



MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Matt Jesick, Case Manager
Joel Lawson, Associate Director for Development Review

DATE: June 11, 2025

SUBJECT: BZA #21288 – 321 Rear Channing Street, NE – Request for relief to establish a residential use on an alley lot

I. RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the following requested special exception:

- U § 601.1(f), pursuant to X § 901 – Residential use on an alley lot not meeting the matter of right criteria (subject lot does not meet matter of right alley width requirements).

II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Address	321 Rear Channing Street, NE
Applicant	Shilja Nair and Vijayalakshmi Vellayan, owners
Legal Description	Square 3555, Lot 800 ¹
Ward / ANC	5, 5F
Zone	R-3 (Moderate Density Rowhouses)
Historic District or Resource	None
Lot Characteristics	Vacant, rectangular alley lot created in 1931, currently used as rear open space for the property at 321 Channing Street. Eight feet of the southern lot line abuts the alley. The lot is less than 300 feet from the closest street, measured along the alley. Alley is 20 feet wide at the property, but 10 feet wide at the exit to 4 th Street.
Existing Development	Vacant land
Adjacent Properties and Neighborhood Character	The owner's street-facing property, 321 Channing, is a semi-detached dwelling. The neighborhood is primarily rowhouses, and there are several other alley lots exist on the alley system, most of which appear to be vacant.
Proposal	Construct a two-story building (matter of right) and establish a residential use (special exception)

¹ The subject site is today a tax lot, but can be converted to a record lot as a matter of right.

III. ZONING REQUIREMENTS AND RELIEF REQUESTED

The site is zoned R-3, a zone which permits residential units on alley lots if the criteria of U § 600.1(f) or U § 601.1(f) are met. The building proposed for the lot would meet all zoning requirements for a building on an alley lot.

Item	Requirement	Existing	Proposed	Relief
Residential Use on an Alley Lot – Matter of Right U 600.1(f)	Various requirements – see below – including alley width > 24 ft. OR > 15 ft. and within 300 ft. of a street	Within 300 ft. of 4 th Street, but alley exit is only 10 ft. wide	No change to alley network – special exception requested	Requested
Residential use on an Alley Lot – Special Exception U 601.1(f)	Use that does not meet MOR requirements may request a special exception – in this case for alley width	Alley width down to 10 feet	No change to alley network – special exception requested	Requested
Height D 5100.1(a)	20 ft. 2 stories	n/a	19 ft. 11.5 in. 2 stories	Conforming
Lot Occupancy D 5100.1(b)	No maximum	n/a	39.7%	Conforming
Rear Yard D 5100.1(c)	5 ft.	n/a	8.67 ft.	Conforming
Side Yard D 5100.1(d)	5 ft.	n/a	5 ft.	Conforming
Alley Centerline Setback D 5100.1(e)	7.5 ft.	n/a	Not provided. Assumed conforming	None requested
Minimum Pervious Surface D 5100.1(f)	10% min.	n/a	Not provided. Assumed conforming	None requested

IV. ANALYSIS

Residential uses are permitted on alley lots as a matter of right, subject to criteria (U § 600.1(f)). If the criteria are not met, an applicant may apply for special exception relief, subject to additional criteria (U § 601.1(f)). Those items are reviewed below, as the well as the criteria of X § 901.

Matter of Right Criteria

600.1 The following uses shall be permitted as a matter of right on an alley lot in the R, RF, and RA zones subject to any applicable conditions:

[...]

(f) Residential use, subject to the following limitations:

(1) The Alley Lot is not wholly or partially within any of the R-1 or R-2 zones;

Complies. The subject lot is in the R-3 zone.

- (2) *A building may not be constructed as or converted to a dwelling unit unless the lot is an Alley Record Lot and there is a minimum of four hundred and fifty square feet (450 sq. ft.) of lot area;*

Complies. The subject lot will be made into a record lot, and has 1,140 square feet.

- (3) *The use shall be limited to one (1) dwelling unit per lot; accessory apartments are not permitted;*

Complies. The applicant proposes a single-family dwelling.

- (4) *The Alley Lot has access to an improved public street as follows:*

- (A) *Through an improved public alley or alleys with an alley width of not less than twenty-four feet (24 ft.) at any point between the lot and the public street; or*
(B) *The public street is within three hundred (300) linear feet of the Alley Lot as measured along an improved public alley or alleys with an alley width of not less than fifteen feet (15 ft.) at any point;*

Does not comply. The alley is 20 feet wide at the subject site. Although the site is within 300 feet of 4th Street, the alley width at 4th Street is only 10 feet wide. Special exception required.

- (5) *The dwelling unit may also contain a parking garage for use by residents of the dwelling;*

N/A. The design does not propose a parking garage.

Special Exception Criteria

601.1 *The following uses shall be permitted on an Alley Lot in any R, RF, and RA zone, if approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment as a special exception pursuant to Subtitle X, Chapter 9 and subject to the applicable conditions for each use below:*

[...]

- (f) *Residential use not meeting the criteria of Subtitle U § 600.1(f), subject to the following conditions:*

- (1) *The Alley Lot is not wholly or partially within any of the R-1 or R-2 zones;*

Complies. The subject lot is in the R-3 zone.

- (2) *A building may not be constructed or converted for a dwelling unit unless the lot is*

an Alley Record Lot and there is a minimum of four hundred and fifty square feet (450 sq. ft.) of lot area;

Complies. The subject lot will be made into a record lot, and has 1,140 square feet of area.

- (3) *The use shall be limited to one (1) dwelling unit per lot; accessory apartments are not permitted;*

Complies. The applicant proposes a single-family dwelling.

- (4) *The Alley Lot connects to an improved public street through an improved alley or system of alleys that provides adequate public safety and infrastructure availability;*

Complies. The alley network appears to presently provide for vehicular access and trash collection, and would continue to do so. FEMS has indicated no objection to the application ([Exhibit 25D](#)). As of this writing, other government agencies have not responded to the referral. In OP's communications with the applicant, however, they indicated that they would provide electrical, water and sewer connections through an easement to Channing Street. No gas service would be provided. Also according to the applicant, the trash for 321 Channing Street would continue to be picked up at the alley, despite no direct connection from that lot to the alley.

- (5) *The Office of Zoning shall refer to the following agencies for their review and recommendation, if filed to the case record within the forty (40) day period established by Subtitle A § 211:*

- (A) *Department of Transportation (DDOT);*
- (B) *Department of Public Works (DPW);*
- (C) *Metropolitan Police Department (MPD);*
- (D) *Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (FEMS);*
- (E) *DC Water (WASA); and*
- (F) *If a historic district or historic landmark is involved, the Historic Preservation Office (HPO); and*

Exhibits 18 and 20 indicate that the application was referred by OZ to the appropriate agencies.

- (6) *The Board of Zoning Adjustment shall consider relevant agency comments concerning:*

- (A) *Public safety;*
- (B) *Water and sewer services;*
- (C) *Waste management;*
- (D) *Traffic and parking;*
- (E) *Historic preservation;*

Based on comments submitted to the record to date, with regards to (A) Public Safety, FEMS indicates that it has no objections to the application. Also, the new residential unit has the potential to add eyes to the alley and thereby increase the safety of the alley. The alley presently serves for vehicular access and trash collection, and would continue to do so. OP defers to DDOT's analysis, but does not anticipate major traffic or parking impacts due to the addition of one unit. Parking for the unit would be provided on a nearby alley lot also owned by the applicant. The subject site is not part of a historic district.

Subtitle X § 901.2

901.2 The Board of Zoning Adjustment is authorized under § 8 of the Zoning Act, D.C. Official Code § 6-641.07(g)(2), to grant special exceptions, as provided in this title, where, in the judgment of the Board of Zoning Adjustment, the special exceptions:

(a) Will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps;

The R-3 zone permits the development of buildings on alley lots, and the proposed building would comply with all limitations on building size, including height, yard, and lot occupancy requirements. The establishment of a residential use is also permitted by the Regulations, and can be a matter of right, or by special exception if the MOR conditions are not met. In this case, the use would meet the special exception criteria, and would therefore be consistent with the intent of the zone.

(b) Will not tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps;

As addressed in the above analysis, the requested special exception would not appear to adversely affect the use neighboring property.

V. COMMENTS OF OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Exhibit 25D is a memo from FEMS stating no objection to the application. As of this writing there are no other comments from government agencies in the record.

VI. ANC COMMENTS

As of this writing there are no ANC comments in the record.

VII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

As of this writing there are no community comments in the record.

VIII. VICINITY MAP

