

Government of the District of Columbia

Department of Transportation



d. Planning and Sustainability Division

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Anna Chamberlin
Neighborhood Planning Manager 

DATE: March 5, 2020

SUBJECT: FMBZA Case No. 19557A – Australian Embassy, 1601 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

PROJECT SUMMARY

Government of the Commonwealth of Australia (the “Embassy” or the “Applicant”) pursuant to Title 11 (2016 Zoning Regulations) of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR), Subtitle Y, requests a modification of consequence to the plans approved by BZA Orders No. 19557 to refine several components of the architectural elements and open spaces of the Australian embassy building. The site is located in the MU-15 Zone at 1601 Massachusetts Avenue NW (Square 181, Lot 162). Specifically, the Applicant proposes the following four modifications:

- Final detailing of the building façade materials;
- Increased height for one of the three approved public art “zones” in public space adjacent to the building to accommodate the final artwork selected for that location;
- Removal of one street tree in public space on Massachusetts Avenue to achieve compliance with the District’s tree spacing requirements; and
- The addition of exterior “Embassy of Australia” signage with uplighting on the knee wall adjacent to the building’s main entrance.

SUMMARY OF DDOT REVIEW

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) is committed to achieving an exceptional quality of life in the nation’s capital by encouraging sustainable transportation and preserving the District’s public space. As one means to achieve this vision, DDOT works through the zoning process to ensure that impacts from new proposals are in fitting with DDOT’s policy and standards.

The purpose of DDOT's review on a Foreign Missions Board of Zoning Adjustment (FMBZA) case is to assess the impacts of the proposed action on the District's public space and transportation network. After an extensive review of the case materials submitted by the Embassy, DDOT finds no objections to the proposed modifications.

PUBLIC SPACE

The Applicant proposed several non-standard public space elements in the previous BZA and has coordinated with DDOT on refining the design. With the current modification request, the Applicant is proposing modifications in the public space area which DDOT can support, but will require Public Space Committee approval and a covenant of maintenance.

DDOT typically does not support bollards or other security measures in public space, with a few exceptions for high threat level sites where security measures cannot be placed in private property and are designed to minimize visual impact and enable pedestrian movements. DDOT supported the ram wall in the previous BZA because it integrated with the public space and the Applicant has taken DDOT's advise to increase the hedge adjacent to the ram wall along 16th Street NW to 3-feet to match the height of the wall and fully obscure it.

The Applicant is proposing to increase the proposed art piece in Courtyard 1 to 18-feet tall. There is precedent for installing art that exceeds the typical 42-inch height cap in public space. Given this piece is located in the public parking area and should not impact sight lines on the street, DDOT can support the height increase, however, the Applicant will need to coordinate with the safety team for any reflective material that may cause visual impairment to drivers. The reflective components should not face the roadway.

The sidewalk pedestrian clear path must be maintained on all frontages.

The proposed signage is appropriate on the knee wall. The uplighting will need to be connected to a private power source.

The revised designs show the removal of one street tree in public space on Massachusetts Avenue to achieve compliance with the District's tree spacing requirements. The Applicant has coordinated with DDOT's Urban Forestry Division (UFD) on the tree removal which UFD supports.

AC:kb