OUTLINE OF TESTIMONY
Nathan W. Gross, AICP
Board of Zoning Adjustment Application No. 16937
1836-38-40 Columbia Road, N.W.
Public Hearing Date – November 5, 2002

Area Context

The Site is within the 18th Street and Columbia Road retail-entertainment district, which extends several blocks along both street frontages.

This retail-entertainment district exhibits a high level of pedestrian activity and business vitality because of the combination of a concentration of retail, restaurant and bar uses together with a high density of residential buildings and population in the commercial district and in the surrounding blocks.

The immediate vicinity – the 1800 block of Columbia Road -- exhibits an eclectic mixture of building heights and bulk, as well as a mixture of architectural styles, predominantly traditional and of a high quality of design.

The proposed building will reinforce the mixed-use development pattern and will be in scale with the surrounding design context.

Because most of the concentration of business activity and because most of the older apartment buildings lack parking, the area has a substantial parking deficit.

Zoning

C-2-B is a midrise, mixed-use zone that allows a maximum building height of 65 feet and a maximum floor area ratio for residential or mixed uses of 3.5, with commercial use limited to 1.5 FAR.

The proposed building complies with the following C-2-B zoning requirements:

- Building height – 65 feet.
- Commercial Gross Floor Area – 7,733 square feet (1.35 FAR) provided; 8,565 square feet (1.5 FAR) allowed.
- Rear Yard – 15 feet required and provided
- Lot Occupancy – 80% allowed, 79.2% provided.
- Parking – 10 spaces required, 15 provided.
- Loading – 1 Berth and 1 Platform required and provided.

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- Residential Recreation Space – 2,500 square feet required, 2,654 square feet provided.

FAR Variance. The one area of requested zoning relief needed is in total FAR - 25,052 square feet of gross floor area ("g.f.a."), or 4.39 FAR, versus 3.5 FAR, or 19,985 g.f.a., allowed. The variance request is thus for 5,067 s. f. of gross floor area (0.89 FAR).

Exceptional Condition/Practical Difficulty

The exceptional condition of the property that creates a practical difficulty is that this is a small, infill lot zoned for midrise, mixed-use development, a situation in which various code and functional space requirements create obstacles to development.

- The lot is only 5,710 square feet in area and only 50 feet wide.
- The building footprint is further reduced by a 14.5-foot front yard setback and a 15-foot rear yard setback.
- Within this small building footprint various required building elements use up a significant part of the usable floor area. These include the elevator core, code requirements for two exits separated by a long corridor, and the need for dual entrance lobbies to serve residential and commercial uses.
- The cost of the structured parking necessary to meet the parking requirement is high, and a significant percentage of parking space is lost to the ramp on such a small site. The narrow width of the lot adds difficulties to the parking layout.

No Substantial Detriment to Public Good or to the Zone Plan

- Construction of the building is directly in furtherance of the purposes of the C-2-B district to create retail continuity along the ground floor with a midrise apartment building above (see 11 DCMR §720.6).
- The 65-foot-high building with an FAR variance will appear the same from the street as a matter-of-right 65-foot building. The proposed building will actually be intermediate in height and bulk among the nearby buildings on both frontages of Columbia Road.
- The new building with its handsome design will replace a dilapidated one-story building and thereby enhance the visual quality of the neighborhood.
- By maintaining a 14.5-foot setback from the front property line, the attractive streetwall of this block's frontage is maintained. An added benefit is that the planned sidewalk café is on private property and does not impinge on the public sidewalk.

- The parking requirement is exceeded, an important benefit in this neighborhood with a severe parking deficit.