

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
FROM: Brandice Elliott, Case Manager
 JL Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review
DATE: May 10, 2016

SUBJECT: BZA Case 19267 (1701 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W.) for a special exception and variances to allow the conversion of a private club into an office building in the DC/SP-1 District.

I. OFFICE OF PLANNING RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the following variances:

- § 2101.1, Parking Spaces (57 spaces required, 36 spaces proposed);
- § 2115.2, Number of Compact Parking Spaces (40% maximum, 14 spaces; up to 50% provided, 18 spaces);
- § 2115.4, Contiguous Compact Parking Spaces (5 contiguous spaces required, 1 space provided); and
- § 2117.5, Drive Aisle Width (20 feet required, minimum of 14 feet provided)

OP recommends **approval** of the following special exception:

- § 508.1, Office Use in SP-1 District

II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Address	1701 Rhode Island Avenue, N.E.
Applicant:	Christine Shiker, H&K for 1711 Rhode Island Owner LLC
Legal Description	Square 159, Lot 87
Ward / ANC	Ward 2; ANC 2B
Zone	DC/SP-1: A transitional zone between commercial and residential areas designed to preserve and protect areas adjacent to Commercial Districts that contain a mix of row houses, apartments, offices, and institutions at a medium to high density, including buildings of historic and architectural merit.
Historic District or Resource	Dupont Circle Historic District; the renovation of the building has received concept approval by the Historic Preservation Review Board.

Lot Characteristics	The irregularly shaped lot, situated at the northwest corner of Rhode Island Avenue and 17 th Street, is 17,935 square feet in area. The lot has approximately 176 linear feet of frontage along Rhode Island Avenue, and 57 linear feet of frontage along 17 th Street. A public alley is located at the north of the property, having a width that ranges from 10 feet wide to the east, and a width of 20 feet wide to the west.
Existing Development	The subject property is currently improved with a seven story pre-cast concrete building that was previously occupied by the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington. The building is approximately 81.5 feet in height and consists of 98,565 square feet of gross floor area, equating to a floor area ratio of 5.5. There is currently no parking on the site, as a variance was obtained in 1976 (reference BZA Case No. 12045) to provide zero parking spaces. Loading facilities are also absent from the development. Instead of parking, the below grade portion of the building consists of an Olympic-sized swimming pool and additional recreation area.
Adjacent Properties	To the north, on the south side of N Street, are three and four story buildings consisting predominantly of non-residential uses. To the south, across Rhode Island Avenue, are high rise office buildings. To the east, across 17 th Street, are additional high rise structures, including a hotel and office building. To the west, is a high rise office development incorporating a series of historic row houses, and the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle is located further west along Rhode Island Avenue.
Surrounding Neighborhood Character	The surrounding neighborhood character is generally non-residential, and features high rise structures, as well as lower-scale historic structures.
Proposed Development	The applicant proposes to renovate the existing seven story building and convert it into Class A office space within the existing building footprint. The brick façade would be replaced with a clear glass curtain wall and sculptural metal detailing. The scale of the structure would be reduced at the southwest and northeast corners so that it better relates to adjacent lower scale development. In addition, the building would be set back at the northwest corner, at the 20 foot wide section of the public alley, to create an entrance to the below-grade parking and new loading facilities. The parking would consist of 36 compliant parking spaces (48 total, including noncompliant spaces), and loading would comply with the Zoning Regulations. A new compliant penthouse consisting of habitable and mechanical space would be constructed, and would require a contribution to the Housing Production Trust Fund.

III. ZONING REQUIREMENTS and RELIEF REQUESTED

Zone – SP-1	Regulation	Existing	Proposed	Relief
Height § 530	65 ft. max.	81.5 ft.	81.5 ft.	Existing nonconforming
Floor Area Ratio § 531	4.0 total (2.5 for other permitted uses)	5.5	5.5	Existing nonconforming
Lot Occupancy § 532	100% max.	89%	83%	None required
Rear Yard § 534	17 ft. min.	17.12 ft.	17.12 ft.	None required
Side Yard § 535	Not required	0 ft.	0 ft.	None required
Parking Spaces § 2101	57 spaces	0 spaces	36 spaces	Required
Percentage of Compact Parking Spaces § 2115	40% (15 spaces)	0 spaces	50% (18 spaces)	Required
Contiguous Compact Parking Spaces § 2115	5 contiguous spaces with access from the same aisle	0 spaces	1 space	Required
Drive Aisle Width § 2117	20 feet	None	14 feet minimum	Required
Loading § 2201	1 berth @ 30 ft. 1 platform @ 100 ft. 1 delivery @ 20 ft.	None	1 berth @ 30 ft. 1 platform @ 100 ft. 1 delivery @ 20 ft.	None required

IV. OFFICE OF PLANNING ANALYSIS

a. Variance Relief from § 2101.1, Parking Spaces; § 2115.2, Percentage of Compact Parking Spaces; 2115.4, Contiguous Compact Parking Spaces; and § 2117.5, Drive Aisle Width

i. Exceptional Situation Resulting in a Practical Difficulty

The existing development, originally constructed to accommodate a YMCA, was constructed without parking facilities. In 1976, the BZA approved a variance requesting the provision of zero parking spaces, citing the irregularly shaped lot as a practical difficulty. As a result, the below-grade portion of the building housed an Olympic-sized swimming pool and other recreational facilities.

Given that the below-grade portion of the development was not originally constructed to accommodate parking, converting the space into a two-level parking garage results in a practical difficulty. Converting the space into a parking garage requires the use of the existing structural columns, which were not placed in consideration of space needed to maneuver vehicles. In working with the existing column grid, and inserting new columns to support the first level of the garage and ground floor slab, the applicant notes that the columns create a narrowed drive aisle condition. The columns cannot be removed or modified to increase the drive aisle width without requiring significant structural modification to the building.

Parking Spaces, § 2101.1

A total of 57 parking spaces are required for this development, including spaces for the penthouse habitable space. While a total of 48 spaces will be provided, only 36 will be compliant with the Zoning Regulations. The aforementioned constraints related to the placement of the existing structural columns preclude several spaces from meeting the minimum required parking space dimensions and/or access requirements, rendering some parking spaces noncompliant. In addition, the parking garage requires improvements, including a garage ramp, an elevator core, egress stairs, and other required mechanical, electrical and plumbing equipment, which impacts the area allotted to parking spaces. The irregular shape of the garage and its area, which is smaller than the building footprint, make it practically difficult to provide the number of spaces required for the proposed office development.

Percentage of Compact Parking Spaces, § 2115.2

The area available to parking spaces in the garage is reduced by features necessary to improve building functionality, including the addition of a ramp, bicycle parking, and electrical, mechanical and plumbing rooms. In addition, as discussed above, the structural columns provide a barrier to vehicular maneuverability. As a result, more than 40% of the parking spaces provided are unable to comply with standard parking dimensions.

Since the garage would consist of more than 25 parking spaces, the regulations would permit up to 40% of those spaces to have smaller compact parking space dimensions. The applicant is requesting relief to allow up to 50% of the spaces to be of compact size. As the design becomes further developed, additional adjustments may result in the need for additional compact spaces.

Contiguous Compact Parking Spaces, § 2115.4

The applicant has requested relief that would allow for compact parking spaces to be placed in groupings of less than five contiguous spaces. As provided above, the existing structural components of the garage present a practical difficulty that makes use of the space in an efficient manner problematic. Given the width of the garage, there is only one location along the south wall where five or more parking spaces can be grouped, and this area has been maximized to the extent possible to provide standard-sized parking spaces. The placement of the columns and the space otherwise needed for circulation make it practically difficult to group compact parking spaces as required by the Zoning Regulations.

Drive Aisle Width, § 2117.5

The Zoning Regulations require a minimum drive aisle width of 20 feet when ninety degree angle parking is provided. As noted above, the existing placement of the structural columns present a practical difficulty, providing pinch points that reduce the aisles to a minimum width of 14 feet. The sections of the drive aisles that would not conform are located along the north and east sides of the garage. In these areas, once a driver passes the pinch point between the columns, there is more generous spacing that allows for greater maneuverability.

ii. No Substantial Detriment to the Public Good

The requested variance relief should not cause detriment to the public good. The existing building contains no parking, and the proposed modifications would bring the structure into closer conformity with the Zoning Regulations. While only 36 parking spaces would be conforming, a total of 48 would be provided, which is nine fewer than required. The site is located in a transit-rich

neighborhood, as it is within close proximity to three Metro Stations: Dupont Circle, Farragut North, and Farragut West Metro Stations. In addition, the neighborhood has a high Walk Score of 99, a Transit Score 100, and a Bike Score of 91, indicating that the site is easily accessible by means other than by vehicle.

The applicant has submitted an analysis to DDOT that provides a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan, which includes: an electronic display provided in the lobby of the building providing public transit information; information on other transit options on the property management website; shower and changing facilities on site; and long and short term bicycle spaces. The applicant has also identified 40 commercial parking facilities within one-quarter mile of the site that could provide parking to employees and visitors, if needed. The applicant should continue to work with DDOT to refine the TDM and provide additional measures as necessary.

iii. No Substantial Harm to the Zoning Regulations

The requested variances should not cause harm to the Zoning Regulations. The intent of the affected regulations is to provide dedicated on-site parking that is accessible and navigable. While the existing structural columns present challenges in designing such a space, the intent has been met. Most of the drive aisles comply with the 20 foot width minimum, and reduced drive aisles provide sufficient space beyond the columns for maneuverability. Compact spaces will be clearly marked, ensuring that they are easily found. Finally, while a reduction in the number of parking spaces has been requested, the site is located in a transit-rich area with multiple transportation options, and the applicant has provided TDM measures intended to off-set the request for reduced parking.

b. Special Exception Relief pursuant to § 508.1, Uses in SP-1 District

508.3 The use, height, bulk, and design shall be in harmony with existing uses and structures on neighboring property.

The use, height, bulk, and design of the proposed development are in harmony with existing uses and structures on adjacent property. The surrounding uses predominantly consist of offices, as well as an institutional use further west of the site, and a hotel to the east, across 17th Street. The height and bulk of the structure would not be increased, and would be compatible with existing development. The properties to the north, along 17th and N Streets, consist of lower-scale buildings; however, the proposed alterations to the existing building would respond to those structures with the incorporation of setbacks and court niches. The design was found to be compatible with the area and the Dupont Circle Historic District by the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB), which granted concept approval of the design.

508.4 The use shall not create dangerous or other objectionable traffic conditions.

The proposed use should not create dangerous or other objectionable traffic concerns. Traffic patterns around the structure would remain unchanged, with the exception of access to parking and loading from the alley to the north. These modifications are an improvement to the site, providing parking and loading where none presently exists. There would be no curb cuts to accommodate the development, ensuring that conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles remain at a minimum and preserving the streetscape.

508.5 The Board may require special treatment in the way of design, screening of buildings, accessory uses, signs, and other facilities as it deems necessary to protect the value of neighboring property.

OP does not recommend special treatment to the development.

i. Is the proposal in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps?

The SP-1 District is intended to act as a transitional area between offices and residential; although, in this case, there is no residential nearby from which to provide a buffer. The proposed office development is a use that is consistent with neighboring uses, which are predominantly offices, interspersed with hotel and institutional uses. While the existing nonconforming structure is higher and denser than what is currently permitted by the Zoning Regulations, it is not out of character with surrounding development, which tends to be of a similar height. The proposed exterior refinements consist of additional setbacks and court niches that are intended to respect the lower scale of the properties to the north. Finally, HPRB has approved a concept design for the project, which ensures that the design is complimentary to other examples of architecture found in the Dupont Circle Historic District. As a result, the proposal appears to be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Maps.

ii. Would the proposal appear to tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property?

The proposal does not appear to adversely impact the use of neighboring property. The proposed development would be adding parking and loading facilities that are currently not provided on-site, which will reduce its overall impact on the neighborhood. In addition, design considerations have been made that will respect adjacent lower-scale buildings.

V. COMMENTS OF OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES

As of the date of this writing, OP has not received comments from other agencies.

VI. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

ANC 2B voted to recommend approval at its regularly scheduled meeting in March regarding preservation issues. The applicant is scheduled to present the present request for relief to the full ANC at its regularly scheduled meeting on May 11, 2016.

Attachment: Location Map

Location Map

