

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

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

DATE: October 22, 2025

SUBJECT: BZA #21366 – 307 15th Street, NE – Request for relief to construct a rear addition an accessory building

I. RECOMMENDATION

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

- E § 207.4, pursuant to E §§ 207.5 and 5201 – Rear Yard / Depth of Rear Addition (Additions deeper than 10 feet permitted by special exception; 26 foot addition proposed);
- E § 210, pursuant to E § 5201 – Lot Occupancy (60% maximum; 70% permitted by special exception; 32.7% existing; 69.8% proposed);
- E § 5003, pursuant to E § 5201.2(a) – Accessory Building Area (450 square feet permitted; 474.5 square feet proposed).

II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Applicant	Jonathon Haigh Thornton, owner
Address	307 15 th Street, NE
Legal Description	Square 4564, Lot 21
Ward / ANC	Ward 7, ANC 7D
Zone	RF-1 – Moderate density rowhouses and flats
Historic District / Resource	None
Lot Characteristics and Existing Development	Rectangular rowhouse lot, 19.5 ft. x 120.08 ft.; 18 ft. wide alley to the rear; Existing two-story plus cellar single-family row dwelling, with rear decks at the 1 st and 2 nd floors.
Adjacent Properties and Neighborhood Character	Similar rowhouses on north and south; Surrounding neighborhood is primarily rowhouses.
Proposal	Construct a 26 foot deep rear addition, plus a two-story accessory building.

III. ZONING REQUIREMENTS AND RELIEF REQUESTED

STANDARD	REQUIREMENT	EXISTING	PROPOSED	RELIEF
Lot Width E 202	18 ft.	19.5 ft.	No change	Conforming
Lot Depth n/a	n/a	120.1 ft.	No change	Conforming
Lot Area E 202	1,800 sf	2,342 sf	No change	Conforming
Height – princ. bld. E 203	35 ft. / 3 stories	28.2 ft. / 2 stories	No change	Conforming
Rear Yard E 207	20 ft.	80.1 ft.	30 ft.	Conforming
Rear Yard – Depth of Rear Addition E 207.4	Additions more than 10 ft. beyond adjacent rear wall permitted by sp. ex.	In line with adjacent properties	26 ft. beyond adjacent properties	Requested
Lot Occupancy E 210	60% 70% by sp. ex.	32.7% 765 sf	69.8% 1,634 sf	Requested
Acc. Bld. Height E 5002	22 ft.	n/a	21 ft.11 in.	Conforming
Acc. Bld. Building Area E 5003	450 sf max.	n/a	474.5 sf	Requested
Acc. Bld. Rear Yard E 5004	Not in a req'd rear yard; 7.5 ft. from alley CL	n/a	Not in req'd rear yard 9 ft. from alley CL	Conforming

IV. ANALYSIS

Special Exceptions from Rear Yard / Depth of Rear Addition, Lot Occupancy, and Accessory Building Area – Subtitle E §§ 207.4, 210 and 5003, pursuant to E §§ 207.5 and 5201, and X § 901

5201.1 For an addition to a principal residential building on a non-alley lot or for a new principal residential building on a substandard non-alley record lot as described by Subtitle C § 301.1, the Board of Zoning Adjustment may grant relief from the following development standards of this subtitle as a special exception, subject to the provisions of this section and the general special exception criteria at Subtitle X, Chapter 9:

- (a) **Lot occupancy** up to a maximum of seventy percent (70%) for all new and existing structures on the lot;
- (b) **Yards**, including alley centerline setback;
- (c) **Courts**; and
- (d) **Pervious surface**.

5201.2 *For a new or enlarged accessory structure to a residential building on a non-alley lot, the Board of Zoning Adjustment may grant relief from the following development standards as a special exception, subject to the provisions of this section and the general special exception criteria at Subtitle X, Chapter 9:*

- (a) ***Lot occupancy under Subtitle E § 5003 up to a maximum of seventy percent (70%) for all new and existing structures on the lot;***
- (b) *Yards, including alley centerline setback;*
- (c) *Courts; and*
- (d) *Pervious surface.*

The application requests special exception relief for lot occupancy, rear yard / depth of rear addition, and accessory building area.

5201.3 *Not applicable*

5201.4 *An applicant for special exception under this section shall demonstrate that the proposed addition, new building, or accessory structure shall not have a substantially adverse effect on the use or enjoyment of any abutting or adjacent dwelling or property, in particular:*

- (a) *The light and air available to neighboring properties shall not be unduly affected;*

The light and air available to adjacent properties should not be unduly affected. The applicant proposes a rear extension of 26 feet past the rear walls of adjacent homes. The submitted sun study (Exhibit 12) shows that the potential light impacts to the home to the north would be slightly greater than a matter of right addition at certain times of the year and day, but that the degree of difference would not result in an undue impact. The rear yard between the main house and the proposed accessory building would comply with the rear yard requirement and should provide adequate light and air flow to adjacent properties. Regarding the accessory building, the approximately 25 square foot difference between the permitted footprint (450 square feet) and the proposed footprint (474.5 square feet), should not result in a noticeable difference in the level of impact.

- (b) *The privacy of use and enjoyment of neighboring properties shall not be unduly compromised;*

The proposed addition and accessory building should not unduly impact the privacy available to neighboring properties. No windows are proposed on the north side of the addition. While windows are proposed on the south side of the addition, the views from those windows should not be substantially different from the views from a matter of right addition or even from the existing home and decks. In addition, the homeowner on that side has submitted a letter in support of the application (Exhibit 21). Regarding the accessory building, the requested relief to add 25 square feet to the footprint of the building would result in no changes to the types of views possible into or from the accessory building.

- (c) The proposed addition or accessory structure, together with the original building, or the new principal building, as viewed from the street, alley, and other public way, shall not substantially visually intrude upon the character, scale, and pattern of houses along the street or alley frontage; and*

The proposed rear addition and accessory building would be visible from C Street to the south (across a neighbor's property) and the alley to the east. While the new construction would change the appearance of the back of this property, rear additions and accessory buildings are not uncommon in Capitol Hill. On the subject block, the alley frontage features a number of garages, fences, and roll-up doors, and at the north end of the block a number of houses appear to have rear additions or were originally built farther back. A small apartment building at the north end of the alley also extends to the rear. The addition would maintain the existing height of the house, well below permitted height and matching other nearby houses. Furthermore, any minor change to the character of the alley or street would not be to a degree that would have a substantially adverse effect on the use or enjoyment of any abutting or adjacent dwelling or property in. (§ 5201.4).

- (d) In demonstrating compliance with paragraphs (a), (b), and (c) of this subsection, the applicant shall use graphical representations such as plans, photographs, or elevation and section drawings sufficient to represent the relationship of the proposed addition or accessory structure to adjacent buildings and views from public ways.*

The application materials include plans, elevations, photos, site plans and a sun study.

5201.5 The Board of Zoning Adjustment may require special treatment in the way of design, screening, exterior or interior lighting, building materials, or other features for the protection of adjacent and nearby properties.

OP recommends no special treatments.

5201.6 This section shall not be used to permit the introduction or expansion of a nonconforming use, lot occupancy beyond what is authorized in this section, height, or number of stories, as a special exception.

Granting relief would not result in the introduction of a nonconforming use. The applicant plans to maintain the existing single-family dwelling use.

Subtitle X § 901.2

901.2 (a) [Granting the special exception] Will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps;

Granting the requested relief should not impair the intent of the Regulations - to ensure open space on a lot, and to facilitate adequate light and air both to the subject property and to adjacent properties. Granting the relief should not unduly diminish those factors. Similarly, relief to

accessory building area would not impair the intent of the regulation to keep the scale of accessory buildings smaller than the principal building. The house, with the proposed addition, would remain well below the permitted height, and the applicant does not propose a third story, which could be built as a matter of right. The expanded house, together with the proposed accessory building, should not result in undue impacts to light, air or privacy, and would not result in a scale or intensity of use beyond that anticipated by the zone.

901.2(b) *[Granting the special exception] 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 exceptions for rear yard / depth of rear addition, lot occupancy, and accessory building area would not appear to unduly affect the use neighboring property. There should be no undue impacts regarding factors such as light, air or privacy.

V. COMMENTS OF OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES

As of this writing there are no comments from other District agencies in the record. In an email to OP, DDOT indicated that they have no objections to the relief.

VI. ANC COMMENTS

As of this writing there is no memo from the ANC in the record.

VII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

The record contains a number of letters in support of the application from nearby neighbors. Exhibit 18 is a letter from neighbors. Exhibit 35 is a letter in opposition from the Capitol Hill Restoration Society.

VIII. VICINITY MAP

