GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

Office of the Director

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 24, 2004

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Andrew Altman, Director

SUBJECT: Board of Zoning Adjustment Case No. 17178
The Potter's House - 1656-60 Columbia Road N.W.

Summary

The applicant seeks a variance from the floor area ratio (FAR) provisions of §771.2 to allow 1.89 FAR of commercial use and from the court provisions of §776.1. The applicant seeks to expand the existing use to the south in the rear of the building while adding no further parking. The Office of Planning **recommends approval** of the requested variances.

Site and Area Description

The subject property is located at 1656-60 Columbia Road N.W., Square 2579, Lot 801. The lot is 4,705 square feet, of which the existing building occupies approximately 71 percent. The building contains two full stories. The subject property and the neighboring properties on both sides of Columbia Road are zoned C-2-B. Columbia Road contains a mix of commercial and medium-high density residential uses in this location. The area to the east of the site on Fuller Street and to the south is zoned R-5-B and consists of residential uses.

Project Description

The existing use combines a restaurant and bookstore with social welfare and religious activities. All of the existing uses count toward commercial FAR which is currently at 1.43. There is no residential component to this building and none is proposed. There is currently no parking on the site and none is proposed. The addition would increase the total non-residential FAR to 1.89, 0.39 over the allowed 1.5. On the second floor, the addition would be set back five feet from the neighboring property creating a non-conforming court. The project would provide the non-profit use with much needed space

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that would be available to affiliated and neighborhood organizations. The addition would also allow for handicap access in the rear of the building and interior improvements for increased handicap accessibility.



Figure 1: Area Map

Zoning Requirements

The applicant is requesting a variance from the FAR allowable for non-residential uses. The C-2-B zoning district allows a total of 3.5 FAR of which only 1.5 can be dedicated to non-residential uses. The existing building is 1.43 FAR entirely dedicated to commercial uses. The addition would increase the total and commercial FAR to 1.89.

The site currently has no parking spaces. Additional parking spaces are required for additions to pre-1958 buildings unless the expansion is less than 25% of the aggregate per §2100.7. The proposed expansion is 24.7% (2,198 square feet) of the proposed final gross floor area of 8,906 square feet. Therefore, no additional parking is required.

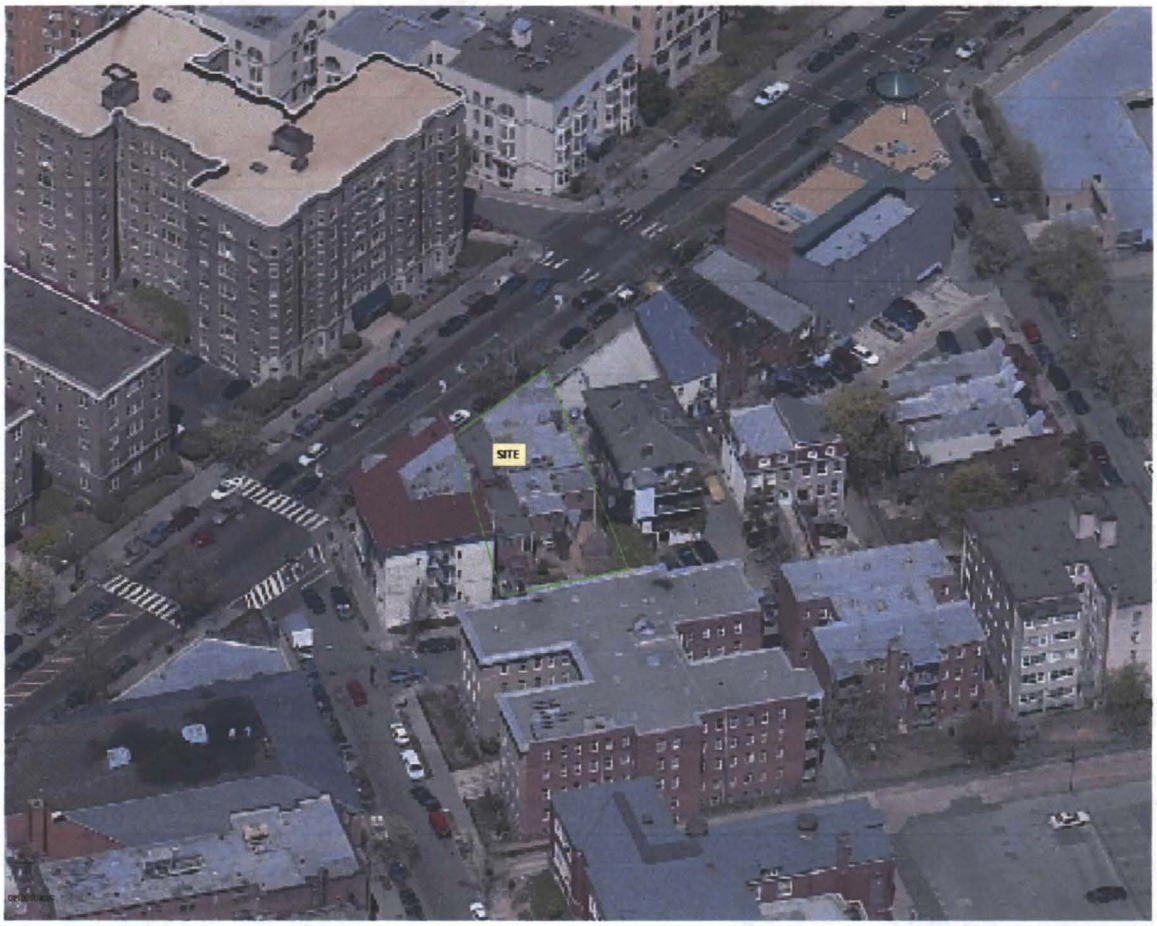


Figure 2: Aerial View from South

Analysis

The provisions of §3103.2 require the applicant to show a unique physical aspect or other extraordinary or exceptional situation or condition of a specific piece of property that creates an undue hardship or practical difficulty. In addition, there should be no harm to the public or to the zone plan.

Extraordinary or Exceptional Situation

The exceptional situation in this application arises largely from the topography on the lot combined with the existing building. The ground level rises as much as six feet from the front elevation of the property to the rear and then falls off again at the south end of the lot. The resulting situation is that the rear of the building is half underground and still above the level of Fuller Street. There are stairs rising six feet up from Fuller Street and then stairs that either rise up to the second level or drop back down to the first level in the rear. The existing building is unique in that it steps back from Fuller Street in three sections. This situation produces an inefficient interior layout that exacerbates a need for more space.

Practical Difficulty

The above situation creates practical difficulties for the applicant. Any addition within the allowable FAR would not extend far enough through the grade change to come out at ground level, doing nothing to relieve ingress/egress problems. The proposed addition will extend the building through the higher grade portion of the site and end where the property drops off again. This will allow for handicapped access to the rear as well as improving the overall rear access. The additional space will allow for interior ADA improvements as well. The addition will even out two thirds of the rear of the building increasing the efficiency of the interior layout. Finally, the addition will allow Potter's House to continue operation at this location where they have built a significant relationship with the immediate neighborhood regarding their social welfare and religious activities. A move to accommodate the needs of the programs on site would present practical difficulties.

Substantial Detriment

In addition to the above tests, §3103.2 further requires that the relief requested will not be a substantial detriment to the public good or substantially impair the intent, purpose and integrity of the zone plan.

Contrary to being a detriment to the public good, the proposed expansion will allow Potter's House to continue serving the public good in this neighborhood and the city. In terms of immediate building impacts on the neighbors, the applicant has met with the adjacent neighbor and changed the design of the project to address any concerns. The request for a court variance arises from these discussions and at the neighbor's request. There appears to be no detriment to the public good from this proposal. The restaurant and bookstore have been a part of this neighborhood for years and no opposition to the application has been registered by the neighbors. OP sees no threat to the integrity or intent of the zone plan should this application be approved.

ANC Recommendation

OP is in possession of a letter from ANC 1C dated November 5, 2004 offering support of the application. OP is aware of no further comments on the application or opposition to this project from the neighborhood.

Recommendation

The Office of Planning concludes that the applicant has met the burden of proof, pursuant to 11 DCMR 3103.2 of the Zoning Regulations, for the granting of variances to permit expansion of the existing use at 1656-60 Columbia Road N.W.

The Office of Planning **recommends approval** of the variances by the Board of Zoning Adjustment to allow the increase in commercial FAR and from the minimum court requirement on the property at 1656-60 Columbia Road N.W.

AA/tp