



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

**FROM:** Matt Jesick, Development Review Specialist  
MBR Maxine Brown-Roberts, Associate Director for Development Review

**DATE:** June 12, 2026

**SUBJECT:** BZA #21444 – 3215 Rear Rowland Place, NW – Request for relief to construct a garage on an alley lot

### I. RECOMMENDATION

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

- C § 306.4, Conversion of an Alley Tax Lot to an Alley Record Lot, pursuant to X § 901 (Alley tax lot not meeting matter of right subdivision standards can be converted to an alley record lot by special exception);
- D § 5100.1(c), Rear Yard, pursuant to D § 5201.3 (5 feet required, 0 feet proposed);
- D § 5100.1(d), Side Yard, pursuant to D § 5201.3 (5 feet required, 0 feet proposed).

### II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Applicant                                      | Gordon Seagrave, owner                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Address, Legal Description                     | Square 2062, Lot 809 (No official address – “3215 Rear Rowland Place”)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Ward / ANC                                     | Ward 3, ANC 3C                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Zone                                           | R-2 (Low density, semi-detached homes; alley buildings permitted)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Historic District / Resource                   | Cleveland Park Historic District                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Lot Characteristics and Existing Development   | Vacant lot, approx. 12’ x 23’, that sits at the grade of the alley, but below the grade of the surrounding lots; Existing retaining walls around perimeter of property; A fence sits at the top of the retaining wall; <i>See photo excerpt from Exhibit 5, at right.</i> The property is currently a tax lot, and has been a tax lot since at least 2013.                                                                                                                                                              |
| Adjacent Properties and Neighborhood Character | The subject site is surrounded on 3 sides by Lot 59, which has a street address of 3215 Rowland Place. The owners of that lot, however, have no association with the subject lot or this application. The owner of the subject alley lot lives on a street-facing lot with address 3112 Rodman Street, just on the other side of the alley to the northwest. The surrounding neighborhood is entirely residential with detached and semi-detached buildings. Connecticut Avenue is approximately 1.5 block to the east. |
| Proposal                                       | Construct a 1-story, single-car garage.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |



### III. ZONING REQUIREMENTS AND RELIEF REQUESTED

| STANDARD                                                             | REQUIREMENT         | EXISTING         | PROPOSED          | RELIEF           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| <b>Lot Width<br/>C 306.1(a)</b>                                      | <b>14 ft.</b>       | <b>12 ft.</b>    | <b>No change</b>  | <b>Requested</b> |
| Lot Depth<br>n/a                                                     | n/a                 | ~23 feet average | No change         | Conforming       |
| <b>Lot Area<br/>C 306.1(c) and D 202.1</b>                           | <b>4,000 sf</b>     | <b>276 sf</b>    | <b>No change</b>  | <b>Requested</b> |
| <b>Alley Width for Subdivision,<br/>at the lot<br/>C 306.1(a)</b>    | <b>24 ft.</b>       | <b>16 ft.</b>    | <b>No change</b>  | <b>Requested</b> |
| <b>Alley Width for Subdivision,<br/>out to Street<br/>C 306.1(b)</b> | <b>24 ft.</b>       | <b>16 ft.</b>    | <b>No change</b>  | <b>Requested</b> |
| Height<br>D 5100.1(a)                                                | 20 ft.<br>2 stories | n/a              | 10 ft.<br>1 story | Conforming       |
| Lot Occupancy<br>D 5100.1(b)                                         | No maximum          | n/a              | 77%               | Conforming       |
| <b>Rear Yard<br/>D 5100.1(c)</b>                                     | <b>5 ft.</b>        | <b>n/a</b>       | <b>0 ft.</b>      | <b>Requested</b> |
| <b>Side Yard<br/>D 5100.1(d)</b>                                     | <b>5 ft.</b>        | <b>n/a</b>       | <b>0 ft.</b>      | <b>Requested</b> |
| Pervious Surface<br>D 5100.1(e)                                      | 10%                 | Not provided     | >10%*             | Conforming       |

\* Pervious surface will comply, according to the Self Certification, Exhibit 4.

### IV. ANALYSIS

#### Special Exception to Convert an Alley Tax Lot to an Alley Record Lot

A record lot is necessary to obtain a building permit and C § 306.1 provides standards for establishing a new alley record lot. If there is an existing alley tax lot, and that lot does not meet the matter of right standards of C § 306.1, other zoning routes can be utilized to convert the alley tax lot to an alley record lot. In this case, because the lot was apparently created after 1958, but before 2016, the applicant can use the special exception criteria of C § 306.4 to convert the lot to an alley record lot.

The analysis below first provides an overview of the matter of right standards from C § 306.1, then reviews the special exception criterion of C § 306.4.

*306.1 A new Alley Record Lot shall:*

- (a) Have frontage along a public alley with a minimum alley width of twenty-four feet (24 ft.), with the alley frontage no less than fourteen feet (14 ft);*
- (b) Have access to a public street through a public alley or alleys with an alley width of not less than twenty-four feet (24 ft.) at any point between the new Alley Record Lot and the street;*

The subject lot does not have adequate frontage, and the alley is not wide enough to permit a matter

of right subdivision.

- (c) *Meet the lot area standards applicable for non-Alley Lots in the same zone; if no minimum lot area standard is provided, the Alley Record Lot shall be a minimum of eighteen hundred square feet (1,800 sq. ft.) of lot area; and*

The existing lot is well below the 4,000 square foot lot area minimum provided for in the R-2 zone for buildings other than semi-detached buildings.

- (d) *Not be created by subdividing an existing record lot unless the subdivision application includes a statement, supported by a plat depicting the proposed Alley Record Lot and its existing record lot, that establishes to the Zoning Administrator's satisfaction that the remainder of that existing record lot and the new Alley Record Lot each comply with Subtitle C § 302 in addition to all other applicable requirements.*

The applicant does not propose to subdivide an existing record lot.

*306.4 An Alley Tax Lot not meeting the requirements of Subtitle C §§ 306.1 through 306.3 that was recorded with the Office of Tax and Revenue prior to September 6, 2016, may be converted to an Alley Record Lot if approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment as a special exception under Subtitle X, Chapter 9, and subject to the following requirements:*

- (a) *The Alley Tax Lot connects to an improved public street through an improved alley or system of alleys that provides adequate public safety, and infrastructure availability; and*
- (b) *The Office of Zoning shall refer the application 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:*
  - (1) *Department of Transportation (DDOT);*
  - (2) *Department of Public Works (DPW);*
  - (3) *Metropolitan Police Department (MPD);*
  - (4) *Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (FEMS);*
  - (5) *DC Water (WASA); and*
  - (6) *If a historic district or historic landmark is involved, the Historic Preservation Office (HPO).*

The Office of Zoning referred the application to the required agencies, and OP defers to any analysis from those agencies that the Board may receive. As of this writing, DDOT has submitted a memo at Exhibit 21 stating no objection to the application. Based on the development pattern of the District, which features innumerable garages on public alleys – many of which are less than 16 feet in width – OP finds that the subject alley would provide for adequate public safety and infrastructure availability. The garage would have an electricity connection, but would not have any water or sewer connections.

### **Special Exception from Rear Yard and Side Yard**

The alley lot development standards require a five foot rear yard and five foot side yard. In this case, because of the small size of the lot and the desire to have a garage, the applicant proposes a building design that goes from side lot line to side lot line, and the entire way to the rear of the lot. Relief can be granted pursuant to D § 5201, and the relevant criteria of that section are reviewed below.

- 5201.3 *For a new or enlarged principal building on an Alley Record 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) **Yards**, including alley centerline setback; and
  - (b) *Pervious surface.*

The applicant requests relief from rear and side yard requirements

- 5201.4 *An application for special exception relief under this section shall demonstrate that the proposed addition, new principal building, or accessory structure shall not have a substantially adverse effect on the use or enjoyment of any abutting or adjacent dwelling or property, specifically:*
- (a) *The light and air available to neighboring properties shall not be unduly affected;*

The light or air available to abutting or adjacent properties would not be unduly affected. The garage will largely sit below the surrounding grade, and existing retaining walls and fences would block any visual impact the garage might have. Similarly, because the new building will sit below grade, it should have little to no impact on air flow.

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

The garage would not impact the privacy or use and enjoyment of adjacent properties. As noted above, the garage would sit mostly below grade, and would have no windows that would create potential views onto nearby properties. Even if there were windows, the presence of the existing fence at the top of the retaining walls would block any views toward the surrounding lot.

- (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 garage would be of a style typical of small, alley-facing garages in DC. Furthermore, the nature of the surrounding grade should minimize the building's visibility. The Historic Preservation Office, in an email to Development Review staff, has stated that they have no

objections to the zoning application, but will conduct a more detailed evaluation of the architecture at the time of building permit.

- (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, new building, or accessory structure to adjacent buildings and views from public ways.*

The application materials include plans, elevations, photos, and site plans.

- 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.*

The application does not propose a nonconforming 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 special exceptions to convert the tax lot to a record lot, and for rear and side yard relief, would not compromise the intent of the Regulations. The special exception processes are in place to allow deviations from matter of right standards where the deviations would not impact nearby properties. The intent of the alley lot regulations is to provide for an acceptable form of development and for adequate access for utilities and public safety. In this case, the existing alley should provide adequate access, and the form of the building is not unlike typical garages throughout DC.

- 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 to convert the tax lot to a record lot, and for rear and side yard relief, should not unduly affect the use neighboring property. There should be no undue impacts regarding factors such as light, air, or privacy.

## **V. HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

The record does not contain comments from the Historic Preservation Office, but in an email to OP Development Review staff, HP staff indicated no objections to the zoning application, and that at the time of permit the garage could be approved at the staff level. A full architectural review would happen at the time of permit.

## **VI. COMMENTS OF OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES**

Exhibit 21 is a DDOT report indicating no objection to the application.

## **VII. ANC COMMENTS**

Exhibit 22 is an ANC memo in support of the application.

## **VIII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS**

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

## IX. VICINITY MAP

