GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

Office of the Director

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MEMORANDUM

TO: D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Andrew Altman
Director

BZA
Case No. 16673
Exhibit No. 30

DATE: February 13, 2001

SUBJECT: BZA Application No. 16673-Continued Use of a Surface Parking Lot as an Accessory Parking Lot to Serve American University at Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church, 3401 Nebraska Avenue, NW, Square 1601, Lot 816

APPLICATION

Application of Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church/American University, pursuant to 11 DCMR 3104.2 for a special exception to allow American University to continue the use of an existing surface parking lot as accessory parking during the weekdays in an R-5-A and WH/R-1-B Districts at premises 3401 Nebraska Avenue, N.W. (Square 1601, Lot 816).

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning recommends that the Board of Zoning Adjustment grant this application for the period of the proposed American University Campus Plan, 2001-2010 (or to 2011 if the campus plan is approved for that period).

BACKGROUND

The property for which the special exception is requested is part of the larger property of the Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church, as described below. As also described below, the parking lot is adjacent to American University. The Church and American University are requesting this special exception relief to continue American University's weekday use of this lot for the duration of the next Campus Plan (2001-2010). The application notes that the Board of Zoning Adjustment has previously

Board of Zoning Adjustment
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approved similar applications in BZA Cases Nos. 12567 (order dated March 9, 1978), 1347 (order dated July 27, 1981) and 15107 (order dated February 21, 1990).

SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The property of Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church is generally triangular in shape, bounded on the west by Nebraska Avenue, on the east by New Mexico Avenue and on the south by Newark Street, NW. The church building, which fronts on Nebraska Avenue, and related church buildings occupy the west portion of the property. The surface parking lot, with frontages on Nebraska Avenue, New Mexico Avenue and Newark Street, NW, occupies the eastern portion of the property. The total church property is 92,686 square feet, of which the parking lot comprises approximately 21,000 square feet. The church property is located approximately one block southwest of Ward Circle.

The main American University surface parking lot (approximately 900 spaces) is north of the church property across New Mexico Avenue. The Westover Place residential development is southeast of the church property, and the Sutton Place office/retail complex is further south on New Mexico Avenue. The Horace Mann School is south across Newark Street from the church property. The main part of the Main Campus of American University is directly west of the church property across Nebraska Avenue. The Church parking lot is therefore essentially separated from the adjacent Wesley Heights and Spring Valley residential neighborhoods.

Most of the Church parking lot is located in an R-5-A District but part of the lot is located in the WH/R-1-B District.

APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL

The application of The Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church, on behalf of American University, requests a special exception, under Section 2116.5 to continue to use the parking lot owned by the Church as weekday parking for American University for the duration of the next Campus Plan (2001-2010). The parking lot contains a total of 113 parking spaces. At present, American University uses the lot for parking on weekdays and the Church uses the parking for church purposes on weekends. Under the agreement between the Church and American University, Church attendees on weekends can use the nearby American University main parking lot if that is necessary. Over the period of the next campus plan, indicated as 2001-2010, American University proposes to use 80 spaces for visitor parking and 33 spaces for faculty/staff parking. The application indicates that using this parking lot, which is so close to the University's main parking lot, will prevent cars from circling through neighborhood streets looking for parking.

ANALYSIS

Section 2116.5 of the Zoning Regulations provides for the Board of Zoning Adjustment to approve open parking spaces accessory to any building or structure on the same lot as the building, or elsewhere.

Section 2116.6 provides guidance to the Board in approving accessory parking spaces, including 2116.6 (d): "The location of required parking spaces elsewhere on the same lot or on another lot would result in more efficient use of land, better design or landscaping, safer ingress or egress, and less adverse impact on neighboring properties."

Section 2116.7 indicates that accessory paring spaces on adjacent lots, or lots separated by an alley, shall be preferred.

Section 2116.8 states that "The accessory parking spaces shall be located so as to furnish reasonable and convenient parking facilities for the occupants or guests of the building or structures which they are designed to serve."

Section 2116.9 indicates that the Board may impose conditions such as screening, setbacks or other requirements necessary to protect adjacent or nearby property.

In this case, the Church parking lot serves church parking needs on weekends and serves as accessory parking for American University on weekdays. The buildings of the Main American University Campus are located to the west across Nebraska Avenue.

The Office of Planning basically agrees with the arguments of the applicant that this dual use of this parking lot results in efficient use of land and lessens adverse impacts on neighboring properties. The lot is well suited to serve the nearby campus as an accessory parking use.

In addition, it is important to understand the role of this accessory parking in the framework of the proposed updated American University Campus Plan. The Zoning Commission will hold a hearing on the proposed campus plan on February 15. American University, the community and the Office of Planning have been working intensively to fashion an agreement on the campus plan since October 2000 (University/community discussions go back to January 2000). In the proposed plan, American University is proposing a new parking approach in which new underground parking garages are built under new campus buildings. Surface parking lots and one above-grade garage in the center of the campus are removed. The use of the Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church parking lot for accessory parking for the University on weekdays is still an important part of the Campus Plan parking program.

Unfortunately, as of this time the University and the community have not been able to reach agreement on all aspects of the proposed Campus Plan. However, there is community agreement on the need for adequate parking on the campus or, in this case,

immediately adjacent to the campus to reduce the potential for adverse parking impacts related to the University on adjacent residential neighborhoods. The Office of Planning also believes that this accessory parking is an important component of the overall parking element of the proposed American University Campus Plan.

ANC AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

The parking lot being considered in this application is located in ANC-3D and is also near the boundary of ANC-3E. The boundary line between the two ANCs extends along Massachusetts Avenue. The Office of Zoning sent the application to both ANCs for comment.

ANC-3D considered the application at its meeting on February 7, 2001 and reported to the Board in a letter dated February 9, 2001. The letter reports that ANC-3D voted unanimously 7-0-0 to approve the continued use of this parking lot facility by American University during weekdays. At the time this report was filed, ANC-3E had not taken a formal position on this application.

The immediate adjacent neighborhoods are Wesley Heights, Spring Valley and Westover Place. At the time this report was filed, neither the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association or the Westover Place Homeowners Association had taken a formal position on this application. The Office of Planning understands that statements on this application may be forthcoming.

OTHER AGENCY COMMENTS

The Department of Public Works (DPW) submitted a report on this application, dated February 6, 2001, to the Office of Zoning. DPW notes that the parking lot is in good condition and well maintained, based on a site visit, and that the parking spaces are included in the parking inventory for the American University Campus Plan. The DPW report notes that continuation of the existing use (accessory parking lot) will not create dangerous or otherwise objectionable traffic conditions, or cause a large increase in the traffic volume for neighboring streets. DPW also notes that if the subject lot were to cease its present use as a parking lot, the lack of parking spaces would negatively affect the parking supply on neighboring residential streets. Accordingly, DPW has no objection to the application being approved.

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning recommends that this special exception application for accessory parking be granted for the period of the next American University campus plan. The Zoning Commission hearing on the American University Campus Plan will be held February 15. The Office of Planning has recommended that the campus plan be extended to 2011. The last BZA order on this parking lot (Application No. 15107, final date of order February 21, 1990) included conditions related to the duration of the campus plan,

maintenance of parking lot paving, bumper stops, landscaping, keeping lot free of debris, limitation of other uses and hours of operation. The Office of Planning recommends that similar conditions be included in the order for this requested special exception.

AA/jf