District of Columbia
Office of Planning

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Crystal Myers, Development Review Specialist
MBR
Maxine-Brown Roberts Associate Director Development Review

DATE: September 25, 2026

SUBJECT: FMBZA Case # 21515- Application of the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia to renovate its existing chancery at 601 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.

I. RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning recommends that the FMBZA **not disapprove** the application to renovate the existing chancery as shown in the plans at Exhibit 5, pursuant to X§ 201 and the Foreign Missions Act, 22 USCA § 4306 et seq. (2014).

II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Address	601 New Hampshire Ave., NW
Applicant:	The Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
Legal Description	Square 19, Lot 823
Ward / ANC	Ward 2; ANC 2A
Zone	MU-2- The purposes of the MU-2 zone are to act as a buffer between adjoining non-residential and residential areas, and to ensure that new development is compatible in use, scale, and design with the transitional function of this zone. The MU-2 zone permits a chancery use by special exception. This property has existed as a chancery use by the Applicant since 1983.
Historic District or Resource	The property is within the jurisdiction of the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). It is not within a historic district and is not a designated landmark.
Lot Characteristics	The trapezoid-shaped lot is located between 25th Street, N.W., New Hampshire Avenue, N.W. and F Street, N.W.
Existing Development	The property is developed with a five-story, marble façade structure occupied by the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia.
Neighboring Properties	The subject property occupies the entirety of Square 19, opposite the Watergate Complex to the west, the Kennedy Center to the south and 25th Street, N.W. and Interstate 66 to the east.

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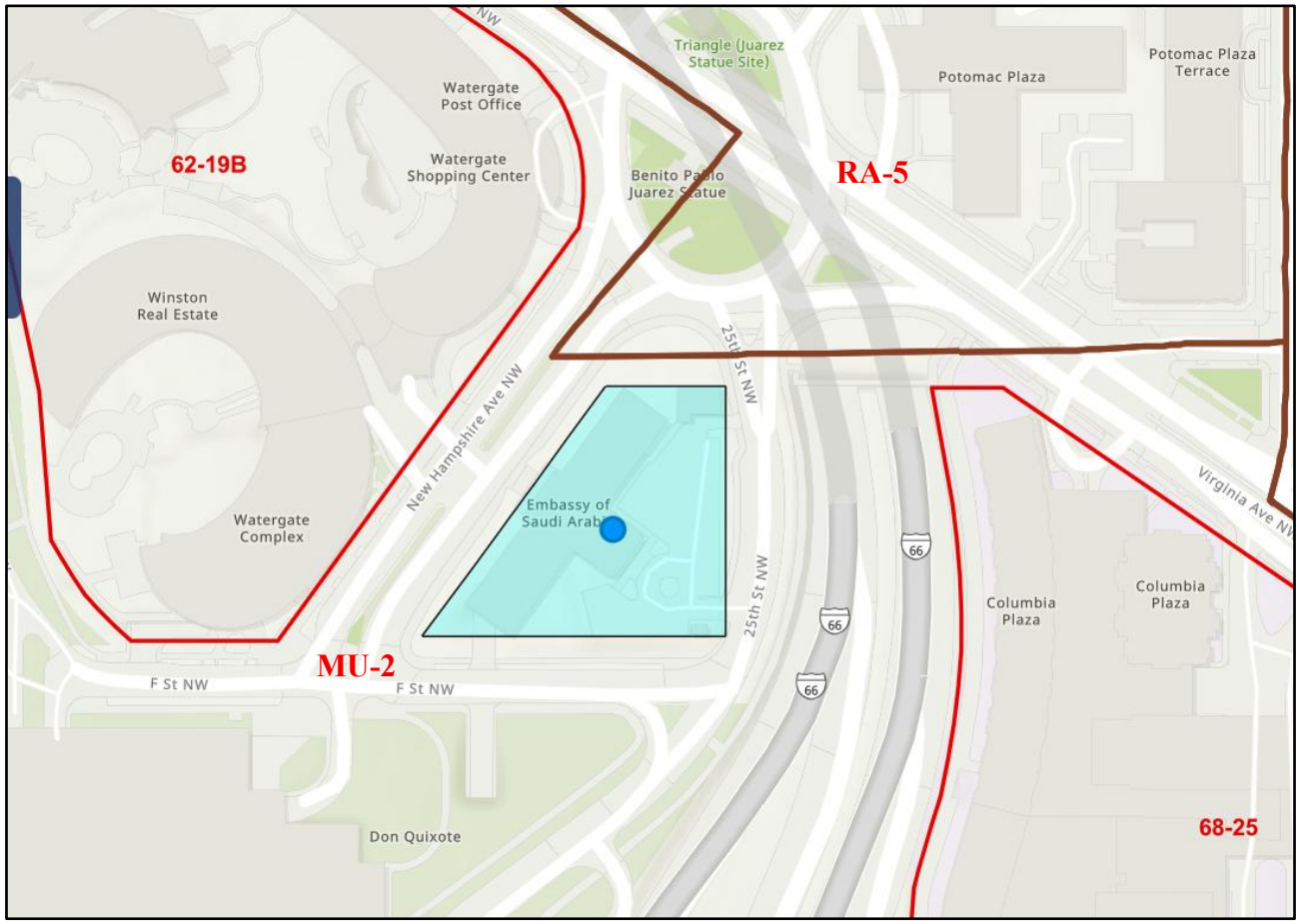
Surrounding Neighborhood Character	The surrounding neighborhood includes a wide variety of uses, including office, residential, hotel, cultural and institutional uses. The Watergate office, hotel and residential complex is located opposite to the west, and the Kennedy Center is located to the south. Several other residential and office buildings are in the West End/Foggy Bottom neighborhood, as well as nearby George Washington University. The Foggy-Bottom Metrorail station is within walking distance approximately 0.3 miles from the property.

III. LOCATION MAP



IV. APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF.

The applicant, the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, proposes interior modernization of its existing chancery, including upgrades to mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems to meet contemporary standards. Exterior work includes façade refinements and window replacements, improved vehicle access controls, and new security screening facilities. The Embassy also proposes security enhancements to the 25th Street. N.W. gate and installation of a 10-foot anti-climb perimeter fence to address current safety concerns and support modern security requirements.

The subject property is zoned MU-2, which is a special purpose zone under Subtitle X § 200.3. The Embassy purchased the property in 1983 and has continuously operated its chancery at this location since that time. The proposed renovations do not require zoning relief, and the applicant is not requesting any deviation from MU-2 development standards.

V. OFFICE OF PLANNING ANALYSIS

Compliance with X§ 201.8

As part of its review, the FMBZA is required to evaluate the application within the six factors set forth in the Foreign Missions Act (FMA).

(a) The international obligation of the United States to facilitate the provision of adequate and secure facilities for foreign missions in the Nation's Capital;

As noted in a letter dated August 13, 2026, (Exhibit 27) the Department of State has "…determined that favorable BZA action … would fulfill the international obligation of the United States to facilitate the provision of adequate and secure premises for the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its diplomatic mission in Washington (DC)." OP agrees that this criterion has been addressed.

(b) Historic preservation, as determined by the Board of Zoning Adjustment. In carrying out this section, and in order to ensure compatibility with historic landmarks and districts, substantial compliance with District of Columbia and federal regulations governing historic preservation shall be required with respect to new construction and to demolition of or alteration to historic landmark;

The project proposes changes to the front façade of the existing structure. It is noted that the subject property lies within the jurisdiction of the Committee of Fine Arts (CFA) but is not a designated landmark nor located within a historic district. The Historic Preservation Office (HPO) has no comments on the proposal and defers to CFA's comments on the proposed design. CFA has provided its comments in support of the proposal at Exhibit 17.

(c) *The adequacy of off-street parking or other parking and the extent to which the area will be served by public transportation to reduce parking needs, subject to such special security requirements as may be determined by the Secretary of State, after consultation with federal agencies authorized to perform protective services*;

The Applicant's self-certification indicates that on-site parking would be reduced from 70 spaces to 50 spaces, which would exceed the minimum requirement of 29 spaces. The site is well-served by public transportation with multiple metrobus routes and is a seven-minute walk to Metrorail's Blue, Orange and Silver Lines at the Foggy Bottom Metro Station. Several bike share stations also support the area's transportation needs. Therefore, while a few spaces would be removed to accommodate the new screening facility, on-site parking would remain adequate and would have no perceptible effect on the off-street parking supply in public space.

The Department of State notes that there exist no special security requirements relating to parking in this case.

(d) *The extent to which the area is capable of being adequately protected, as determined by the Secretary of State, after consultation with federal agencies authorized to perform protective services*;

The U.S. Department of State, in consultation with the federal agencies responsible for protective services, has an obligation to ensure that the proposed chancery can be adequately protected. The proposed security enhancements, including the ten-feet fence and new screening facilities, will directly support this obligation.

Federal agencies performing protective services have determined that the subject site and area are capable of being adequately protected pursuant to federal regulations 22 U.S.C. § 4306(d) (4), as stated in the State Department's letter at Exhibit 27**.**

(e) The municipal interest, as determined by the Mayor of the District of Columbia; and

Zoning

Considering the above analysis, OP determined, on behalf of the Mayor of the District of Columbia, that favorable action on this application is in the municipal interest and generally consistent with the Zoning Regulations. Relief from the Regulations were not requested.

Historic Preservaton

The property is not within a historic district, and HPO's comments are not required. However, it is within the CFA's jurisdiction as referenced prior and its recommendation in support is included in the record (Exhibit 17).

Public Space

OP supports the proposal that would allow the chancery's placement of the security fencing along its property lines, the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) submitted a report at Exhibit 28 in which thay stated that the proposed action will not have adverse impacts on the District's transportation network and therefore DDOT has no objection to the approval of the application. In relation to the public space DDOT recommend the applicant participate in a Preliminary Design Review Meeting (PDRM) to address public space issues.

(f) *The federal interest, as determined by the Secretary of State*.

The U.S. Department of State's memo stated that there is a federal interest in the project and "*…cooperation was essential for successfully achieving the Federal Government's mission of providing safe, secure, and functional facilities for the conduct of U.S. diplomacy and the promotion of U.S. interests worldwide."* Exhibit 27.

Based on the submitted materials, the Office of Planning finds that the proposed improvements are consistent with the longstanding diplomatic use of the site, support the functional and security needs of the chancery, and do not conflict with the intent or requirements of the MU-2 zone.

VI. DISTRICT AGENCY COMMENTS

DDOT submitted a report at Exhibit 28. At the writing of this report, no other District agency submitted a report to the record.

The Commission of Fine Arts submitted a letter in support stating their approval of the concept submission and provided comments for development of the design. (Exhibit 17)

VII. ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION

There is no formal report from ANC 2A in the record. However, the Applicant submitted their email exchange with the ANC's Executive Director. (Exhibit 19)

VIII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

At the writing of this report, no community comments were filed in the record.