GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

Office of the Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Andrew Altman
Director

DATE: June 15, 2001

SUBJECT: Waiver of Rules for Late Submittal of Additional Comments on Board of Zoning Adjustment Application No. 16702, Georgetown Incinerator Project

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The attached report concerning Board of Zoning Adjustment Application No. 16702, Georgetown IncineratorProject, is being submitted less than seven days prior to the Board of Zoning Adjustment meeting on June 19 to consider additional information on this project. In this instance, the Office of Planning wanted to have the computer simulations in hand and to compare the simulations with actual walks along 31st Street and Wisconsin Avenue. The Office of Planning respectfully requests that the Commission waive its rule and accept the report into the record.

Attachment

AA/jf

BZA
Case No. 16702
Exhibit No. 81

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16702
EXHIBIT NO.81

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SUBJECT: Comments on Additional Information Provided on BZA Application No. 16702, Georgetown Incinerator Project

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SCOPE OF REPORT

This report covers the application of Millennium Georgetown Partners, LLC, pursuant to 11 DCMR 3103.2 for a variance from the height requirements of Subsection 930.1, and from the floor area ratio (FAR) limitation of subsection 931.1, to construct mixed-use buildings/structures of residential, hotel and commercial uses in a W-1 District at premises 3100 South Street, N.W. (Square 1189, Lot 88).

This memorandum provides an assessment by the Office of Planning (OP) of the additional information that the Board of Zoning Adjustment requested from the applicant about the Georgetown Incinerator Project at the Board's meeting on May 15, 2001. It is based on both a review of the simulation provided and a site visit.

BACKGROUND

Variances Requested

The variance requests are to add an extra floor of residential use, increasing the height of the residential elements of the building by 10 feet, 8 inches above the 40-foot height limit, and increasing the FAR of the project from 2.48 FAR to 2.89 FAR (2.5 FAR allowed in W-1 District). The residential elements in the project are along K Street. As indicated in the April 9, 2001 OP report, and by the applicant, part of the FAR increase results from filling voids in the building that will now count as FAR. This means that although the total increased FAR for the project is 0.41, the additional FAR that will be visible as increased mass of the project is .23 FAR.

The developer has set the added floor (fifth residential floor) back 12 to 20 feet on Wisconsin Avenue and 12 feet on 31st Street to address community concerns about view lines on those streets.

Previous Office of Planning Reports

The Office of Planning (OP) submitted a report, dated April 9, 2001, on this Application for the hearing held on April 17, 2001. **The Office of Planning recommended that the requested height and FAR variances be granted.** At its meeting on May 1, the BZA requested additional information from the Applicant, the Citizens Association of Georgetown, the Department of Public Works and the Office of the Corporation Counsel. The Office of Planning submitted a second report dated May 11, 2001, summarizing key facts about the project, and again recommending approval of the variances requested.

Board of Zoning Adjustment Actions on May 15

At the meeting on May 15, the Board approved the additional FAR that was requested within the building. However, the Board deferred action on the additional height (one floor) and the associated FAR for the residential elements of the building along K Street. The requested that the applicant provide view studies of the project, as it would be seen from various locations along 31st Street and Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.

This Office of Planning report deals only with the additional information provided by the applicant in response to the Board's request on May 15. Previous analysis and background information is not repeated.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE APPLICANT

As requested by the Board, the applicant has provided computer generated view studies of the project as seen by a person walking down 31st Street from M Street to almost K Street and down Wisconsin Avenue from M Street to almost K Street. These view studies are shown in three scenarios, A, B and C. Scenario A is the project as approved by the Commission of Fine Arts and the Old Georgetown Board, as well as other District reviews. This is the project that is under construction. Scenario B is the project with the additional floor on the residential elements and the setbacks requested by the community. Scenario C is the project with the additional floor and an additional 10-foot setback, in addition to the original setbacks. The Board requested this additional setback.

The applicant has provided these computer-generated views in two forms. The first consists of an animation of the views (A, B and C) that would be seen by a person walking down 31st Street and down Wisconsin Avenue. These three animations will be shown to the Board at its meeting on June 19.

The second format, taken from the continuous animation, is a series of page size views for ten locations along both 31st Street and Wisconsin Avenue for all three scenarios (A, B and C).

OFFICE OF PLANNING REVIEW

The Approach

In making its review, the Office of Planning has done three things. First, OP reviewed the animations for both 31st Street and Wisconsin Avenue for all three scenarios. Second, OP reviewed the page images for 10 locations along the three streets for all three scenarios. OP also looked at some views with trees added. Third, OP staff went to Georgetown and walked down both 31st Street and Wisconsin Avenue from M Street to K Street, using the page views at 10 locations for each scenario.

In making these reviews of the simulations, and using the simulation views at actual locations on the streets, OP asked three basic questions:

1) Does the additional height of the residential elements affect the view down the 31st Street or Wisconsin Avenue in terms of views of the waterfront (Whitehurst Freeway, the waterfront park, the Potomac River and Roosevelt Island across the river)?

2) Is the added height of the residential elements visible above the hotel elements along South Street, and if so, what is the effect?

3) How much of the added height is visible at the corner of the residential element on both streets, and what is the effect.

In reaching decisions about these questions, the computer-generated views provide a very significant tool. However, these views must be used with care and understanding. In walking down the streets with the appropriate views, it is clear that the computer-generated views have limitations. The computer-generated views provide a somewhat static and "gray" view of the streets. In fact, these streets are colorful, complex and dynamic. The buildings have various colors, signs and architectural ornamentation. There are street signs and street furniture and varying pavements. The streets have moving and parked vehicles and there are people walking on the streets or sitting at sidewalk cafes. The streets and adjacent landscape have trees and other vegetation that sometimes partially block views shown in the animations. Building facades are stylized in the animations and, of course, are much more interesting in reality. The applicant has also provided some views with trees, but these trees are stylized. The actual trees with their natural lines, provide a stronger effect and in some cases significantly hide views of the Incinerator Project, at least in spring and summer months.

In addition, OP believes the view in the animation is quite wide and somewhat exaggerates what a person walking along either of these streets would see. This is especially true for some of the views seen when descending 31st or Wisconsin Avenue south of the C&O Canal and approaching K Street. The Whitehurst Freeway appears somewhat lighter and thinner in the views that in reality. All these factors mean that the differences in the Incinerator Project that can be seen in different computer-generated scenarios will likely be more apparent in these views than would be noticeable to someone actually walking down these streets. In addition, a person walking down either street after the building is completed will see that building and would not have any reference point with which to contrast the additional floor.

Even with these limitations, the computer-generated views provide a good idea of how the building elements will appear to a person moving along these streets.

Views Along 31st Street

The views are taken from the east side of 31st Street. This street drops about 44 feet from M Street to K Street, with most of the slope coming south of the C&O Canal. First, it is clear from looking at the animations, and walking the street, that the added height will not affect the views down the street of the waterfront, the river and Roosevelt Island in the distance. It appears that there will be a thin edge of the housing element visible above the hotel element at some point along 31st Street. The added height will be visible on the corner of the building. Differences in height are more visible south of the Canal (Image 4). There is some difference in perception of the added height between Scenario B and Scenario C but the difference is limited. In architectural terms, in the massing of the residential element on 31st Street, it appears that Scenario B (the initial setback proposal) is better than Scenario C. In the simulations, the added height is most visible toward the lower end of 31st Street (images 8 and 9). In fact, we question whether that additional height would be very noticeable to a person descending down the slope of 31st Street.

Views Along Wisconsin Avenue

Views are taken from the west side of Wisconsin Avenue. This avenue drops about 56 feet from M Street to K Street, with most of the slope coming south of the C&O Canal. As with 31st Street, it is clear from looking at the animations and walking down Wisconsin Avenue that the added height will not affect the views down the street of the waterfront, the river and Roosevelt Island in the distance. It appears from the animations that there will be a thin edge of the housing element visible over the hotel element from the views near M Street. However, in reality, the large trees on the Grace Church property east of Wisconsin Avenue and south of the Canal hide almost all of the Incinerator Project from view. Existing trees on the west side of Wisconsin Avenue south of the canal also mask much of the view of the west side of Wisconsin Avenue from north of the canal. The slight edge of added height that might be visible would not be significant. The added height of the residential element would be visible on the southwest

corner of the Incinerator Project. The additional 10-foot setback would cause a reduced view of the penthouse element, as seen in the simulations. In reality, people walking down Wisconsin Avenue would not likely have much sense of the reduced building element.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The computer simulations are useful in gaining an understanding of how the Incinerator Building will appear with the additional height and with additional setbacks. Because these simulations are simplified, they probably somewhat overstate the impact of the Incinerator Project and of the additional height.

Based on review of these drawings, the Office of Planning continues to believe that the requested height variance, and the FAR associated with the height increase (0.23 FAR), will *not cause substantial detriment to the public good and will not impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan as embodied in the Zoning Regulations and Map.* OP does not believe that the additional 10-foot setbacks in Scenario C provides a significant difference in the views of the Project with the additional height.

The Office of Planning recommends that the Board of Zoning Adjustment approve the additional height variance, and the FAR associated with it, and approve the total variance requested by the applicant, incorporating the approvals voted at the May15 meeting.

AA/jf