

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Karen Thomas, Case Manager
Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review

DATE: November 26, 2025

SUBJECT: BZA Case 21388 - request for special exception relief pursuant to allow a two-story rear addition to the semi-detached house at 617 Massachusetts Avenue, NE.

I. RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the following special exception pursuant to Subtitle E § 5201 and Subtitle X § 901:

- E § 210.1 Lot Occupancy (60% max. permitted, 51.39% existing, 62.29% proposed)

The applicant has also requested relief from E § 207.5 Rear Addition extension beyond the rear wall of an adjacent property. The subject house is semi-detached, with a side yard on the west side, so the rear extension limit does not apply on that side. The adjoining house to the east has a “dog-leg” along the adjoining lot line, and the applicant measured from the back of this dog-leg. OP consulted with the Zoning Administrator’s Office, and the 10 foot limit is not measured to the back of the dog-leg, but rather to the furthest rear wall of the adjacent house. As such, using the correct method for measurement, the proposed addition would not extend beyond the rear wall of the adjacent house by more than the 10 feet permitted, and this relief would not be required. However, if the BZA determines that relief is required, OP would also recommend **approval** of the following additional relief request:

- E § 207.5 Rear Addition (10 feet max permitted beyond furthest adjoining rear wall, 6.4 feet existing; 15.7 feet proposed).

II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Address:	617 Massachusetts Avenue NE
Applicant:	Theresa Sullivan
Legal Description:	Square 866, Lot 810
Ward / ANC:	ANC 6C
Zone:	RF-1 - permits row dwellings and flats.
Historic Districts	Capitol Hill HD
Lot Characteristics:	The lot is rectangular without remarkable slope abutting a four-foot wide alley at the rear.
Existing Development:	The property is developed with a two-story, brick, semi-detached single-family dwelling.

Adjacent Properties:	The adjacent properties include a semi-detached and an attached row dwelling.
Surrounding Neighborhood Character:	The surrounding neighborhood is characteristic of the Capitol Hill Historic District which are a mix of attached and semi-detached row structures, schools and churches.
Proposed Development:	The Applicant seeks to construct a 9 feet long, two-story addition at the full width of the existing residence. The proposed rear wall would not extend past the rear wall of the adjoining house at 619 Massachusetts Avenue, NE.

III. ZONING REQUIREMENTS and RELIEF REQUESTED

RF-1 Zone	Regulation	Existing	Proposed ¹	Relief:
Height E § 303	35 ft. max.	29.5 ft.	29.5 ft.	None requested
Lot Width E § 201	18 ft. min.	22 ft.	22 ft.	None requested
Lot Area E § 201	1,800 sq. ft. min.	1,578 sq.ft.	1,587 sq.ft.	Existing nonconformity
Lot Occupancy E § 304	60% max.	51.39%	62.29 %	Relief requested
Rear Yard E § 306	20 ft. min.	29.5 ft.	20.5 ft.	None requested
Rear Yard Addition	10 ft max beyond attached rear wall	6.4 feet	15.7 feet < 10 ft. actual	Relief requested Appears to not be required
Side Yard E § 307	None required, but 5 ft. min. if provided	0 ft. 3 ft	No Change	Existing nonconformity

IV. ANALYSIS

Subtitle E Chapter 5201 ADDITION TO A BUILDING OR ACCESSORY STRUCTURE

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:

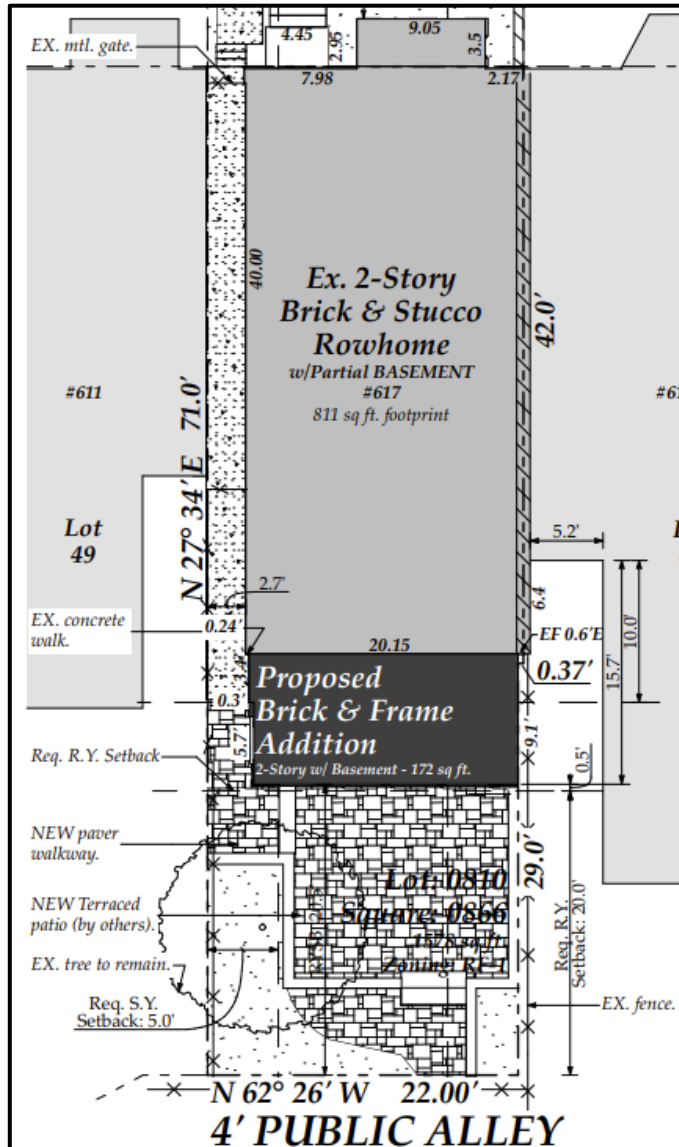
- (a) **Lot occupancy** up to a maximum of seventy percent (70%) for all new and existing structures on the lot;
- (b) Yards, including alley centerline setback;
- (c) Courts; and
- (d) Pervious surface.

The existing lot occupancy (51.4%) would be increased to 62.3%, so would not exceed the

¹ Information provided by applicant

maximum 70% permitted by special exception.

The subject property's rear wall currently projects beyond the rear wall of the dogleg of the adjoining property by 6.4 feet. The proposed 9-foot addition would not exceed the adjoining furthest rear wall as shown below.



5201.2 & 5201.3 not relevant to this application

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.

Light and air to the neighbors would not be adversely impacted, as shown in the Applicant's solar study of [Exhibit 12](#). The study indicates that during the summer, there would be minimal shadows on both adjacent properties due to the proposed addition, with shadows cast primarily on the roof of the adjoining property. During winter, there

would be some shadows to 611 Massachusetts Avenue and to the dogleg and the side elevation of the home at 619 Massachusetts Avenue, but no more than would be cast by a matter of right addition, not exceeding the by-right lot occupancy limit, but it should not cause an undue effect on the neighbor's enjoyment of light and air.

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

The addition proposes a kitchen window on the first level of the west elevation would face opaque fencing on the lot line. A second story bedroom window is set well back from the side lot line, so views from these areas would not impinge on the neighbor's sense of privacy.

- (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 addition is typical of rear additions and would not be substantially different in terms of design or materials for other additions within the historic neighborhood. This project would be reviewed at permitting by Historic Preservation staff as it is within the Capitol Hill Historic District.

- (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 Applicant provided the following:

Plans & Elevations – [Exhibit 4](#); Surveyor's Plat - [Exhibit 5](#); Photos [Exhibit 6](#);
Solar Study – [Exhibit 12](#).

- 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 does not propose special design treatment for protection of nearby properties.

- 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.*

The property would continue to be used as a single-family home as permitted in the zone.

Subtitle X Section 901 SPECIAL EXCEPTION REVIEW STANDARDS

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 proposed addition would be in harmony with the intent of the Regulations, as it satisfies

the bulk and yard requirements as discussed prior.

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

A solar study was provided which indicated that there should not be substantial change to the light and air to the neighboring properties. Similarly, loss of the neighbors' privacy beyond what may exist for a matter-of-right addition is not anticipated.

- (c) *Subject in specific cases to the special conditions specified in this title.*

The conditions were satisfied as discussed prior.

V. OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES

The Applicant received support from the Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS).

There were no other agencies' comments in the record at the writing of this report.

VI. ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION

The ANC 6C met at their regularly scheduled meeting on November 10, 2025, and voted to recommend approval. However, their report is not available in the record at the writing of this report.

VII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

There are three neighbors' letters in support, including immediate neighbors at [Exhibits 18 \(611 Massachusetts Avenue NE\)](#), and [20](#) (619 Massachusetts Avenue NE). [Exhibit 19](#) is a neighbor's letter in support at the rear of the property at 209 6th Street NE

Figure 1: Location Map

