

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
FOREIGN MISSION BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT

Embassy of the Republic of Cuba
Statement in Support of Chancery Alteration
2630 16th Street NW (Square 2575, Lot 843)

I. INTRODUCTION.

This Statement is submitted on behalf of the Embassy of the Republic of Cuba (the “**Applicant**”) the owner of the property located at 2630 16th Street NW (Square 2575, Lot 843) (the “**Property**”). The Property is improved with a four-story building (the “**Building**”) constructed in 1917 as the Cuban Embassy. It is currently used as the Chancery for the Republic of Cuba. As detailed more fully below, the Applicant is proposing to replace the existing fence at the rear of the Property, requiring additional grading and a retaining wall. Pursuant to X § 201-2 of the Zoning Regulations, as described herein, the Application meets the standard for the Foreign Mission Board of Zoning Adjustment (“**FMBZA**” or the “**Board**”) to “not disapprove” the proposed scope of work.

II. JURISDICTION OF THE BOARD.

The Board has jurisdiction to not disapprove the request for a new chancery pursuant to Subtitle, X § 201 of the Foreign Missions Act (22 U.S.C. § 4306(b)(2)(B)) (the “**Act**”).

III. BACKGROUND.

A. Description of the Property and Surrounding Area.

The Property is split zoned RA-2 and RA-4; the principal Building is located entirely within the RA-4 portion whereas the accessory structures and rear yard are located in the RA-2 portion. The work being proposed is located in the RA-2 portion. The Property is also located in the Meridian Hill History District. The Property is a through lot with a total land area of 26,775 square feet. Abutting the Property to the west is 16th Street, NW. To the north is the Polish Chancery and Embassy Towers Apartment Building. Abutting the Property to the south is the Lithuanian Chancery. The surrounding area features a mix of residential, institutional, and diplomatic uses, reflecting the property’s location within a historically significant and diverse neighborhood. Nearby landmarks include Meridian Hill Park, directly to the south, and several other embassy and chancery buildings along the 16th Street corridor. This area is characterized by its historic architecture, diplomatic presence, and proximity to cultural and recreational amenities.

B. History of The Building

The Cuban Embassy in Washington, D.C. serves as Cuba's diplomatic mission to the United States. Situated at 2630 16th Street, NW, in the Meridian Hill Historic District and Adams Morgan neighborhood, the Building was originally constructed in 1917 to house the Cuban embassy. It fulfilled this role until 1961, when diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba were severed.

Between 1977 and 2015, the building functioned as the Cuban Interests Section in the United States. While staffed by Cuban diplomats, it was overseen by a protecting power. Initially, from 1977 to 1991, it operated under the auspices of the Czechoslovak Embassy. Following the collapse of Communism, Czechoslovakia withdrew its sponsorship, and from 1991 to 2015, the Swiss Embassy took on this role. Once diplomatic relations were restored, the building resumed its status as the Cuban Embassy. Diplomatic relations were formally restored on July 1, 2015, as announced by U.S. President Barack Obama, and the building officially reopened as the Cuban Embassy on July 20, 2015.

C. Proposed Scope of Work and Outreach.

The proposed project (the “**Project**”) includes an update to the rear of the Property. Initially the Applicant simply wanted to simply replace the security fence at the rear. In consulting with HPO, they suggested the Applicant update the grading at the rear to be consistent with the adjacent apartment building to the north. Accordingly, in addition to the new fence, the Applicant must construct a retaining wall, concrete square enclosure for the trash containers and a new emergency generator. The generator and the trash containers will be located next to the generator and trash containers for the Lithuanian Embassy. The permits for both the retaining wall and fence work have been issued and are included with this Application. The Applicant has also posted the respective permit notices on the Property and reached out to neighbors via the neighbor notification process through DOB. Accordingly, the neighbors are aware of the work and have no objections thus far.

IV. PROPOSAL IS CONSISTENT WITH THE FOREIGN MISSIONS ACT AND SUBTITLE X, CHAPTER 2 OF THE ZONING REGULATIONS.

The Act and Subtitle X, Chapter 2 of the Zoning Regulations govern the location, replacement, and expansion of chanceries. The Property is split zoned RA-2 and RA-4. Chapter 2 establishes the criteria for approval for new chanceries, which includes a requirement that new chanceries in medium-density residential zones (such as an RA-2 zone) be subject to a mixed-use

area location requirement. However, pursuant to X-202.1, expansions of established chanceries in a low- to medium-density residential zones are only subject to the criteria of X-208.¹ High-density zones such as the RA-4 zone are not subject to any mixed-use area requirement, only the standards in X-208.

Accordingly, the proposal is subject to and meets the standards set forth by X § 208 as follows:

(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;

The United States has an international obligation to facilitate the provision of adequate and secure facilities for foreign missions in the Nation's Capital. See 22 USC § 4306(d)(1); D.C. Official Code § 6-1306(d)(1); 11X DCMR § 201.8(a). Favorable action by the FMBZA on this application would fulfill the international obligation of the United States. The Embassy has received and submitted with this Application documentation from the US Department of State.

(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 Property is located in the Meridian Hill Historic District and the Project was revised to the current scope of work in consultation with HPO.

(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;

This section is not applicable. The proposed scope will not affect the number of employees at the Property, the use of the Property, or any other factor that could impact parking. The existing parking inventory will remain.

¹ X-202.1: An existing chancery in a low- to medium-density residential zone may be expanded or replaced, subject to disapproval by the Board of Zoning Adjustment, in accordance with the review standards of Subtitle X § 201.8.

(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 replacement security fence will increase the protection to the Property.

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

The FMBZA must consider the municipal interest, as determined by the Mayor, in deciding whether to approve an application for a chancery use. The proposed chancery use is compatible with the surrounding mix of uses. As described above, the area is characterized by a mix of residential, institutional, and diplomatic uses, reflecting the property's location within a historically significant and diverse neighborhood. The fence replacement project began when an administrative suit was filed against the Embassy by a neighbor who wanted to see the existing fence updated, claiming it was poorly maintained. While the lawsuit was dismissed, the Embassy heard the neighbor's concerns and is, with this improvement, contributing to the betterment of the community and the spirit of the lawsuit, not only improving its security, but the general image of the area.

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

The Applicant has requested that the Department of State submit a report to the FMBZA case record prior to the public hearing.

V. CONCLUSION.

For the reasons stated above, this Applicant requests that the Board not disapprove this Application.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexandra Wilson

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Date: December 5, 2024

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