


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
Project Review Manager 

DATE: July 6, 2018

SUBJECT: **BZA Case No. 19797** – 1925 Vermont Avenue NW (African American Civil War Museum at the Historic Grimke School)

APPLICATION

Community Three Grimke, LLC (the “Applicant”), pursuant to Title 11 (2016 Zoning Regulations) of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR), Subtitle X, Chapter 9, requests a special exception under Subtitle K § 813 from the rear yard requirements of Subtitle K § 805.1, and pursuant to Subtitle X, Chapter 10, for variances from the parking access requirements of Subtitle C § 711.3(b) and the drive aisle requirements of Subtitle C § 712.5. The site was recently rezoned to ARTS-2 (ZC Case No. 18-01) and is located at 1925 Vermont Avenue NW (Square 361, Lot 827). The Applicant proposes to convert the existing school building—which currently is used for museum and office space—into a mixed-use building consisting of the following development program:

- 30,000 SF office space;
- 11,000 SF of museum space for the African American Civil War Museum;
- 4,000 SF of cultural use space;
- 40 residential units;
- 21 vehicle parking spaces;
- 20 short-term and 0 long-term bicycle parking spaces; and
- No dedicated loading berths

TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) is committed to achieve an exceptional quality of life in the nation’s capital by encouraging sustainable travel practices, safer streets, and outstanding access to goods and services. The purpose of DDOT’s review is to assess the potential safety and capacity impacts of the proposed action on the District’s transportation network and, as necessary, propose

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mitigations that are commensurate with the action. After an extensive review of the case materials submitted by the Applicant, DDOT finds:

- The Applicant will close the existing northern curb cut and slightly shift the southern curb cut further south on Vermont Avenue NW;
- The Applicant proposes to exceed its vehicle parking requirement of 16 spaces by providing 21 vehicle parking spaces off of an internal alley network comprised of both public and private segments;
- The Applicant requests relief from zoning requirements related to the vehicle access and design of vehicle parking spaces. The Applicant's request may result in multiple turning movements, particularly for larger vehicles, but will not have significant impacts within the alley network;
- On June 7th, 2018, the Zoning Commission approved a map amendment for the subject site, which facilitated the current proposal. DDOT's report to the Zoning Commission projected that 24 percent of trips generated by the site will be vehicle trips, 30 percent will be transit trips, 44 percent will be pedestrian trips and 2 percent will be bicycle trips;
- Per Subtitle C § 901.7 and § 802.6, the Applicant is not required to provide dedicated loading or bicycle parking as the GFA on the historic site is not being expanded by 50 percent. Despite this, the Applicant has coordinated with DDOT and proposes to provide 20 short-term bicycle parking spaces for the two (2) buildings and zero (0) long-term spaces. DDOT encourages the Applicant to continue to examine ways to provide long-term bicycle parking on-site; and
- The Applicant's plans depict a mid-block crossing over Vermont Avenue NW connecting the site with the African American Civil War Memorial and Metro Plaza. Based on coordination with the Applicant, these improvements will not be a component of its forthcoming public space application and will potentially be applied for by the museum operator. Any proposed mid-block crossing will require a transportation study and would be subject to DDOT's review and approval.

RECOMMENDATION

DDOT has reviewed the Applicant's request and determined that based on the information provided, this proposed project will have no adverse impacts on the travel conditions of the District's transportation network. The proposed project may lead to a minor increase in vehicular, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle trips. In addition, the project has the potential to generate minor impacts to on-street parking conditions in the area. Despite these minor potential impacts, DDOT has no objection to the approval of the requested relief.

TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS

Site Access

The site is accessible via Vermont Avenue NW and 9½ Alley NW, which connects to U Street NW and T Street NW through a series of public and private alley segments. Figure 1 shows the site and associated alley network.

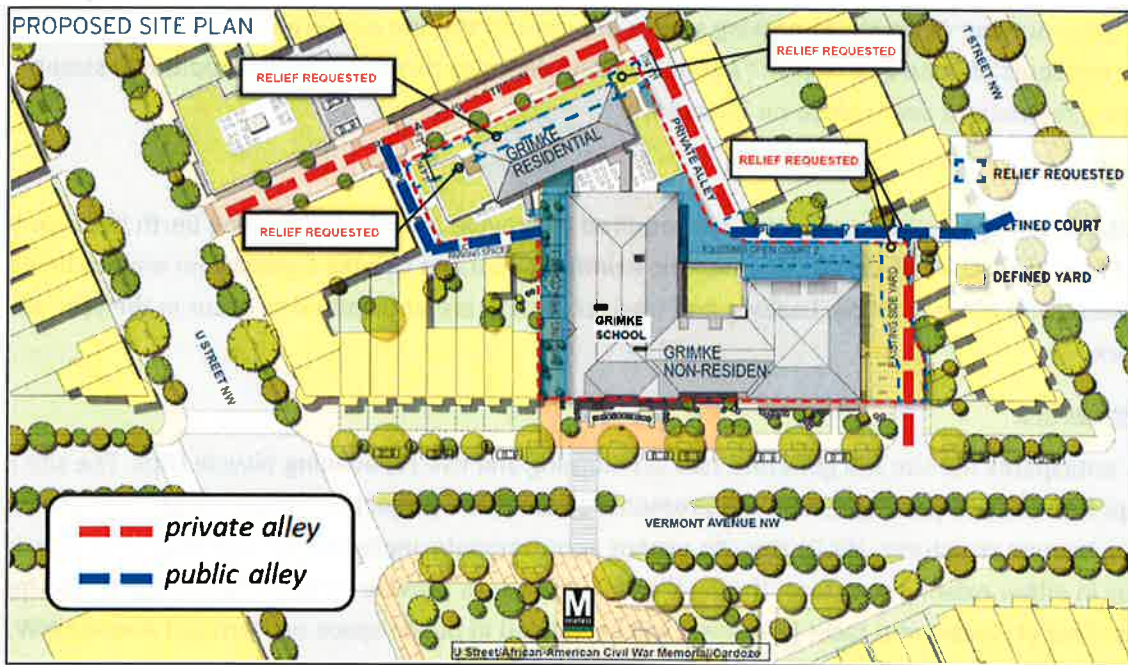


Figure 1 - Site Plan: (Source: Applicant's Architectural Plans, Exhibit 7A, dated 5/9/18)

The Applicant is requesting relief to accommodate its vehicle parking. Per Subtitle C § 711.3(b), when vehicle parking spaces are accessed by a public alley, the alley must be no less than 10 feet wide. The ten surface parking spaces proposed on the east side of the Grimke school are adjacent to an alley that is 9.33-feet wide. While DDOT has no objection to this relief, DDOT notes that some vehicles—particularly larger SUVs and vans—will need to make multiple movements when moving into or out of a space. The Applicant also requests relief from Subtitle C § 712.5, which specifies the drive-aisle widths for different parking space layouts. The Applicant is proposing both perpendicular and parallel spaces adjacent to a two-way drive aisle, which must be 20-feet wide per zoning. Due to existing site constraints, the site drive aisle is 17-feet wide. While the proposed widths are not ideal for quick, convenient vehicle parking movements, vehicles should still be able to navigate within the alley.

Trip Generation

In order to facilitate the present development proposal, the Applicant was granted a map amendment on June 7th, 2018 (Zoning Commission Case 18-01). DDOT's report, dated May 29th, 2018, assesses the impact of the map amendment and assumes that 24 percent of trips generated by the site will be vehicle trips, 30 percent will be transit trips, 44 percent will be pedestrian trips, and 2 percent will be bicycle trips.

Vehicle Parking

The site currently contains 16 existing vehicle parking spaces. Per Subtitle C § 704.2, the Applicant is not required to provide additional vehicle parking spaces because the existing Grimke School and Grimke Gymnasium are not being increased by 50 percent (50%) or more. Despite this, the Applicant proposes to provide 21 vehicle parking spaces accessible via 9½ Street NW, an alley with both public and private segments, as shown in Figure 1. The layout provides both perpendicular and parallel spaces.

There are a number of on-street parking spaces adjacent to the site on Vermont, which are restricted for use by residents of Zone 1 between 7 AM and 12 AM, Monday through Sunday. Additional street sweeping restrictions are in place on Thursdays.

Loading

Per Subtitle C § 901.7, the Applicant is not required to provide a dedicated loading berth because the Gross Floor Area (GFA) of the existing historic Grimke School and Grimke Gymnasium are not being increased by 50 percent (50%). Loading and trash collection are anticipated to occur in the rear alley network.

Bicycle Parking

DDOT anticipates the site will generate two (2) morning and five (5) evening bicycle trips. The site is exempt from bicycle parking zoning requirements because the project proposes adaptive re-use of the existing historic structures. While the site cannot accommodate sheltered, secure long-term bicycle parking in either existing structure, the Applicant proposes to provide 20 short-term bicycle parking spaces. Four (4) inverted-u racks (8 spaces) will be located in public space on Vermont Avenue NW, and 12 spaces will be located in the alley near the entrance to the residential structure.

Public Space

DDOT's lack of objection to the requested special exception should not be viewed as an approval of public space elements. Any elements of the project proposed in public space require the Applicant to pursue a public space permit through DDOT's permitting process.

The project contains a number of elements in public space, including staircases, planting strips, and new street trees. The Applicant has indicated that it plans to set up a Project Design Review Meeting (PDRM) in the near future to discuss its public space elements with DDOT and the Office of Planning.

The Applicant's plans illustrate a midblock crossing over Vermont Avenue NW between the Grimke School entrance and the African American Civil War Memorial/Metro Plaza. Previous iterations of the site plan associated with Zoning Case 18-01 depict a raised crossing. DDOT understands that the museum operators, and not the current Applicant, will be responsible for pursuing this improvement under a separate public space permit, if desired. That improvement will require further study and approval by DDOT and will likely require closure of the existing adjacent median break.

The Applicant may refer to Titles 11, 12A, and 24 of the DCMR and DDOT's recently released 2017 Design and Engineering Manual (DEM) for specific controls of public space. A summary can also be found in DDOT's Public Realm Design Manual.

AC:pr