GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

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Office of the Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Andrew Altman, Director

DATE: July 18, 2002

SUBJECT: Response to Applicant's Post Hearing Submission
BZA Application No. 16892

D.C. OFFICE OF ZONING
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BZA
Case No. 16892
Exhibit No. 47

The Office of Planning (OP) has reviewed the applicant's post-hearing submission dated July 16, 2002. Staff from both the Development Review Section and the Historic Preservation Office has been involved in these discussions. OP has also discussed the post-hearing submission with the applicant.

The Board of Zoning Adjustment (the Board, or the BZA) had asked the applicant to address further:

- The requested variance relief from residential recreation space requirements within the context of both on-site alternatives and nearby off-site alternatives;

- Three specific alternative parking and loading access options within the context of the Downtown Development District.

§773 Residential Recreation Space

OP is satisfied with the range of alternatives presented. Any of the residential locations suggested by the applicant would strengthen the objectives for creating a Living Downtown.

OP recommends the Board approve the requested variance from §773 subject to the following:

- The Applicant shall provide at least 6,000 square feet of new residential space at the subject property, at 919 F Street, NW, or at some other location within a two-block radius north, south or east of the subject property.

- The applicant shall also provide, at minimum, the square footage of residential recreation space required by the Zoning Regulations.

- If the residential space is located at the subject property, OP recommends that the recreation square footage be provided at the subject property, at 912-916 F Street, N.W., or at 919 F Street. N.W.

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- If the residential space is located at 919 F Street, or at some other location within the two-block radius north, south or east of the subject property, OP recommends that the required recreation square footage located within the same property as the residential space is located.

- OP recommends that the applicant be granted relief from the locational requirements of §773.8. All of the recreation space may be located indoors.

- OP also recommends that the applicant be granted relief from the dimension requirements of §773.7

§1701.4(c) Parking/Loading Access

The applicant has presented schematics for two of the alternatives requested by the Board, and a brief discussion of the third alternative requested by the Board.

The applicant correctly states that OP would not find parking and/or loading access from F Street to be acceptable. These reasons are outlined in OP's June 25, 2002 report on this application. They are grounded in the Mayor's Agent order of May 12, 1989, which found the earlier project to be of "special merit", in part because it would re-establish "continuous active retail uses on F Street, the primary shopping street in downtown".

OP recommends the Board approve "Scheme 6A", as presented by the applicant in its July 16, 2002 submission. This alternative would provide for access to the parking garage immediately south of the contributing historic structures that will be retained at the corner of 10th and F and would provide for loading access from the alley behind the applicant's proposed building. The Historic Preservation Review Board also voted on June 27, 2002 for the applicant to provide access for parking on 10th Street and access for loading from the alley.

Scheme A has several advantages:

- Moving the parking access farther north and relocating the existing curb cut reduces, from the previous proposal, possible negative aesthetic and traffic impacts on the National Historic Landmark Ford's Theater.

- The alternative does not introduce a substantial amount of new traffic to the alley accessed from F Street. As the June 25 OP report noted, both the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Regulations stress the importance of maintaining the continuity of the pedestrian experience along F Street, which was, historically, Washington's principal shopping street.

- The alternative allows the re-introduction of a substantial retail presence on 10th Street, adjacent to Ford's Theater.

OP does not favor "Scheme 6B". It would introduce an additional loading and delivery opening and access point on 10th Street that would necessarily be wider, taller and closer to Ford's Theater than would the parking-only access point in Scheme 6A. It would also not allow for as much retail frontage on 10th Street. The applicant anticipates a limited number of service vehicles. Both the applicant and D-

DOT have stated that alley access is acceptable for loading purposes. OP recommends the Board not approve Scheme 6B.

Other Matters: Passageway Between 10th Street and the Alley

None of the July 16 alternatives show a passageway linking 10th Street with the alley behind Ford's Theater and the applicant's site. The passageway had been integrated with parking and/or loading access in the earlier schemes, but disappeared from the July 16, 2002 plans, as these access points were moved further north.

The passageway had been intended to augment access to the alley, which is to have public education displays about John Wilkes Booth's escape, provided in cooperation with the D.C. Heritage Tourism Coalition by the developers of the proposed housing project on the south side of the Square. It also could have provided a sheltered area for Ford's Theater patrons waiting to enter the theater. At one point, the applicant in this case considered having retail frontage in the alley or along the passageway.

These are desirable aims. However, OP notes that

- The National Park Service, which is the government custodian of Ford's Theater, has expressed no interest in such a passageway;

- A passageway would become a completely separate element if parking access is moved farther north, with little utility to Ford's Theater patrons;

- The passageway would be approximately 8 feet wide, one story high, and 100 feet long. It would not have the possibility of active uses for most, if any, of its length. It would be difficult to make this configuration attractive, safe, and of utility.

OP concludes that formerly proposed passageway is no longer a justifiable design element, and concurs with its elimination from the applicant's plans.

Aa/slc