GOVE MENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLU IA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

Office of the Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 23, 2002

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

THROUGH: Andrew Altman, Director OP
Ellen McCarthy, Deputy Director OP

FROM: David J. McGettigan, AICP

SUBJECT: Board of Zoning Adjustment Case No. 16933
Washington Drama Society, Inc. d/b/a Arena Stage
1101 6th Street, SW
Square 472 Lots 123 and 126

Summary

The applicant, Washington Drama Society, Inc. (Arena Stage), seeks approval of

1. A variance from the height requirement under Section 930;
2. A variance from the floor area ratio (FAR) requirement of Section 931;
3. A variance from the lot occupancy requirement under Section 932; and,
4. A variance from the rear yard requirement under Section 933.

The applicant proposes construction of a new theatre, preservation of two existing theaters and demolition and reconstruction of accessory spaces such as offices, workshops, storage, and other spaces incidental to theater productions. The complex of three theatres will be enclosed in a glass superstructure to protect the existing structures from traffic noise and to create a dramatic interior space.

- The Office of Planning believes this is an exceptional situation due to the zoning history of the property, the historical landmark status of the structures on site and the distinctive requirements of theaters which bring public benefits of culture and economic development.
- Based on the analysis of the Office of Planning, the zoning

BZA
Case No. 16933
Exhibit No. 26

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EXHIBIT NO.26

regulations cause peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties in development of the property for its continued use as a theatre.

- Based on the analysis of the Office of Planning, the proposed design would not cause substantial detriment to the public good and would not substantially impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan as embodied in the Zoning Regulations and Map.

Recommended Action:
The Office of Planning recommends approval of the application.

Background

The subject property is located at 1101 6th Street, SW (Square 472, Lot 126) and bounded by Maine Avenue, SW to the southwest, 6th Street, SW to the east, and bounded by a single property to the north (See Attachment 1). A portion of the property is separted from Maine Avenue by a 20' strip of land paralleling the avenue that belongs to the National Park Service. The subject property is in a W-1 District. The site, currently occupied by the Arena Stage, contains the Fichandler Theater, the Kreeger Theater, the Old Vat Room (a cabaret theater), and an administrative and service section, which connects the two main theaters and contains the Old Vat Room on a lower level. The rear portion of the lot is occupied by a parking lot that serves the theater complex (See Attachment 2). The Arena Stage received historic designation in 1980 as a pioneer in the American Regional Theater movement, as one of the City's unique cultural institutions, and as an innovatively designed building complex. The building received a number of architectural awards and was a key component of the Southwest Urban Renewal Plan. The theater sits across the street from the Southwest waterfront in an area that is seeing redevelopment and revitalization. The Office of Planning has recently completed an extensive planning process for the Southwest waterfront and developed the Southwest Waterfront Plan as part of the City's Anacostia Waterfront Initiative. The Arena Stage is envisioned as a major contributor to a new culture center along the waterfront. The site is in an area with a mix of densities and uses.

Project Description

The applicant proposes to demolish the administrative and service portions of the structure, along with the Old Vat Room and replace these with new construction including a new theater (The Cradle). The new theater will be architecturally distinctive and will complement the existing historic theaters. The theaters will be connected by a new lobby structure that integrates a large water feature filled with fountains. The existing parking will be moved underground and the entire complex will be encased in a glass enclosure. The glass enclosure allows the passerby to enjoy the beauty and presence of the three theaters and see the activity of the people and fountains within. Most importantly, the enclosure provides a sound barrier to protect the existing historic theaters from external noises that are currently disruptive to performances. The water

feature introduces a link to the waterfront and provides a thematic connection between the three theaters.

The project will provide parking for at least 70 cars with access off of 6th Street through the curb cut currently used to serve the existing parking lot. The proposed expansion will replace spaces that are currently too small and improve the functionality of the site. The redevelopment is necessary for the continued viability of the theater.

Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan several goals relevant to this development:

801.1 The new preservation and historic features goal for the District is to preserve the important historic features of the District while permitting new development that is compatible with those features.

804.1(n) Foster broad community participation in the effort to protect and enhance historic properties in the National Capital and give maximum encouragement to organizations and individuals undertaking preservation by private means, particularly the financially disadvantaged;

805.1 Every effort should be made to provide for the continued, appropriate use of all historic properties. If the original use or a reasonable intensification of the original use is no longer feasible, appropriate adaptive uses consistent with applicable land use regulations should be encouraged.

805.15 The distinguishing original quality or character of historic properties should be protected. The removal or alteration of any historically valuable material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible and kept to a minimum when required for continued use. The design of additions should be compatible with the height, scale, materials, color, texture, and character of the historic property.

1348.1(c) Revitalize and redevelop the Southwest waterfront along Maine Avenue as a major destination and service area for the currently 20 million visitors to the nation's capital city,

1367.3 To protect and enhance the character of the Southwest community, the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly commissioned the Urban Land Institute to study concepts that would improve the neighborhood, including the potential for redeveloping Waterside Mall and the Southwest waterfront. The Urban Land Institute met with residents and other stakeholders in 1998 and recommended the following improvements:

(c) More convenient, safe parking, for the retail centers as well as Arena Stage, and Southeastern University;

(l) A standard of architectural excellence for the one-half million square feet of new construction that will be built in the next few years; and

The proposed historic preservation solution and the significant streetscape and presence the new development will bring to the waterfront further these as well as many other goals of the Comprehensive Plan. The site is designated as the medium density

residential category which includes multiple-unit housing and mid-rise apartment buildings as the predominant uses and may also include, as appropriate uses, low and moderate density housing.

Zoning

The total area of the two lots is 84,619 square feet with a total lot width of 368.76 feet. The lot lies in the W-1 Zone. The W-1 Zone District's purpose is to encourage a diversity of compatible land uses at various densities, including combinations of residential, offices, retail, recreational, and other miscellaneous uses. The uses proposed for the site are permitted as a matter-of-right in the W-1. The development needs zoning relief from four area provisions.

Area Req.	Existing	Required/Allowed	Proposed	Variance	Code Ref.
Height	45'	40'	75'	35'(87.5%)	§930
FAR	0.9	2.0	2.5	0.5 (25%)	§§931 and 2521.1
Lot Occupancy	36%	80%	99%	19%	§932
Rear yard		12'	8'	4' (33%)	§933
Side yard	None	None	None	None	§934
Parking	70+	See Note	70-90	None	§2100
Loading	0	2	2	None	§2200

Note: §2100.5 exempts historic landmarks from additional parking requirements.

The Zoning Regulations, §3103, provide the Board three standards for granting a variance:

1. The site is unique because of its size, shape or topography or other extraordinary or exceptional situation or condition.
2. Strict application of the regulations results in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties.
3. The variance would not cause substantial detriment to the public good and would not substantially impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan as embodied in the Zoning Regulations and Map

Site's Exceptional Situation

The first factor that contributes to the exceptional situation is the historic landmark status of the site. The site presents a preservation challenge, as it does not provide adequate and efficient space for the Drama Society's current operations. In addition, the Fichandler Theater is impacted by outside noise from auto and airplane traffic because it lacks a surrounding lobby or foyer area to buffer it from outside noise. The documentation presented in support of the designation expresses the importance of Arena

Stage as a cultural institution as well as the architectural contributions of the building. Therefore, the preservation solution must not only preserve the significant architectural elements of the building, but it must also retain the Arena Stage as a cultural institution. This situation is clearly exceptional.

The second factor that contributes to the exceptional situation is the distinctive use of the site. Theaters have specific programming needs that don't fit the typical zoning box of height and FAR. Acoustical requirements of the theater spaces and space in the ceiling to accommodate lighting and other production related mechanical equipment are necessary to bring the public benefits of culture and economic development of theater to the waterfront. As was the case in the 1950's urban renewal plan that used the Arena Stage as a focal point and catalyst of the Southwest Urban Renewal Area, the Arena Stage redevelopment is a focal point and catalyst for revitalization of the waterfront as envisioned in the recently released Southwest Waterfront Plan by the Office of Planning. The proposed redevelopment will create a new landmark and a reinvigorated source of activity for the waterfront.

Exceptional Practical Difficulties

The practical difficulties in redeveloping the site for Arena Stage's continuing use can be found in three areas:

1. The theater needs acoustical protection that must be provided without impairing the integrity of the significant historic elements of the structure;
2. The theater needs more space to continue and enhance its important contribution to the economic and cultural life of the Southwest waterfront;
3. Because of the historic landmark designation the applicant can't just demolish the whole thing and use the site more efficiently. Because it is surrounded by roads and development on all sides, expansion through the purchase of additional property is not an option. There is a need for Arena Stage to remain in the Southwest waterfront to continue anchoring revitalization efforts along the waterfront.

These result in the need to build higher, with more floor area, and on more of the lot.

The applicant wishes to (and should) creates a dramatic architectural statement that merits the demolition of the dysfunctional support spaces and create a new landmark along the waterfront to provide identity and sense of place. These difficulties are addressed by Bing Thom's bold design that wraps the existing structures in a glass façade and preserves views of the architecturally significant theaters. This solution provides the necessary acoustical protection as well as addressing preservation.

As part of solving the programmatic requirements of Arena Stage, Bing Thom has created a new theater that complements and completes the set of theaters. The theater is a sculptural architectural piece that provides residential apartments for visiting performers in its upper levels.

Public Good and Intent of Zoning

The nature of the proposed development cannot fit in the constraining envelope of zoning that exists on the site. The variances that are proposed, except for height, are essentially minor deviations from the strict interpretation of the code. The design solution proposed reflects a creative and thoughtful urban design that is not a detriment to the public good or the intent of the zoning regulations. The continuation of the theater use by Arena Stage on the site contributes to the cultural opportunities in the city and continues the theater's role as an anchor to the southwest waterfront area.

Height

Controlling the height of buildings is essentially intended to limit density, protect the character of a zone, and ensure adequate light and air. The proposed development is not a detriment to these three goals. In regards to density this project is not significantly changing the intensity of the existing use and most of the height of the structure is required to protect the existing historic landmark structures. The height is not required to increase the floor space of the structure beyond what is permitted in the zone (see discussion of FAR below). With respect to the character of the area, existing zoning height limits and buildings to the north and east are higher than the proposed structure. In addition, the contextual impact of the structure as been reviewed and approved by the Commission of Fine Arts and the Mayor's Agent. In the case of light and air, the proposed enclosure is very transparent and the impact of the new theater is minimal because of its location on the lot and its curved shape that recedes the structure from the property lines. The proposed administration and service wing to the rear is approximately 40-45 feet high.

FAR

The floor area ratio, which is a measure of density, is exaggerated by the glass enclosure. Programmatically, the use of the property is essentially the same, a three-stage theater with accessory uses and spaces supporting this function. The enclosing glass structure creates additional floor space that would functionally been outdoor space in the absence of the need for the enclosure. As noted above, the enclosure is necessary to acoustically screen the existing landmark theaters and is designed to maximize visibility of the theaters. The required variance from FAR of 0.5 (25%), in this context, is minor.

Lot Occupancy

The intent of the lot occupancy provision of the Waterfront District is to ensure residential uses have adequate light, air and open space. Since the lot occupancy requirement is only applicable to residential uses, the provision of a handful of apartments in the Cradle triggers this requirement. Realizing that some structures may be mixed use in the Waterfront district, the zoning regulations allow the lot occupancy to be calculated on a horizontal plane located at the lowest level where residential uses begin. Given the special purposes of the proposed housing and the vagaries of calculating lot

occupancy, the variance, if granted, would not impair the intent of the zoning regulations.

Rear Yard

As with the lot occupancy, the rear yard requirements are only applicable to residential structures and rear yards are required only at the horizontal plane upon which the residential use begins. Additionally, the shape and size of the lot requires a substantial rear yard area. The proposed encroachment on the rear yard occurs only at the third floor level and has minimal impact on the rear yard. As addressed above, adequate light and air are still provided. Therefore, the variance will not impair the intent of the zoning regulations.

ANC's and Community Groups

The applicant has presented the application to ANC 2D. At its regularly scheduled meeting on October 21st, the ANC voted unanimously to support the project. The ANC 2D Chairman Andy Litsky indicated that concerns of the ANC included traffic, parking, and construction related impacts, but these concerns are more widespread and related to all of the development going on in the area not particularly to Arena Stage. Arena Stage is providing underground parking to replace the lost surface parking, providing adequate loading and is proposing little or no increase in the number of seats and would, in addition, not significantly impact peak hour traffic volumes given its hours of operation.

Recommendation

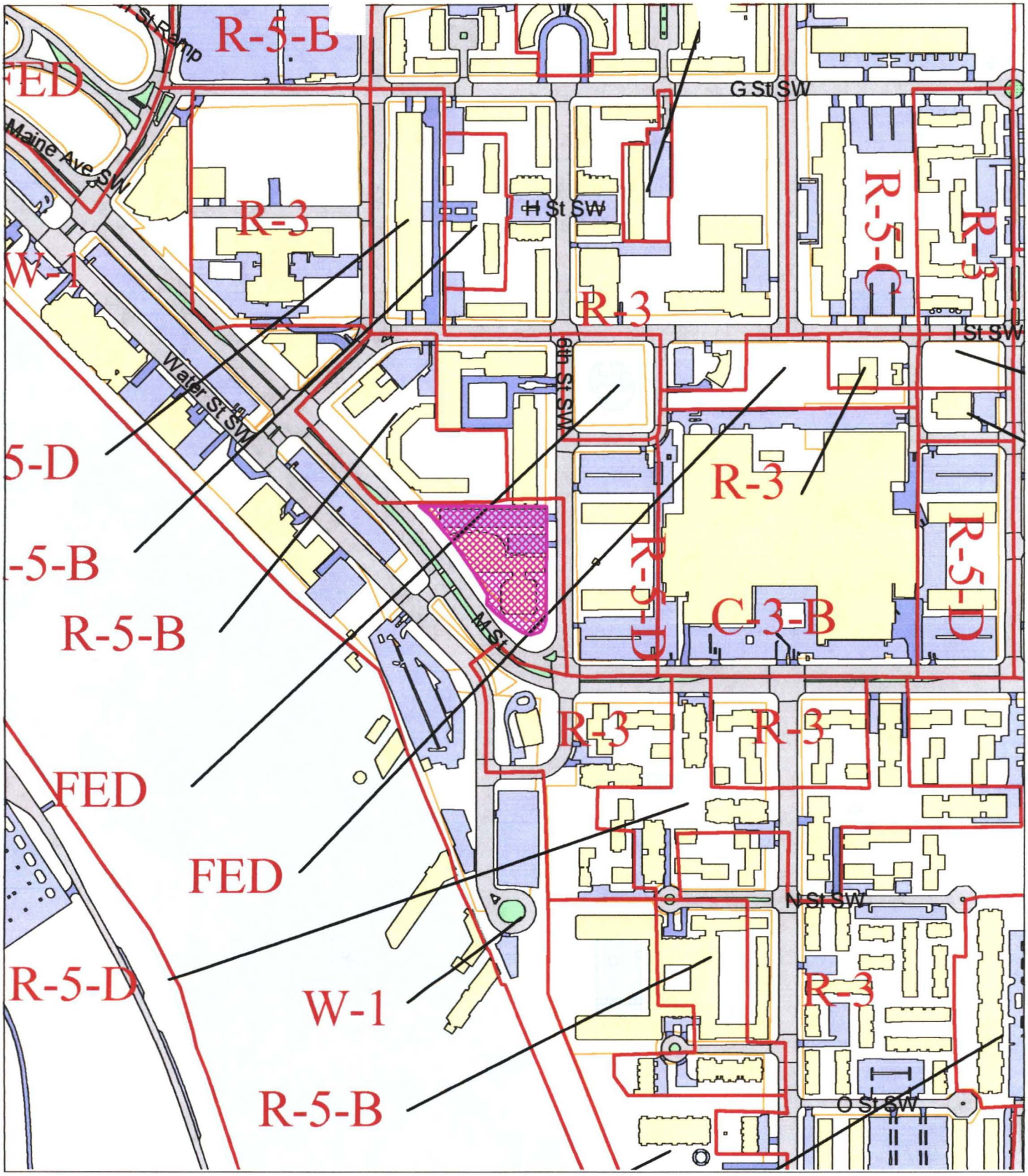
The Office of Planning recommends approval of BZA application 16933 requesting a the following variances:

1. A variance from the height requirement under Section 930;
2. A variance from the floor area ratio (FAR) requirement of Section 931;
3. A variance from the lot occupancy requirement under Section 932; and,
4. A variance from the rear yard requirement under Section 933.

The Arena Stage proposal will be a high quality development with exceptional positive impacts on the community.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Location Map
2. Comprehensive Plan Map
3. Aerial Photograph



Feature Key

- Roads
- Parking Lots
- Water
- Parks
- Building
- Subject Property
- Zoning Boundaries
- Square Index

Site Planimetrics

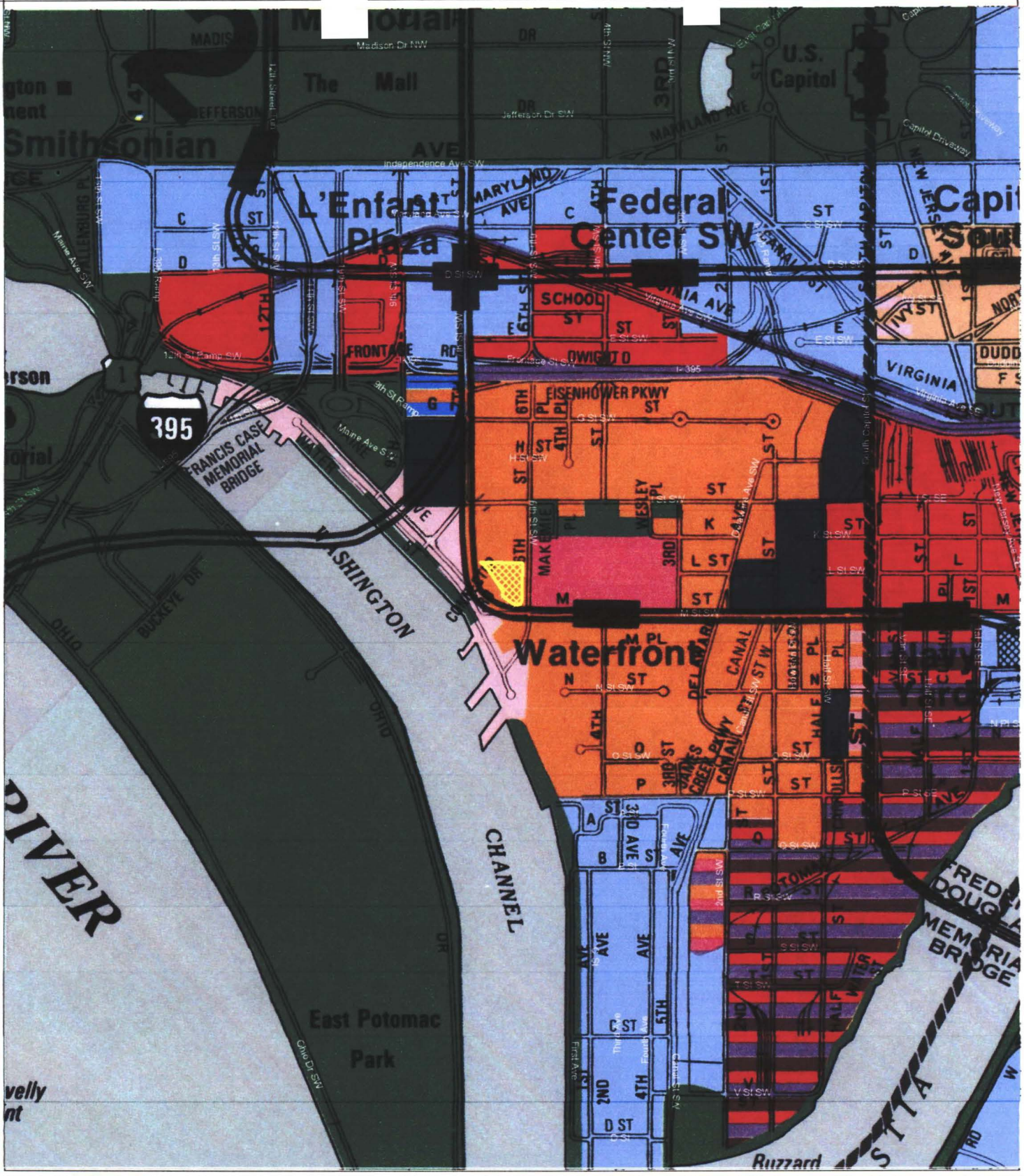
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Scale 1:4800

400 0 400 Feet

DC Office of Planning
October 24, 2002

Attachment 1



Generalized Land Use Key

- Residential Low Density
- Residential Moderate Density
- Residential Medium Density
- Residential High Density
- Water
- Commercial Low Density
- Commercial Moderate Density
- Commercial Medium Density
- Commercial Med.-high Density
- Commercial High Density
- Federal
- Institutional
- Local Public
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- Production and Technical Employment

Comprehensive Plan Landuse

N

Scale 1:14400

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October 24, 2002

Attachment 4

Attachment C – Aerial Photograph

