GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

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MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director

DATE: July 24, 2007

SUBJECT: Board of Zoning Adjustment Case No. 17033-A
Washington Drama Society, Inc. - Arena Stage
1101 6th Street, SW
Square 472 Lots 123 and 126

APPLICATION

The applicant, Washington Drama Society, Inc. (Arena Stage), seeks modification of variance case #17033, which permitted 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 applicant also seeks a waiver of the six month time frame set forth in 11 DCMR §3129.3.

RECOMMENDATION IN BRIEF

The Office of Planning recommends **approval** of the requested modifications and the waiver of the six-month time frame.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

Arena Stage is located at the Southwest waterfront on the triangular parcel bounded by Maine Avenue to the south and west, 6th Street to the east, and the Waterside Tower Apartments to the north. The area is comprised of a mixture of uses, including restaurant, waterfront commercial and arts activities, and residential uses. Farther north of this site are numerous Federal office buildings.

The present Arena Stage consists of three main sections: the Fichandler Theater, the Kreeger Theater, and administrative and service wings. Constructed in 1960, the Fichandler Theater comprises the original portion of the Arena Stage. The octagon-shaped "theater in the round" is located at the southeastern portion of the site. In 1969, the Kreeger Theater was added to the complex at the northwest portion of the site, along with additional administrative space, shops, and the Old Vat Room, a cabaret theater located in the lower level of the 1969 addition. The

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administrative wing connects the two theater areas. The main lobby entrance to Arena Stage is located off 6th Street, SW. A parking lot is located to the north of the building.

In 1980, Arena Stage was designated a historic landmark in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites as one of the City's unique cultural institutions and for its pioneering role in the American Regional Theater movement. The glass and masonry structure, designed by Harry Weese Architects, is recognized for its architectural composition, structural expressionism, and exposed raw materials.

The subject property received a variance from the building height, floor area ratio, lot occupancy and rear yard requirements under BZA Case No. 16933 and BZA Case No. 17033. The Board found that the applicant had met the burden of proof and noted that Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2D and the Office of Planning recommended approval of the application. Regarding the exceptional situation the Board found the following:

- The lot was an unusual shape and size.
- The context of the site was unique with the theater's role in revitalizing the waterfront, its development under an urban renewal plan without zoning and the resulting later need to "fit" a zoning designation on the existing development.
- The historic theaters on the site create an extraordinary condition of the site and the need to preserve them along with previous and continuing need to use the site for a theater is also an exceptional situation.

The Board further found that these exceptional and extraordinary conditions led to practical difficulties including the following:

- The theater needs to expand and upgrade its facilities to continue to be viable.
- The existing historic theaters need acoustical protection from airplane and traffic noise that could not be practically provided without damaging the integrity of the historic structures.
- The design solution to encase the historic theaters in a glass box is an exceptional solution that requires the variance relief requested, especially in terms of height, where clearance is needed for the new roof from the existing 45' tall historic theater and structural bracing to the big roof for sheer, thus eliminating the need to create any other major structural components in the center of the project that would interfere with the historic theaters.

Finally, the Board concluded that there would be no substantial detriment to the integrity of the zone plan or map. The project is a key component in the revitalization plan for the Southwest Waterfront and was developed in concert with planning for the area.



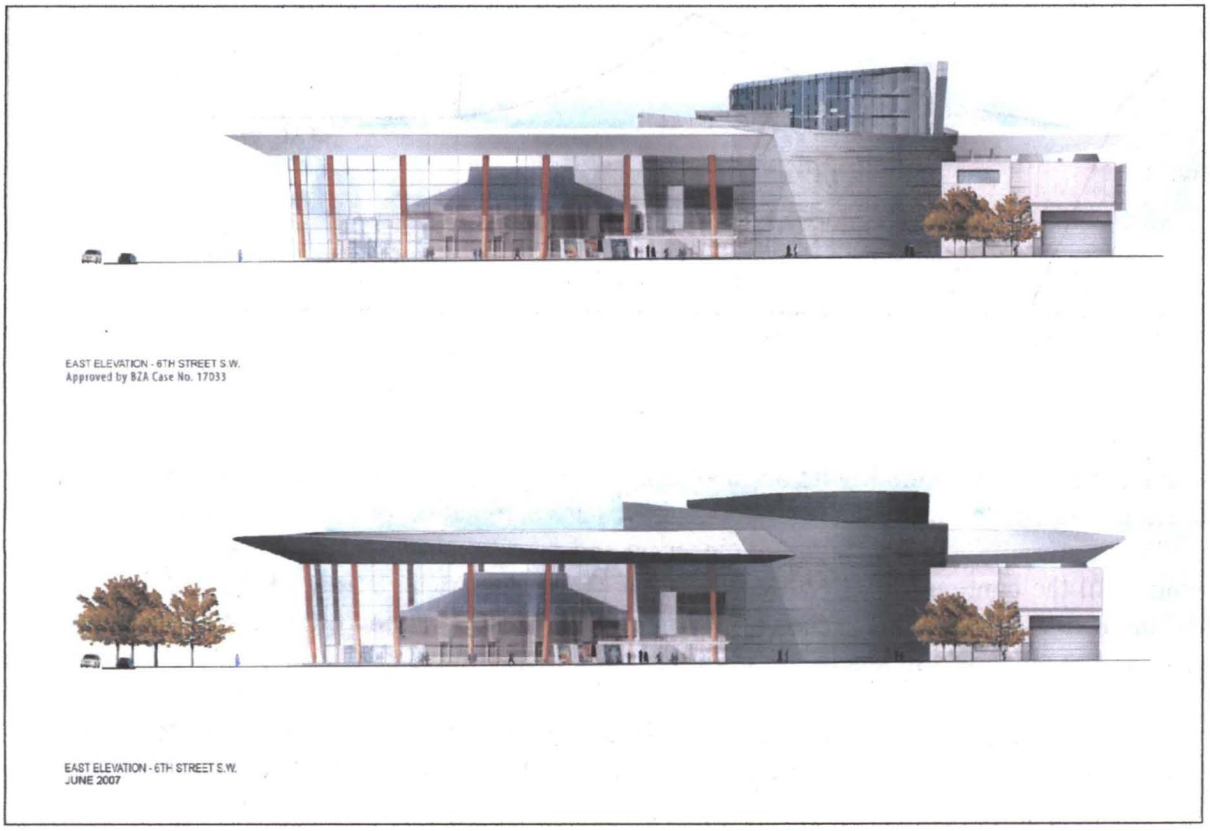
Site Location Map

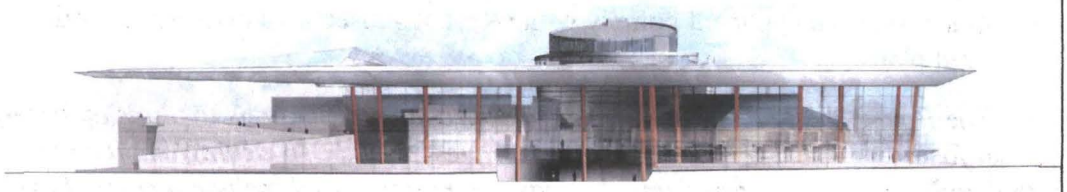
PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to modify its original design in response to various programmatic, engineering, and cost concerns. The major revisions are elimination of the artists' apartments above the new "cradle" theater, the re-engineering and modification of the overhanging roof, and the removal of the continuous reflecting pool along the Maine Avenue front of the building. Less significant changes would involve the corner entrance at 6th and Maine, the terrace layout, and design of the north elevation facing the adjoining apartment complex.

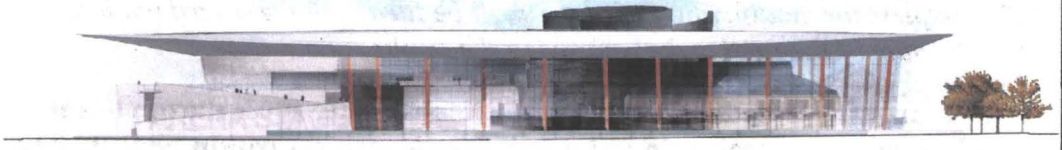
The modifications proposed eliminate the need for the previously approved variances for FAR, rear yard and lot occupancy, and reduces by approximately 12' the previously approved variance for height.

	Permitted in W-1 District	BZA Case No. 16933-A	BZA Case No. 17033	Proposed Modification
Height	45 feet*	75 feet	89.77 feet	77.27 feet
FAR	2.0	2.8	2.5	2.0 No relief necessary
Rear Yard	3"/foot but not less than 12' for residential use.	8' provided 4' variance approved.	8' 2" provided 3'10" variance approved.	No residential use. No relief necessary.
Lot Occupancy	80% for Building with residential use.	99% 19% variance approved.	99% 19% variance approved.	100% permitted No residential use No relief necessary.





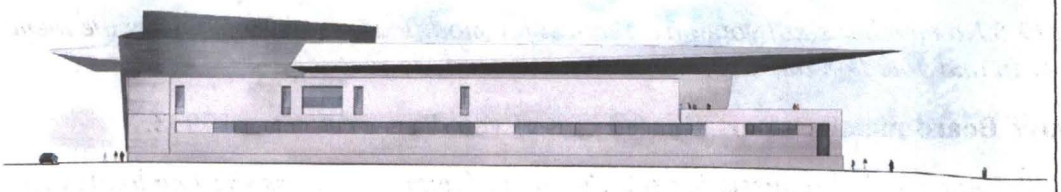
WEST ELEVATION - MAINE AVENUE S.W.
Approved by BZA Case No. 17033



WEST ELEVATION - MAINE AVENUE S.W.
JUNE 2007



NORTH ELEVATION @ BUILDING GRADE
Approved by BZA Case No. 17033



NORTH ELEVATION @ BUILDING GRADE
JUNE 2007

ANALYSIS

Section 3129 requires that the applicant comply with relevant subsections in order to modify previously approved plans.

Section 3129.2 The Board shall consider requests to approve modifications to plans approved by the Board, as set forth in §§3125.7 and 3231.8. The request shall be in writing, shall state specifically the modifications requested and the reasons therefore and include a copy of the plans for which approval is now requested.

The applicant has requested the modification in writing and has stated specifically the modifications requested and the reasons for the modifications. Copies of the plans for which approval is now requested are included in the application.

Section 3129.3 A request for modification of plans shall be filed with the Board not later than six (6) months after the date of the final order approving the application.

Since the approval granted in BZA Case 17033 on July 8, 2003, the applicant has continued to refine the project in order to bring the project within budget. The applicant has been able to retain the programmatic elements of the original project, with the exception of the residential uses and the requested design changes are minor revisions to the architectural design which has either eliminated the need for the original variance relief or has reduced the relief requested. In addition, both the original approval, BZA Case 16933, and modification, BZA Case 17033 were approved with the condition that "*The Applicant may modify the design of the building as may be approved by the Historic Preservation Review Board and/or the Commission of Fine Arts, provided that those changes do not increase any of the areas of relief granted by the Board of Zoning Adjustment.*"

Section 3129.4 All requests for modifications of plans shall be served on all other parties to the original application at the same time as the request is filed with the Board. A party shall have ten (10) days within which to submit written comments that such party may have concerning the requested modification.

The application for modification was served on all parties to the original application at the same time as the BZA.

Section 3129.6 No member shall vote on a request for modification of plans unless the member participated in and voted on the original decision or read the record.

Three Board members participated in and voted on BZA Case 17033.

Section 3129.7 Approval of requests for modification of approved plans shall be limited to minor modifications that do not change the material facts the Board relied upon its approving the application.

Zoning Analysis

The applicant, through the redesign, has eliminated the need for the previously approved variances for FAR, rear yard, and lot occupancy by reducing the size of the building and eliminating the residential use. The modification in the variance

relief previously granted in BZA Case No. 17033 brings the proposed height (77.27') more in line with the previously approved height of 75' granted in BZA case 16933.

Design Analysis

The elimination of the artists' apartments above the "cradle" theater is largely programmatic in effect. With their removal, the design of the cradle's cylindrical shell is adjusted and reshaped to make it slightly higher, but the modification does not disrupt the overall design concept and strengthens the sculptural quality of the architecture by visually focusing on the new auditorium rather than a secondary programmatic element.

The proposed roof redesign is the second iteration of a change necessitated largely by engineering constraints. The original roof design was premised on a system of tensile cables supporting the longest roof overhang. The roof has been revised as a more conventional internal truss system. OP believes that the elimination of the roof cables leads to a simplification of the skyline that ultimately might be considered a design improvement overall.

The elimination of the water feature, which was one of the notable components of the design, is in part a cost issue but also an acknowledgement that large water features are notoriously difficult to maintain and can be unsightly when they are empty in the winter months (a large part of the theater season).

The proposed modification is in the same spirit of the previous analysis and meets the same tests as outlined above.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Arena Stage is an historic landmark and has been reviewed by the HPRB and the CFA. At its June 28, 2007 meeting the HPRB approved the modifications as consistent with the design concept. The CFA approved the modification at its June 21, 2007 meeting.

ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION (ANC) COMMENTS

As of the date of this report no ANC comments have been received.

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning recommends approval of BZA application 17033-A, requesting a waiver of the six-month time frame and modification to the previously approved variances granted under BZA Order #17033. OP further recommends that the application be approved with the following provision:

1. The Applicant may modify the design of the building as may be approved by the Historic Preservation Review Board and/or the Commission of Fine Arts, provided that those changes do not increase any of the areas of relief granted by the Board of Zoning Adjustment and is within the matter-of-right zoning envelope.

JLS/djw