

Government of the District of Columbia

Department of Transportation



d. Planning and Sustainability Division

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Meredith Soniat
Acting Associate Director *MS*

DATE: July 11, 2025

SUBJECT: BZA Case No. 21034 – 261 17th Street SE

APPLICATION

Morningstar Community Development (the “Applicant”), pursuant to Title 11 of the *District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR)*, requests the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) grant a Special Exception from the access requirements of Subtitle C § 711.7 and an Area Variance from the floor area ratio requirements of Subtitle F § 201.1 to construct 34 new residential units in an existing three-story building with a basement. The building was most recently the Eastern Branch Boys and Girls Club but has been vacant and unused for at least 13 years. The site is in the RA-2 Zone at 261 17th Street SE (Square 1088, Lot 802) and is served by a 10-foot public alley.

RECOMMENDATION

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) has reviewed the application materials and has determined that the proposed action may lead to a minor increase in vehicle, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle trips on the localized transportation network. In addition, the project may result in increased pick-up and drop-off activity and slightly reduced availability of on-street parking within the immediate area. However, the Applicant’s requested relief from the 12-foot-minimum setback from an alley centerline to a garage entrance supports the adaptive reuse of the existing building. Moreover, while the garage entrance is only set back 5 feet from the alley centerline, the Applicant has designed the garage entrance so that vehicles will be able to safely enter and exit the garage, as shown by the provided vehicle turning maneuver diagrams ([Exhibit 7A4](#)). Despite the minor impacts noted above, DDOT has no objection to the approval of this application.

STREETSCAPE AND PUBLIC REALM

DDOT’s lack of objection to this application should not be viewed as an approval of the public realm. While the existing public space along the site’s frontages is generally in good condition and appears to meet District standards, there are two (2) short segments of substandard sidewalk that do not meet the

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia

minimum recommended width of 6 feet per the most recent version of DDOT's [Design and Engineering Manual \(DEM\)](#). Typically, the Applicant would be required to bring all sidewalks up to standard; however, doing so along these segments would jeopardize the health of the two (2) large trees (1 Heritage, 1 Special) in the adjacent tree box. Since the existing sidewalk along these large trees meets the typical ADA-minimum 3-foot-width, DDOT does not expect the Applicant to improve them or provide an alternative alignment. All elements of the project proposed within District-owned right-of-way, such as the areaways, fencing, lead walks, and utility work, require the Applicant to pursue a public space construction permit.

DDOT expects the adjacent public realm to meet all District standards. The Applicant should refer to Titles 11, 12A, and 24 of the [DCMR](#), the most recent version of DDOT's *DEM*, and the [Public Realm Design Manual](#) for public space regulations and design guidance. A permit application can be filed through the DDOT [Transportation Online Permitting System](#) (TOPS) website.

The Applicant is encouraged to participate in a Preliminary Design Review Meeting (PDRM) with DDOT and the Office of Planning (OP) to discuss the public space comments in this report.

HERITAGE AND SPECIAL TREES

According to the Applicant's architectural plans ([Exhibit 6A1](#)), the property has no Heritage or Special Trees; however, one (1) Heritage and four (4) Special Trees are in the tree boxes or public parking between the sidewalk and property line along the site's frontages. The Applicant must coordinate with the Ward 7 Arborist regarding the preservation and protection of existing Heritage and Special Trees.

Heritage Trees have a circumference of 100 inches or more and are protected by the Tree Canopy Protection Amendment Act of 2016. With approval by the Mayor and DDOT's Urban Forestry Division (UFD), Heritage Trees might be permitted to be relocated. As such, the Applicant may be required to redesign the site plan to preserve the Non-Hazardous Heritage Trees.

Special Trees are between 44 inches and 99.99 inches in circumference. Special Trees may be removed with a permit. However, if a Special Tree is designated to remain by UFD, a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) will be required.

MS:pj