STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF
AMENDED APPLICATION BY POTTER'S HOUSE CHURCH
FOR A VARIANCE FROM PERMITTED FAR
TO ALLOW AN ADDITION TO
AN EXISTING RESTAURANT, BOOK STORE AND ARTS/CRAFTS USE
AT 1656-1660 COLUMBIA ROAD, N.W.

Application No. 17178

September 27, 2004

I. Nature of Relief Sought

This is the Statement of the Potter's House Church ("Potter's House," the "Applicant") in support of an application for variance relief from the maximum permitted floor area ratio ("FAR") specified in the Zoning Regulations at 11 DCMR § 771.2 for the purpose of constructing a two-story addition. The requested relief is identified in the Self-Certification Form prepared by the project architect and submitted as part of this application. The subject property at 1656, 1658 and 1660 Columbia Road, N.W., is zoned C-2-B.

II. Jurisdiction of the Board of Zoning Adjustment

The Board of Zoning Adjustment ("BZA") has jurisdiction to grant the relief requested pursuant to § 3103 of the Zoning Regulations.

III. The Existing Use and the Surrounding Neighborhood

Potter's House is located in an attractive two-story masonry building at 1656-60 Columbia Road, N.W. (Square 2579, Lot 801, the "Property"). This location is in the Adams-Morgan neighborhood and at the western edge of the 18th Street and Columbia

BZA
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Road business district. It is within the boundaries of Advisory Neighborhood Commission ("ANC") 1C.[1]

The Property is located on the south frontage of Columbia Road, N.W., near 17th Street. Lot 801 is a through lot, having frontage on Fuller Street, N.W. to the rear of the property as well as on Columbia Road.

Adams-Morgan in general, and including this location, has a high level of daytime and evening activity in terms of pedestrian and vehicular flows and activity generally. This reflects the moderate to high density of buildings and the intensity of uses in the vicinity. Two blocks to the east, 16th Street (which is zoned R-5-D, Medium-High Density Apartments) is lined on both frontages with high-intensity uses, primarily high-rise apartment buildings, large churches, embassies and chanceries. As one proceeds west from 16th Street, the pattern of high-rise and mid-rise apartment buildings continues along the north frontage of Columbia Road and into the Adams-Morgan neighborhood generally.

The 1700 block of Columbia Road, south frontage, is improved with one-to-three-story storefronts occupied by commercial uses, including the Potter's House property. This is the eastern end of the C-2-B zone district that is mapped on the extensive and vibrant 18th and Columbia Road retail-entertainment district.

The development pattern in the surrounding neighborhood includes numerous townhouses as well as apartment buildings. Adams Morgan in general has the highest density of population in the city. The predominant residential zone in this vicinity is R-5-

[1] See the "Site Location and Neighborhood Context Map" in *Exhibit A*, the "Zoning Map" in *Exhibit B* and the photographs of the subject property in *Exhibit C*.

B (Medium Density Apartments). The Henry D. Cooke Elementary School is located one block south of Potter's House on 17th Street.

The existing Potter's House use combines a restaurant and bookstore with social welfare and religious activities. The 1996 Certificate of Occupancy, a copy of which is found in *Exhibit D*, is for "Restaurant/Retail, Arts and Crafts." The business license from 1997 (also in *Exhibit D*) is for Restaurant use. The nonprofit organization, Columbia Road Health Services, occupies the second floor of the building as a tenant, Columbia Road Health Services is a clinic serving residents of the neighborhood. It is an integral part of the services offered by Potter's House and was conceived and founded at Potter's House.

The members of the Church of the Saviour opened the Potter's House as a coffeehouse and restaurant in 1960. Six different mission groups or volunteer groups prepared and served food and hosted customers each night of the week. The intention was to establish a "tavern church" but without alcoholic beverages. Discussions ranging from individual salvation to the issues surrounding the Vietnam war took place around each table.

The operation continued six nights per week until the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, after which it closed for a time, then reopened for daytime operations plus three evenings per week. The focus at that point became localized on the immediate neighborhood, especially how the organization could help address the healing of the oppressed in Adams-Morgan. Around the tables at Potter's House, ministries such as Jubilee Housing, Jubilee Jobs, Christ House, Columbia Road Health Services, Good Shepherd Ministries, Sarah's Circle, Samaritan Inns, Joseph's House and Miriam's

House were conceived, brought into existence and continue to serve the most disadvantaged residents of the Adams Morgan neighborhood. More recent examples include Life Pathways, Sign of Jonah Acupuncture Clinic, a lobby group for the Children's Defense Fund, Bethany House, and others.

Potter's House continues to be a tavern church (still without alcohol), with discussion tables each day at 12:30 around such topics as the transformative church, racial reconciliation, support of the clergy and other similar matters. The use has been expanded to include a bookstore. Visitors from around the world who have heard the Potter's House story come to visit and participate, and many of them have interest in taking the Potter House's service and organizational model to other places.

Currently the hours of operation are 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, 7 to 11 p.m. on Fridays and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays. During that time Potter's House is a full-service restaurant. On weekday nights and weekends, the kitchen and restaurant are available for use by community groups and churches. Two faith community groups use the facility Sunday mornings and nights, and three to five other faith groups use the facility Monday through Thursday nights. Most groups use catering from Potter's House Restaurant.

IV. The Proposed Addition

This application requests approval of a small addition at the rear of the building but also facing Fuller Street on the south. The need for the addition derives from two factors. First, Potter's House has had to turn down numerous requests from community groups for meeting space and catering because of lack of adequate space. Most of the ministries cited previously as having been conceived at Potter's House (Jubilee Housing,

Good Shepherd, Columbia Road Health, etc.) continue to use space at Potter's House so that they can allocate their funds to the persons they serve rather than to office space.

A related issue is the privacy of space, illustrated by a recent meeting between Fannie Mae and a group of potential purchasers of affordable housing. The homebuyers group needed more confidentiality for their meetings than could be provided by the restaurant area. Similarly, Jubilee Housing and Good Shepherd need space on a regular basis for lunches and activities, but the restaurant area is too public and distracting for working meetings. Some groups need more workshop space. In short, Potter's House needs more space to more effectively carry out its mission.

The second main goal of the addition is to make the rear of the Property more attractive. The addition would replace the awkward and unsafe (at night) area at the rear of the building, and create an addition that would enhance the appearance of Fuller Street while also improving public safety.[2] Currently this space is frequented by people loitering and has dark, shaded areas that encourage such loitering at night. The addition would redefine this space, eliminate the dark pockets and create an attractive building façade that will fill a gap in the "street wall" along Fuller Street. At present the ground level of the building is six feet (6') above the sidewalk level along Fuller Street. The proposed addition will reduce this to approximately 13 inches and greatly enhance the appearance of this part of the street frontage by creating a more normal street wall along Fuller Street. This improved façade will be beneficial to the neighboring properties and the general public as well as to Potter's House, demonstrating the organization's commitment to the neighborhood.

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[2] See the photographs of the rear (Fuller Street) side of the property in *Exhibit C*.

The addition will be approximately 34 feet wide by 38 feet deep and two stories in height. Each floor will have 1,099 square feet of gross floor area ("g.f.a.) for a total addition of 2,198 g.f.a. The proposed use of the additional space is for meeting rooms with chairs and tables that can be overflow space for the present social and religious purposes of the organization. The additional spaces will have privacy rather than the open public environment of the restaurant, and can be used for workshops, religious services and meetings.[3]

The addition will be constructed in such a way as to match the surrounding materials of the existing buildings. The exterior facades will be built with red brick. The cornice will be finished in wood trim painted white. Vinyl windows will be installed. The ramp located on the west side of the building will be concrete. The roofline of the elevations will match the roofline of the existing building. Awnings will be placed over the doors to define the entry.

No parking is proposed or required. Pursuant to 11 DCMR 2100.6, when an addition is made to a pre-1958 building, the parking requirement is based on the addition only. In this case, the parking requirement for retail use in the C-2-B District is to exclude 3,000 square feet of gross floor area, then provide one space for each 750 square feet. The proposed addition of 2,198 square feet is less than the exclusion of 3,000 s.f., and accordingly, no parking is required.

V. The Requested Area Variance

The Property is zoned C-2-B, which is a medium-density mixed-use zone that allows residential, retail, office and mixed uses up to a maximum building height of 65

[3] See the Project Plans attached in *Exhibit E.*

feet, a maximum floor area ratio ("FAR") of 3.5 for residential or mixed uses, with a 1.5 FAR limitation on commercial uses. As a retail (restaurant and bookstore) use, Potter's House is limited to the 1.5 FAR allowed for commercial uses.

The existing gross floor area of the Potter's House building is 6,708 g.f.a., which, on the lot of 4,705 s.f., equals a density of 1.43 FAR. The addition would add 2,198 g.f.a. of space for a total of 8,906 g.f.a. and a total of 1.89 FAR. The proposed addition is 0.47 FAR. The maximum allowed for commercial uses at 1.5 FAR is 7,058 g.f.a., so that the proposed addition exceeds this limit by 1,848 g.f.a., or 0.39 FAR.

The requested area variance requires a demonstration that some exceptional or unique condition of the property creates a practical difficulty for the owner in using or developing the property. The Board must also find (2) that the requested variance can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and (3) without substantially impairing the purpose and integrity of the zone plan.

A. An exceptional or unique condition creates a practical difficulty in using the property. A combination of exceptional conditions affect the Property. Lot 801 is a through lot in a square that is trapezoidal in shape. As a result, the lot is irregular in shape because Columbia Road intersects the grid street network at an angle. This situation is compounded by a significant change of grade (approximately six feet) in the short distance between the rear of the existing building and the sidewalk level and property line on Fuller Street. Without the requested variance, an addition of only 350 s.f. can be added. This is extremely restrictive and makes an addition infeasible.

It should be added that, since its origins in 1960 in this building, Potter's House has achieved highly significant neighborhood identification with this location.

Relocating would entail a substantial increase in financial outlays, given the very large increase in property values and rents in the neighborhood in the past 5 to 10 years especially. The known location and identification of that location with Potter's House is important to the successful functioning of the important retail, social welfare and religious services provided.

All of these factors create a practical difficulty that supports the granting of the requested variance.

B. The requested relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good, and the requested relief can be granted without substantial impairment of the zone plan. Potter's House is a relatively small commercial and social service use at a low scale (two stories). The building presents an appealing façade along Columbia Road with a tasteful awning and display windows that exemplify retail use, which is the desired ground floor use along Columbia Road and 18th Streets, N.W.

The proposed addition is quite small, at 2,198 square feet and will accommodate only a marginal increase in activity at the premises. The number of employees and volunteers at Potter's House will not increase because of this addition, and any change in vehicular traffic will likewise be very minor and essentially unnoticeable.

The minor addition of space and activity represented by the proposed addition is especially compatible and non-objectionable with its surroundings given the quite intensive pattern of building uses in the immediate vicinity. These include a high-rise apartment house directly across Columbia Road from the premises, other mid-rise and high-rise apartment buildings within a two-block radius, commercial uses along Columbia Road and large churches and chanceries along 16th Street.

Two of the uses in the building are allowed as a matter of right in residential zones. The religious services and activities are allowed as of right in all residential zones, and the Columbia Health Services clinic on the second floor is allowed as of right beginning in the R-4 District. If these uses could be included in the permitted residential density of the C-2-B District of up to 3.5 FAR, this requested FAR variance would be unnecessary. However, the Zoning Administrator advised that only residential dwellings are allowed in the residential FAR of this zone, not uses that are simply allowed in the residential zones. The point is simply that these are uses of sufficiently low impact on immediate surroundings that they are allowed as a matter of right in residential zones.

As to the intent and purpose of the C-2-B zone district, as set forth in § 720 ("Community Business Center Districts") is to "provide facilities for shopping and business needs," as well as "housing and mixed uses." As a matter-of-right use in C-2-B, Potter's House complies with the intent and purpose of the Zoning Regulations. The height of the existing building and the addition, at 26 feet, is much lower than the permitted, matter-of-right height of 65 feet.

In the neighborhood (and beyond) Potter's House is a greatly respected and well-liked use that contributes significantly to the well being of neighborhood and city residents and visitors. Its functions help the city achieve a number of policies and objectives in the *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* in several Elements, especially the Human Services Element.

Based on the foregoing facts, the Applicant believes that the application complies with the second and third tests for approval of a variance.

VI. Conclusion

The proposed area variance from the floor area ratio requirements is justified based upon the exceptional conditions described herein, which create a practical difficulty. The requested relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and can be granted without substantial impairment of the zone plan. The Applicant requests that the Board approve the application to allow construction of the plans as submitted to the record of the case.

Respectfully submitted,
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Attachments

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