GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

Office of the Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: JLS for Andrew Altman

DATE: September 4, 2001

SUBJECT: BZA Case # 16762 Special Exception Request

APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

Applicant: Central American Resource Center (CARCEN)
1460-62 Columbia Road, N.W.
Square 2670, Lot 841, 842

Relief Sough: Pursuant to 11 DCMR 3104.1 the applicant is requesting special exception relief for a Community Service Facility, fewer than 334.

OFFICE OF PLANNING RECOMMENDATION-IN-BRIEF

The Office of Planning recommends the subject applicant be approved as a community service center with non-profit offices, by special exception relief pursuant to §334.

Applicant's Justification:

The Central American Resource Center (CARCEN), a non-profit organization is requesting relief to use a portion of the premises located at 1460-62 Columbia Road, N.W. for office purposes. The remainder of the premises will be used consistent with the underling R-5-B.

The applicant originally filed for a use variance to use the basement and first floor of a building in the R-5-B zone for non-profit office use. After discussions with the Office of Zoning and the applicant it was concluded that the operations and outreach of CARCEN appropriately qualify as a Community Service Center, which is allowed in the R-5-B zone as a special exception subject to §334.

BZA
Case No. 16762
Exhibit No. 24

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16762
EXHIBIT NO.24

SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The subject premise is in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Ward 1. Spring Road generally bounds the neighborhood to the north, 16th Street to the east, Harvard Street to the south and Adam Mills Road to the west. The Columbia Heights neighborhood is predominantly developed with a mix of mid-rise apartment buildings, single-family row dwellings and a number of institutions, both public and private. Commercial services in the neighborhood are concentrated along both sides of Mount Pleasant Street to the west and most of the frontage along the 14th Street Corridors, to the east, is commercially used.

The subject premises are on the south side of Columbia Road, directly across from the Calvary M E Church, the current location of the office of CARCEN.

The subject properties include two three-story buildings, originally constructed as multi-family dwellings. The buildings have been abandoned for approximately the past 11 years. The deteriorating condition of the buildings is a glaring eyesore on the community; there is evidence of rodent infestation and the site is a haven for vagrancy.

The property was purchased by CARCEN, through the Department of Housing and Community Development Homestead Program, a housing preservation program. The program was established to provide much-needed homeownership opportunities to low and moderate-income residents. The program gives first-time homebuyers, who otherwise might be unable to purchase a house, a chance to become homeowners in the District of Columbia. The Homestead Housing Preservation Program also enables organized groups of low and moderate-income residents to acquire multi-family properties and convert the buildings to cooperatives and condominiums.

Another goal of the Homestead Program is to remove blighted and dilapidated properties in the District, by selling them to low and moderate-income purchasers, for as little as $250.00 per unit. The sold properties are then renovated, using a $10.000 deferred loan, which is made available through the Homestead Program, when the property is sold. The homebuyer is responsible for securing financing for the balance of the rehabilitation expenses. Once the properties are purchased and rehabilitated, they are returned to the active tax rolls, and contribute towards neighborhood stability.

AREA ZONING

The subject premises are in the R-5-B (moderate height and density) Zone District. The R-5 districts are designed to permit a flexibility of design by permitting in a single district, except as provided in §§350 through 360, all types of urban residential if they conform to the height, density and area requirements for the R-5 districts. An overwhelming proportion of the land area east of the subject site, between 14th Street & Park Place, is zoned R-4 and is developed primarily with one-family dwellings.

The Columbia Heights neighborhood is adequately serviced by commercial facilities. Both sides of the 14th Street corridor (east of the subject site) are commercially zoned. The area of the commercial corridor, between Columbia Road & Monroe Street is zoned C-3-A and is considered a "sub-center." Sub-Centers are designed to accommodate development at the highest level next to the Central Business district. These districts are usually developed with mixed uses, commercial uses and housing. The 14th Street Columbia Heights sub-center is flanked on both sides with stepped-down commercial zones. The area north of the sub-center, between Columbia Road and Shepard Street, is zoned C-2-A and is designed to accommodate office employment centers, shopping centers, and medium-bulk mixed use centers. The area south of the sub-center, between Columbia Road and Chapin Street is zoned C-2-B, and is designated to serve commercial and residential functions similar to C-2-A districts, but with high density residential and mixed uses.

APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL

The applicant, CARCEN is seeking to relocate its offices from Calvary M E Church, (which is directly across Columbia Road) to the subject premises. If approved by the Board, CARCEN proposes to relocate its offices to the first floor and basement of the premises and renovate the remainder of the property with multi-family units. The objectives of the project are: 1) to restore the properties to a useful state, after 11 years of abandonment; 2) have a location to continue providing needed community services, such as legal, counseling and advocacy, convenient within the community it has operated in for over 20 years; and 3) provide affordable housing in the Columbia Heights community for low to moderate income families, most of whom are new residents to the District from Central American countries.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE APPLICATION TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan Generalized Land Use Map depicts the area in which the subject premises are located, as being in the ***Moderate Density Residential Land Use Category***. Row houses and garden apartments are the predominant uses, although this category may also include low-density housing. The areas immediately to the east, south and west of the subject area are designated as being in the ***Medium Density Residential Land Use Category***. Multiple-unit housing and mid-rise apartment buildings are the predominant uses in this category. The area just north of the subject area, east of Hiatt Place and Columbia Road, over to the 14th Street at Columbia Road and up to Monroe Street, is in the Mixed Use Land Use Category. Mixed-use areas incorporates a variety of uses, including commercial areas and areas proposed for significant land use changes.

REQUESTED ZONING RELIEF

Pursuant to 11 DCMR §3104.1 the applicant is requesting special exception relief, utilizing § 334 to allow a non-profit Community Service Center in a multi-family building, located in the R-5-B Zone District.

AUTHORITY TO GRANT VARIANCE

DCMR §3104.1 is the D.C. Code provision that authorizes the Board of Zoning Adjustment the power to grant the requested variance.

DOES THE APPLICATION MEET THE SPECIAL EXCEPTION TEST?

It is the Office of Planning's position that the applicant has satisfactorily provided support for a special exception under the requirements of Section 334 of the Zoning Regulations and demonstrated that the proposed Community Service Center can meet the requirements. The application demonstrated that the project can be accomplished in harmony with the general purpose of the Zoning Regulations and will not tend to adversely affect adjacent properties. Specifically:

334.1 A community service center to accommodate organizations created for the purpose of improving the social or economic well being of the residents of the neighborhood in which the center is proposed to be located which may include but not be limited to centers for job training, family counseling, consumer cooperatives, and such other facilities as are similar in nature and purpose, shall be permitted in an R-4 District if approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment in accordance with the conditions specified in §3108 of chapter 31 of this title, subject to the provisions of this section.

The applicant, CARCEN, is committed to improving the social and economic well being of the community. They have provided detailed descriptions of their services and programs that fulfill this commitment. These include legal and housing counseling, advocacy, and transitional living programs.

334.2 A community service center shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to neighboring properties because of noise or other objectionable conditions.

The subject properties have been listed on the DHCD Homestead Program rolls for some time. The properties are dilapidated and have been abandoned for approximately 11 years. The deteriorated condition of the buildings is a glaring eyesore on the community and there is evidence of rodent infestation and the property is a haven for vagrancy. The need for extensive renovation to the structures has been a deterrent to prospective purchasers. Additionally, the poor condition of the properties has served as a hindrance to investment of other properties in the immediate area.

CARCEN has also purchased and intends to renovate the three-story residential building, abutting the subject buildings on the west side, at 1464 Columbia Road. This structure was also abandoned and in the same dilapidated condition as the subject structure. Once renovated, this building will bring an additional four two-bedroom multi-family low to moderate-income units back on the housing market and contribute toward neighborhood stability.

An overwhelming majority of clients served by CARCEN live within convenient walking distance to the proposed relocation site of the service center, and will be able to access the building for services, without an automobile or in most cases, mass transit.

334.3 No structural changes shall be made except those required by other municipal laws or regulations.

CARCEN proposes to renovate the two adjoining three-story buildings it purchased from DHCD, and relocate its offices to the first floor and the basement, and provide residential units on the upper two floors. The combined footage of the two subject buildings is approximately 14,052 square feet. The first floor and the basement offices will consume approximately 6,000 square feet total available space, and the upper two floors, which will contain three two-bedroom units and two one-bedroom units, will consume the remainder of the space. There will not be alterations are changes to the structure, with the exception of proving a handicap access ramp to brings the building into compliance with current building code and ADA requirements.

334.4 The use shall be reasonably necessary or convenient to the neighborhood in which it is proposed to be located.

A majority of the clients live within walking distance to the current location of the organization and would be adversely affected if the organization were to leave the neighborhood because of a lack of affordable space. Each year CARCEN serves approximately 10,000 Latinos directly and reaches at least 10,000 more through educational outreach activities. Many of these residents experience language barriers and are at the lower end of the economic ladder. An overwhelming majority of clients served are new residents to the area, from Central American countries.

The applicant's lease at its current location (the Calvary M E Church) will not be renewed when it expires at the end of the year. There is a unique opportunity for the applicant to remain in the Columbia Heights neighborhood, (practically at the same location) where it has operated for over twenty years. The subject site will permit CARCEN

the opportunity to continue its community services on the same block, but directly across the street.

334.5 A community service center shall not be organized for profit, and no part of its net income inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.

The application states that the Community Service Center will be operated by CARCEN, which is a 501C3 non-profit organization. There will be a co-op structured as a limited-equity co-op, with CARCEN a fifty-percent shareholder and the residents of the eight units being the other fifty-percent shareholder.

The application is also required to meet the requirements of Section 3104.1 for Special Exceptions as follows:

"The special exception will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map and will not tend to affect adversely the use of neighboring property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps."

A non-profit Community Service Center is a permitted use in the R-5 zone, subject to approval of the BZA. The proposed Central American Resource Center fulfills the intent of the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map that allow uses that are compatible to residential areas to create a suitable residential environment.

The applicants, Monsenor Oscar A. Romero Tenant Association and the Central American Resource Center, submitted an application to DHCD to purchase the subject properties through the Homestead Housing Preservation Program. The program was established to provide much-needed homeownership opportunities to low and moderate-income residents. The program gives first-time homebuyers, who otherwise might be unable to purchase a house, a chance to become homeowners in the District of Columbia. The Homestead Housing Preservation Program also enables organized groups of low and moderate-income residents to acquire multi-family properties and convert the buildings to cooperatives and condominiums.

Another goal of the Homestead Program is to remove blighted and dilapidated properties in the District, by selling them to low and moderate-income purchasers, for as little as $250.00 per unit. The sold properties are then renovated, using a $10.000 deferred loan, which is made available through the Homestead Program, when the property is sold. The homebuyer is responsible for securing financing for the

balance of the rehabilitation expenses. Once the properties are purchased and rehabilitated, they are returned to the active tax rolls, and contribute towards neighborhood stability.

COMMENT COMMENTS

Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 1A at its regularly scheduled meeting, held on Monday, August 20, 2001, voted to support the variance request. The ANC did include a caveat that, for the housing, the income for a family of four should not be more than $30,000. This was a condition the applicant had already proposed. Additionally, The ANC encouraged the applicant to prove sufficient parking for the development.

OP SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

After having reviewed the application submitted by the Central American Resource Center, requesting a special exception to permit office use in the R-5- zone district, the Office of Planning recommends that the Board approve the application. OP finds that the subject application meets all the tests specified in §3104.1 and will not cause substantial detriment to the public good (to the contrary) and will not impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan as embodied in the Zoning Regulations and Map.

The Office of Planning recommends approval of the application with the following condition:

1) The non-profit organization (CARCEN) is restricted to the first floor and the basement of the premises, provided that the remainder of the building is developed residentially.