GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING

Office of the Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Ellen McCarthy, Director

DATE: September 27, 2005

SUBJECT: BZA Application **No. 17386**
2809 15th Street & 1480 Girard Street, N.W.

APPLICATION

Application of the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation for a proposed public recreation and community center at 15th Street and Girard Street, N.W (Square 2667, Lot 74) pursuant to 11 DCMR § 3104.1, for

A. Special exception relief from:

1. The percentage of lot occupancy requirement of § 403.3 to occupy 23% of the lot (13,120 square feet proposed; 20% required)
2. The gross floor area requirement per § 408.1 for a proposed gross floor area of 47,330 square feet (40,000 square feet required).

B. Area Variance relief from:

1. The height provision of § 400.14; (53.5' proposed; 45' required)
2. The parking requirement provision of § 2101.1 (8 spaces proposed, 22 spaces required) and
3. The parking space size provision of § 2115.1. (8.5' x 18' proposed; 9' x 19' required).

In addition, the applicant also requested a use variance to permit office use for training purposes by the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation on the fourth floor of the proposed center which is located in the D/R-5-B and R-5-B Zone Districts.

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EXHIBIT NO. 22

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OP does not believe that a use variance is necessary since the definition of a public recreation and community center allows for the provision of a **"range of ... educational classes and services**. The center may include, **but not be limited to**, auditorium, multipurpose room, gymnasium, meeting space, open-space, playground, playing court, playing field and swimming pool...." (§ 199.1)

RECOMMENDATION

Based on succeeding analysis, the Office of Planning recommends approval of the requests accordingly:

Special exception relief from:

- The percentage of lot occupancy requirement of § 403.3 **from 20% to allow 23%** and the gross floor area requirement for such centers per (§ 408.1) **from 40,000 square feet to 47,330 square feet**.

Area variance relief from:

- The height provision of § 400.14 **from 45 feet to 53.5 feet**
- The parking provision of § 2101.1 **for 8 spaces** and
- The parking space size provision of § 2115.1., for spaces sized at **8.5' x 18' instead of 9' x 19'**, on condition that the applicant consults DDOT regarding this requirement prior to the Board's decision.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The property is located in the Columbia Heights neighborhood in Square 2667. The Square is bound by Girard Street to the north, 14th Street to the east, 15th Street to the west, Fairmont Street and Square 2666 to the south. Fuller Street dead-ends at the site's eastern property line and a 10-foot wide alley abuts the lower portion of the property line and exits on Fuller Street.

The property is District-owned and a portion of the property has been renovated under a separate contract to include improved lighting and other features, including a playground with an open play area, pavilion, tot lot and basketball court. The subject site is surrounded primarily by moderate density residential structures and single-family row homes to the south. The site and immediate neighborhood is zoned R-5-B and abuts the D/R-5-B Zone District on the west.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The Department of Parks and Recreation intends to construct a four-story building for use as a public recreation and community center on a portion of the site located at the corner of Girard and 15th Street. The center is proposed at 53' 6" in height, will occupy 13,120 square feet of the property as lot occupancy and a gross floor area of 47,330 square feet. These dimensions exceed the Zone Regulation's permitted height, lot occupancy and gross floor area respectively. In addition, 8 parking spaces would be provided where 22 spaces would be required and § 2201.1 stipulates that a loading dock at 20 feet deep should also be provided since the center will exceed 30,000 square feet in gross floor area. 5,940 square feet of the community center (12.5% of the total square footage on the fourth floor) will be devoted to a training/incubator area as part of the center's programming.

ZONING ANALYSIS

Amendments to the Zone Regulations in 2003 (ZC 02-15) for public recreation and community center uses require that a substantial portion of a lot dedicated to recreation be preserved as open space, with more restrictive bulk requirements for these facilities than those prescribed by the underlying R-5-B Zone District, including height, gross floor area and lot occupancy.

The table below itemizes the required and proposed dimensions relevant to the applicant's request:

Section	Item	Required/Permitted	Proposed	Deviation
400.14	Height	40 Feet	53' 6"	+ 13' 6"
403.1	Lot Occupancy	11,408.70 Sq. ft. (20%)	13, 120 Sq. ft (23 %)	+ 3%
408.1	GFA	40,000 Sq. ft.	47,330 Sq. ft.	+ 7, 330 Sq. Ft.
2101.1	Parking	22 spaces	8 spaces	-14 spaces
2115.1	Size of Parking Space	9ft x 19 ft.	8.5 ft x 18 ft	- 0.5 ft. x 1 ft

Based on the submitted plans, relief from the bulk requirements of the zone district includes:

A. Variance relief from:

1. The height provision of § 400.14;
2. The parking provision of § 2101.1 and
3. The parking space size provision of § 2115.1.

B. Special exception relief from:

4. The percentage of lot occupancy requirement of § 403.3 for 23% instead of the permitted 20% and
5. The gross floor area requirement of § 408.1 for 47,330 square feet instead of the permitted 40,000 square feet.

VARIANCE RELIEF

The proposal requires variance relief, pursuant to § 3103 and must demonstrate that:

1) The subject property is unique due to an extraordinary or special condition;
2) That a strict application of the Zoning Regulations will result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulty for the applicant; and
3) The relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without substantially impairing the intent, purpose, and integrity of the Zone Plan.

OP reviewed the request accordingly:

The subject property is unique due to an extraordinary or special condition

The property owned by the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is a large flag-shaped parcel in the midst of a residentially zoned R-5-B neighborhood. A large portion of the parcel which was historically used as a play area has been recently renovated. DPR recently acquired the abutting lot to the west of the play area which was formerly occupied by an apartment building. The lot was acquired to provide a centralized recreational facility for existing programs currently scattered throughout the community in sub-standard accommodations. This lot was then combined with the play and court facilities to create a single lot of record (Lot 74) for the public facility. The resulting lot is an irregularly shaped, flag lot with a substantial portion already renovated with courts and play area for the community. Therefore, the lot is unique due to its history of subdivision which did not allow for a comprehensive development of the lot in compliance with the existing Zone Regulations.

HEIGHT

§ 400.14 *A public recreation and community center in any residential zone may be erected to a height not to exceed forty-five (45) feet.*

A strict application of the Zoning Regulations will result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulty for the applicant

The proposed center consists of a gymnasium whose volume dimensions, includes a floor to floor height of 17 feet and a width equivalent to three quarters of the total width of the building. The building's footprint could not be expanded to accommodate the required space that would be lost (approximately 2 floors/ 17 feet) to the volume of the regulation-sized gymnasium, since this would affect the exterior courts and play area and would violate the policy of preserving open space as stated in the lot occupancy provision of § 403.3. Further, the outside court area was recently renovated in 2004, and the area allotted to the center was acquired subsequent to the play area's renovation. The only available space for an indoor recreation facility is the flag portion of the lot which

measures 90 ft. x 160 feet in length, since the other portion is occupied by the recently renovated courts and open space play areas.

Since the building area for the facility is restricted, fulfillment of the program requirements for the center creates a practical difficulty for the applicant. Interior space requirements for accessory offices and other uses for the facility must be placed along the sides of the building where possible, creating the necessity for an additional floor to fulfill the center's program requirements.

The relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without substantially impairing the intent, purpose, and integrity of the Zone Plan.

OP does not believe that the requested height increase would substantially impair the intent of the Zone Regulations. The proposed building would not be appreciably higher than the existing apartment structures in the neighborhood at 50 feet, according to the requirements of the R-5-B Zone District.

OP agrees with the applicant's statement that the mass and fenestration of the proposed Center is consistent with the demolished structures and adjoining apartment building, which, at 5 ½ stories, is approximately 55 feet above grade.

PARKING

§ 2101.1 1 parking space for each 2,000 ft^2 gross floor area of building or use

A strict application of the Zoning Regulations will result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulty for the applicant

Similarly, due to the pre-existing development of the combined lot, a practical difficulty is created if 22 required spaces were provided on the remaining "buildable" area of the lot. A substantial portion of the building's footprint would have to be reduced and the programming requirements, which involved consolidation of a variety of existing programs to this main center, could not be reasonably accommodated if the parking requirement was met. The recently renovated court areas create a practical difficulty for the applicant to reduce or remove these areas to provide on-site parking. As proposed, the project is providing 8 spaces below grade.

The applicant further claims that provision of all the required parking below grade would not be economically feasible if the programming space requirements of this public facility are to be accommodated. As explained to OP, the basement slabs and foundations of the demolished buildings were left in place as structural fill for the Center. Excavation to provide for a basement floor would have necessitated complete site excavation and the need to provide sheeting and shoring for much of the site perimeter and also the need to underpin the foundation of the adjacent apartment building. These additional construction requirements would have significantly increased the construction

cost of the building. This would have resulted in a reduction of the approved program spaces developed through citizen input. DPR opted to spend their limited resources by investing in the development of the program spaces, as required by the residents, above grade, rather than commit to spending the associated cost of excavation for a basement floor.

The relief can be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without substantially impairing the intent, purpose, and integrity of the Zone Plan.

OP does not believe that grant of this variance would substantially impair the intent of the Zone Regulation since the facility is intended to serve the immediate surrounding neighborhoods and is not intended as a regional center which would attract District-wide users. Therefore, the primary mode of arrival to this center would be pedestrians and the intended spaces are designed to serve the employees of the facility. The applicant has stated that additional parking would be available at DPR's headquarters building at 3147 16th Street, 3 blocks from the proposed center. The Columbia Heights neighborhood is adequately served by a number of major Metrobus routes and Metrorail.

The application was referred to DDOT for comments regarding the requested reduction. In OP's telephone conversation with DDOT regarding this application, DDOT stated that the center was a community building, which would mainly attract pedestrian activity. DDOT noted that on-street parking was limited in the neighborhood and that most of the activities that would be provided at the center would seem to cater to the needs of the immediate residents within the Columbia Heights neighborhood.

SIZE OF PARKING SPACES

§ 2115.1 Except as otherwise provided in this section, a required automobile parking space shall be a minimum of nine feet (9 ft.) in width and nineteen feet (19 ft.) in length, exclusive of access drives, aisles, ramps, columns, office or work areas and shall be striped according to the requirements of § 2117.3.

However, the above requirement may be waived as stated in §§ 2115.11, and 2115.12 as follows:

> Parking space dimensional, size, design, and striping requirements stipulated under § 2115.1 through 2115.4, 2117.3, 2117.5, and 2117.6 may be waived; provided, that the parking is managed during a specified twelve (12) hour peak period to be determined by the D.C. Department of Transportation by employed attendants who park the vehicles using the parking facility; and

2115.12 A permanent sign shall be posted at each entrance in full view of the public that states: "Attendant assisted parking is required by the **District of Columbia Zoning Regulations**." The sign shall also state the hours during which attendant parking is required. The sign shall have a white background, with black lettering that is no less than two inches (2 in.) in height.

The applicant has not provided information to date how this requirement will be met. The applicant has stated that the on-site parking would be for employees only. OP recommends that the applicant consult with DDOT regarding this requirement prior to the Board's decision.

The applicant proposes to provide 8.5' x 18' feet parking spaces instead of the permitted 9' x 19' regulation size spaces. OP has no objection to the size of the spaces, since it is no smaller than the minimum parking space size for a compact car space of 8' x 16' (§ 2115.3).

SPECIAL EXCEPTION

§ 3104.1 states that the Board is authorized to grant special exceptions, where, in the judgment of the Board, the special exceptions will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps and will not tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps subject in each case to the special conditions specified, as follows:

LOT OCCUPANCY

§ 403.3 ***A public recreation and community center may be permitted a lot occupancy in excess of 20%, but not to exceed forty percent (40%), if approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment; provided that, in addition to the requirements of §3104.1, the agency shows that the increase is consistent with agency policy of preserving open space.***

As previously stated, the proposed center's program requirements, including the space requirement for a regulation size gymnasium, were significant in the determination of the facility's footprint. As such, it was necessary to expand the building's area to accommodate these requirements and the building's core. The height of the gymnasium area between the second and third floors (17 feet) precluded use of the majority of the third floor area above the gym, which is located on the second floor. The 3% difference between the permitted and requested increase in lot occupancy (1,711.30 square feet) could easily fit within the open space area above the second floor, if an entire third floor were constructed. A fully completed third floor could have been used to accommodate rooms shown on the 2nd and 4th floors, thereby decreasing the proposed footprint of the center.

Special exception relief from the lot occupancy requirement would not adversely affect the use of neighboring property since the additional footprint does not decrease the distance between abutting properties nor encroach on light and air, any more than the previous apartment buildings that existed on the site. The center would abut an existing apartment building along similar property lines as previous buildings. The building would occupy the corner of the combined lots at Girard and 15th Street and would preserve a significant amount of open space (play area/courts) to the east or rear of the property. Therefore, the use of neighboring property will not be significantly affected.

GROSS FLOOR AREA

§ 408.1 ***A public recreation and community center shall not exceed a gross floor area of forty thousand square feet (40,000 ft), unless approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment as a special exception in accordance with the provisions of § 3104.1***

For similar reasons as stated above, the gross floor area is increased since an additional floor is required to accommodate the program requirements of the center. The center is seeking to consolidate a number of programs in the neighborhood which currently exist in sub-standard spaces throughout Columbia Heights. Consolidating the programs into one building would allow improved coordination and additional space for educational and training programs intended for the center to better serve the community. The necessary but unused space above the second floor required that an additional floor be included for the improved programming expected at the center.

This upgrade of DPR's facilities as proposed is beneficial to the immediate neighborhood. OP believes that the Center represents an expressed community need and the additional gross floor area would support the requested program requirements. Therefore, relief from the zone requirements would not adversely affect the use of neighboring property and is in harmony with the intent of the Zoning Regulations and Map.

AGENCY and COMMUNITY COMMENTS

OP has not received DDOT's written comments to date regarding the requested parking variances. However, OP discussed the application with DDOT as stated in the analysis portion of this report.

The ANC1B, in its letter to the Board dated 9 July 2005, voted unanimously to support the requests and stated that the applicant "spent considerable time working with the neighborhood to develop a design reflecting the needs of the Columbia Height's neighborhood."

RECOMMENDATION

The proposed recreational facility is a long anticipated and strongly supported project in the Columbia Heights neighborhood. It is a necessary element in its community's life, and will provide much needed programs and facilities for a cross-section of Columbia Height's residents.

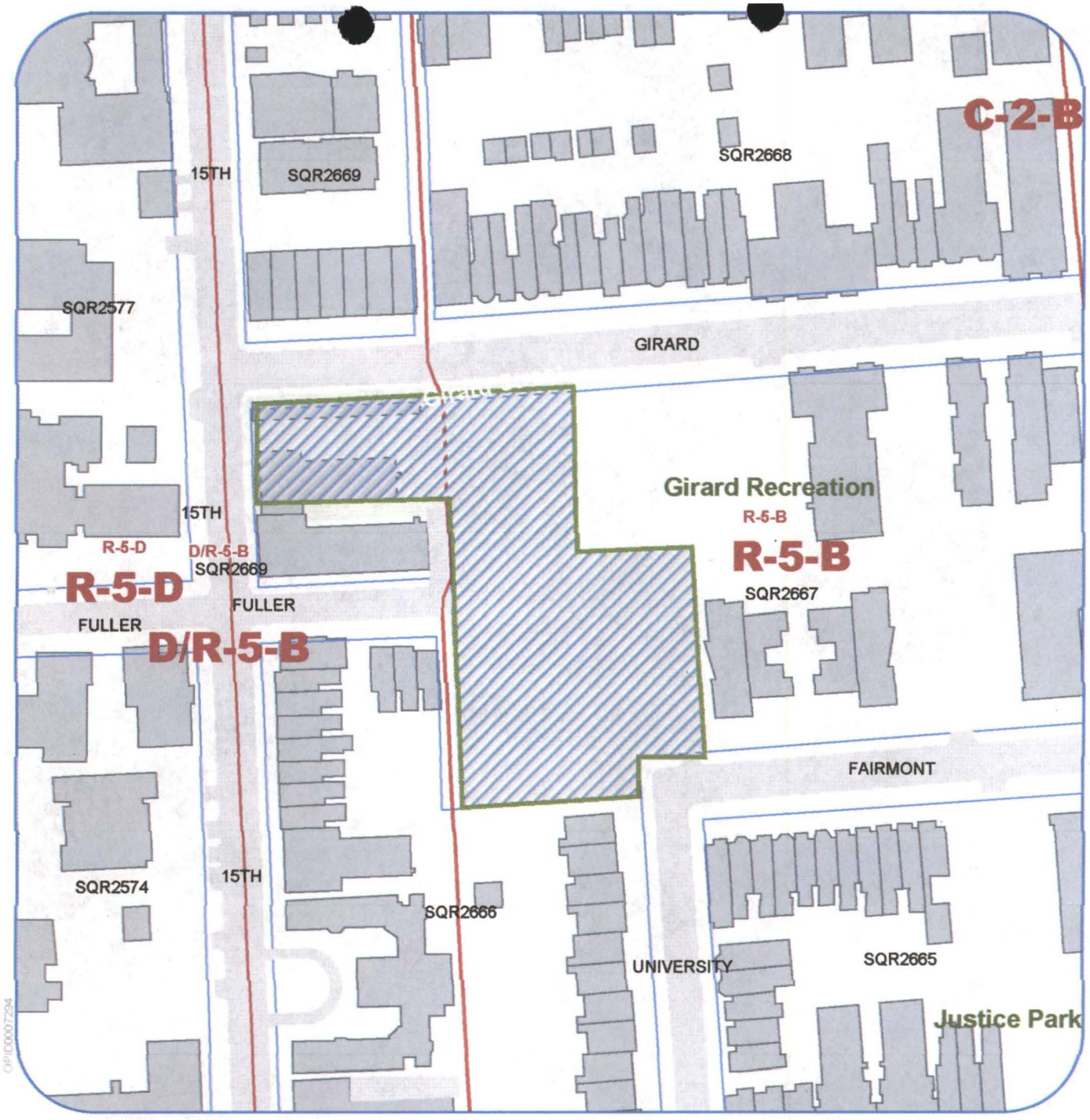
OP believes that the recreation center proposed by the Department of Parks and Recreation meets the intent and integrity of the Zone Regulations and will not adversely affect the use of neighboring property. For reasons discussed in the above analysis, the Office of Planning recommends approval of:

Special exception relief from:

- The percentage of lot occupancy requirement of § 403.3 **from the permitted 20% to allow 23%** and
- The gross floor area requirement for such centers per (§ 408.1) **from the permitted 40,000 square feet to allow 47,330 square feet.**

Area variance relief from:

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SITE PLAN

Girard Street Recreation Center
2809 15th Street, N.W.

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Legend

- Zoning Districts
- Zoning Districts
- DC Parks
- Buildings
- Property Squares
- Roads

Government of the
District of Columbia
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor

Office of Planning ~ July 29, 2005

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