D.C. OFFICE ON AGING
Congress Heights Senior Wellness Center
3500 Martin Luther King Avenue, Jr. Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20032
Capital Project No. A0-5
BZA Application # 16630

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Request Statement

The D.C. Office on Aging/D.C. Government, pursuant to 11 DCMR 3104.1, requests for a special exception under Section 205 to allow the construction of an Elderly DAY CARE ~~Development~~ Center (as defined by the zoning ordinance) for more than 16 persons (aged 60 years and older) in an R-4 District at premises known as 3500 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, S.E. (Parcel 243/47 in Square 6091).

Who We Are

The D.C. Office on Aging is the State and Area Agency on Aging designated by the Mayor of the District of Columbia to plan, develop and implement programs and services for residents 60 years of age and older. We fund a senior service network of providers (Office on Aging Senior Service Network) consisting of 30 community-based nonprofit organizations (including four universities) that operate 42 different programs for senior citizens. The Office on Aging's philosophy is to sustain meaningful roles for older persons in their homes and in their communities, and to promote healthy lifestyles and positive aspects of aging. The proposed wellness center will continue the thrust of the Office on Aging for the 21st Century to address the concept of wellness for the elderly of the District through the development and expansion of preventive health care programs and services.

Background

The Office on Aging received capital authority to build a senor wellness center in Ward 8 in 1998. Ward 8 is the home of over 5,000 seniors (persons 60 years and older) and that number is growing. There is currently no center of this type in the ward. The center is being built on government –owned vacant land. The site is parcel 243/47 and is 3.2 acres. The site is located at the corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue and Savannah Street, S.E.

The property is zoned R-4. This project will address the total design and construction of a state of the art 11,000 square foot facility. The facility will front on Martin Luther King Avenue, and will provide adequate off-street parking. The site is public transportation accessible.

At any given point, there may be up to 100 persons (60 years and older) utilizing the facility and its various programs including nutrition counseling, health screening, strength-building exercises, line dancing, health seminars, surfing the internet for state of

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the art health information, etc.). The activities will primarily take place during weekday daylight hours.

Community Impact

The site is zoned R-4. Under the R-4 designation an elderly development center is permitted for up to 16 individuals by right. A special exemption is required if the number exceeds 16. A senior wellness center is a new, unique phenomenon. This type of facility does not fit existing definitions of child/elderly development centers as outlined in the zoning regulations. This is our judgement the following factors should be taken in consideration by Board. The center will not adversely impact the community because:

1. Codes and Licensing -The center will be capable of meeting all applicable code and licensing requirements by the District Government.

2. Uses - The center will provide health and wellness activities for seniors, which include but not limited to health screening and education, aerobic exercise, etc. These activities will take place inside the facility.

3. Hours of Operation - The staggered arrival and departure times for the different activities in the center will not adversely impact traffic and noise conditions in the neighborhood. Staggered times for different activities will take place in the facility during the course of the day primarily from 9 pm to 3 pm. Activities could range from 1 to 4 hours.

4. Traffic -The center will provide sufficient off-street parking spaces to meet the reasonable needs of teachers, other employees and visitors. The facility will exceed the number of off site parking spaces for this center. There is on street parking available. The facility fronts a main public transportation route in the area. Most of the seniors in the Ward are transit dependent. The staggered arrival and departure times depending on the activity and scheduling will help diminish any traffic impact.

5. Outdoor activities- Most of the activities will take place inside the facility and will not have a noise impact on adjacent or nearby properties. An attractive walk trail surrounding the center will be a feature. Walking is part of regular physical activity. There will no outside play area or leisure space.

6. Compatibility with surrounding uses - The churches, businesses, public and private community facilities and surrounding single family homes will not be adversely impacted by this facility. Many nearby single-family homes have elderly occupants. The facility could have an intergenerational connection with the nearby Ballou High School and the National Childrens Center.

7. Physical Look - The physical look of the facility will not be out of character with the surrounding uses.

8. Community Support – The community has been enthusiastically waiting for this center.

9. Environmental Improvement – The site was vacant land and has been a nuisance property due to illegal trash dumping in the past.

The following are functions that will be carried out in different rooms.

Type of Activity in Rooms	Square Footage	Typical Per Person Requirement
Multipurpose	1,680	12 square feet
Health Fitness	1,642	25 square feet
Computer Access	128	13 square feet
Health Education	244	13 square feet
Reading/Meditation	244	19 square feet
Billiard/Game	522	26 square feet
TOTAL	4460*	

*In the absence of specific space requirements for this type of use we used the child care requirements (derived by dividing total activity space by 35 = 127). Based on these figures, we feel our request of 100 persons is reasonable.

SOURCE: Baker, Cooper and Associates calculations

The Need

The senior wellness center will provide services that promote good health habits, enhance social, mental and spiritual and physical well-being and help to prevent unnecessary and costly medical problems associated with the aging process. Specifically, seniors will gain access to health regimens, activities and programs tailored to those needs.

In a senior center setting the new focus is on health, wellness and self care activities that promote and reinforce older Washingtonians' capacity for learning and caring their own health, based on their ready access to information, skills and activities..

The location of this facility is in a medically underserved area (as defined by Department of Health and Human Services) and would give the area residents access to a needed health service. Four of every five senior in the area are African American increases the Diseases and illnesses already prevalent in the elderly show up more often with more complications in African Americans. According to the Office on Aging Study " Health Needs Assessment Survey of seniors citizens living in Washington, D.C.," Ward 8

seniors had a higher incidence than other seniors in the city of arthritis, diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.

A lifetime of increased levels of stress due to poor economic conditions and less adequate health care increase incidence of certain diseases. Chronic disease accounts for a relatively long period of time toward the end of life and while there may be little hope of a cure through the traditional medical model, the onset of such disease may be postponed through modifications of the risk factors mentioned above. These conditions can be controlled through monitoring and changes in behavioral and health habits that a wellness center can offer. This center will permit seniors with limited or no access to health care - health promotion and disease prevention tools and techniques to keep themselves well.

The central location of the center in the community makes it easier for seniors to reach it.

Community Support

The Office on Aging held several presentations on the conceptual and final design of the wellness center with the Ward 8 Mini-Commission, senior consumers, ANC 8C, Senior Citizens Counseling and Delivery Service (lead agency for Ward 8), Council member Sandy Allen and other community representatives. The architect for this project, Baker Cooper and Associates, along with Office on Aging and Office of Property Management staff made formal presentations at the several community meetings. The community's comments and concerns were addressed. Their suggested changes and comments were incorporated into the final plans.

Given the highly positive response from organizations and groups in the area we anticipate that this center will develop strong community partnerships.

Conclusion/Recommendation

In the zoning ordinance, elderly development center is not clearly distinguished from a child development center. The issues of safety, noise, uses and licensing are different.

If the senior wellness center is not constructed, there will remain a critical unmet need for health focused programs and services for seniors living in Ward 8. The impact would be to deprive senior citizens who are economically and socially vulnerable, services and activities that could postpone or prevent unnecessary and costly institutionalization.

The activities at the facility will not adversely impact the traffic, noise and peace of the neighborhood. The facility itself will blend in with the character of the neighborhood.

Based on the above referenced information, the Office on Aging requests special exemption from DCMR 3104.1, Section 205, to allow the construction of an Elderly Development/Wellness Day Center for more than 16 persons in an R-4 District at premises 3500 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, S.E.