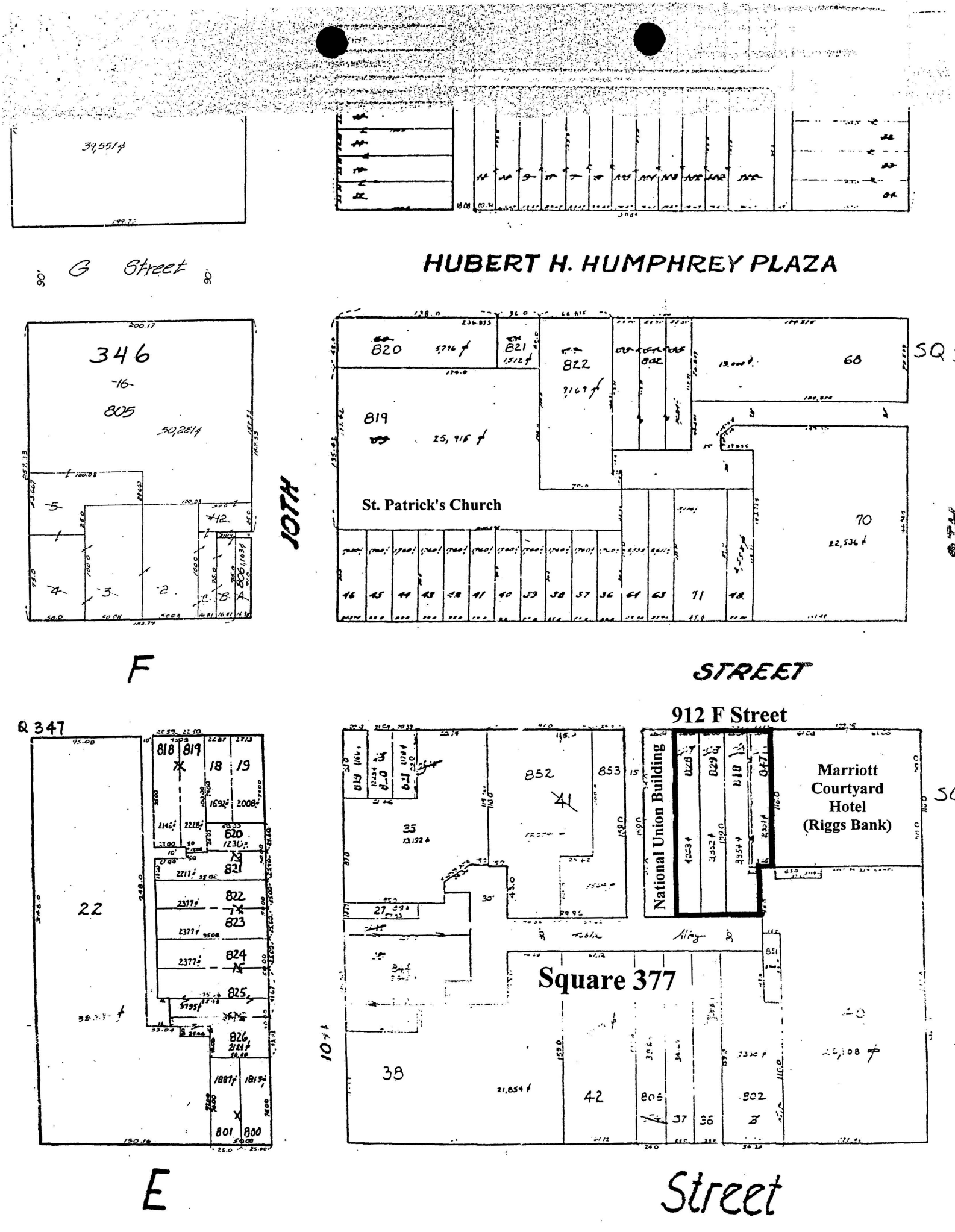
RECOMMENDATION

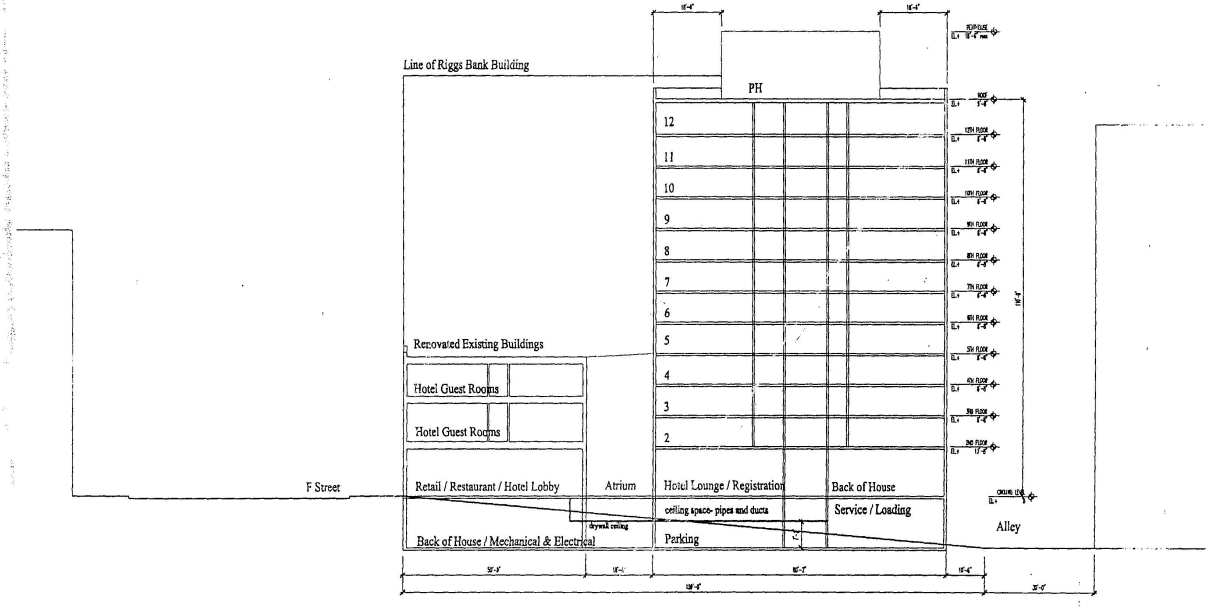
The proposed hotel is a desired use in Downtown and contributes to a critical mass of new and planned hotel rooms in the immediate area. According to the applicant, the minimum size for a hotel is 150 rooms. To get close to 150 rooms on the site, given its unique characteristics, the applicant is requesting additional FAR. This can be achieved within the same envelope as could a 10-story, 6.0 FAR office building because a hotel requires substantially lower floor-to-floor heights. The Historic Preservation Review Board and the Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation agree, noting that the project will contribute to the existing character of the historic district. Retail use of the ground floor and the hotel use itself will contribute significantly to the achievement of a "Living Downtown." Finally, the ANC supports the project.

The "practical difficulty" that would result from strict application of Subsection 1707.4 and render the proposed hotel infeasible results from a number of factors unique to this site and project, including the depth, shape and size of the site, its topography and the significant amount (and manner) of historic preservation required. The proposed project would benefit the area and historic district, not impact it adversely, and it would not impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the DD/C-4 zone district. For all of the reasons given above, the Office of Planning recommends approval of this application, with the condition that the applicant ensure that the final plans show at least one entrance to the retail use of the ground floor from the street.

Attachments

AA/dc


39,551 ft
90' G Street 90'
HUBERT H. HUMPHREY PLAZA
346
-16-
805
50,281 ft
10th
820
5716 ft
821
1512 ft
822
9167 ft
819
25,918 ft
St. Patrick's Church
68
70
82,536 ft
SQ
F
STREET
Q 347
818
819
18
19
820
1230 ft
821
822
823
824
825
826
22
801
800
912 F Street
National Union Building
Marriott
Courtyard
Hotel
(Riggs Bank)
852
853
35
41
Square 377
38
42
806
802
37
36
10th
E
Street



0' 5' 10' 20' 40'

BGM

■ 912 HOTEL
912 F Street N.W., Washington DC

■ 912 F St Assoc, LP
Peebles Atlantic Development Corporation
100 S.E. Second Street, Miami Florida

■ SECTION

■ BZA
3 March 2000
9204.00

■ A.5

BRENNAN BEER GORMAN MONK / ARCHITECTS & INTERIORS