


GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



Office of the Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: D.C. Zoning Commission

FROM: Andrew Altman
Director 

DATE: January 31, 2000

SUBJECT: Preliminary Report - Request for Review and Approval of the Use of Airspace Above a Public Alley Between Lots 87 and 6 in Square 514 (Yale Laundry)

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
FEB -4 4:34 PM '00

APPLICATION

This application has been submitted by Yale Steam Limited Partnership for review and approval of the use of airspace above a public alley between lots 87 and 6 in Square 514, pursuant to the District of Columbia Public Space Utilization Act of October 17, 1968, as compiled at Section 7-941 et. Seq. D.C. Code (1973). The Commission's authority is also noted in Sub Paragraph 3010.2 (a) of the Zoning Regulations. The applicant proposes to execute a lease for the use of airspace with the Government of the District of Columbia to construct a bridge over an alley, connecting two elements of a proposed hotel.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be scheduled for a public hearing.

APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL

The subject alley is a 15-foot wide north south alley connecting a 30-foot wide east-west alley in the center of the square on the north (Brown's Court) and New York Avenue on the south. The applicant owns all of the property on both sides of the alley. According to the applicant, the alley is to be bridged to connect the lobby of a proposed 408-room hotel, to be located in the historic Yale Steam Laundry building east of the alley, and an otherwise "free-standing" hotel structure to the west of the alley. It would provide hotel guests access between the buildings of the Yale Steam Laundry site without having to confront the elements or compete with vehicular traffic in the alley.

ZONING COMMISSION

CASE No. 00-01

EXHIBIT No. 12


Z.C. 00-01

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 00-01
EXHIBIT NO. 12

The bridge would be one story in height, with the lowest elevation of the bridge to be located 22.5 feet above the grade of the alley below. It would obviate the need to close or relocate the existing alley, and would occupy only a small portion of the air space above the alley. In fact the bridge, at 15 feet in length and 8 feet in width, would cover only 120 square feet of ground area, approximately 5.3 percent of the area of the alley below. According to the applicant, the alley needs to remain open for traffic and service purposes.

SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The alley to be bridged is a 15-foot wide north south alley connecting a 30-foot wide east-west alley in the center of the square on the north (Brown's Court) and New York Avenue on the south. It runs between lots 6 and 87 owned by the applicant. It is an extension of a north-south alley on the north, so that it provides a direct connection between M Street on the north and New York Avenue on the south.

The applicant's property, which is proposed for hotel development, consists of lots 6, 67, 68, 73, 74 and 87 in Square 514, totaling 52,516 square feet of land area. Lot 87 east of the alley is developed with the vacant 1902 Yale Laundry Building. Lot 60 west of the alley is developed with the associated vacant stable/garage building. Both are historic landmarks. The Yale Steam Laundry site is zoned DD/C-2-C. (See attached map.)

The remainder of the square is zoned DD/R-5-B. Facing New York Avenue in addition to the Yale Laundry complex are located a church and residence on the east and a large, vacant, one-story printing (bindery) structure on the west (the site to be developed by the applicant with a mixture of residential and commercial uses). Along 5th Street to the west are located two- and three-story, residential row structures, many converted to apartments, and a 30-foot high, vacant, printing structure. Along M Street on the north are located a "store-front" church and two- and three-story row structures, many converted to apartments.

EXISTING ZONING

The existing DD/C-2-C zoning for the site permits matter-of-right community business centers of high density development, including office, retail, housing, and mixed uses to a maximum height of 130 feet (except that no part of the building may project above a plane drawn at a 45 degree angle from a line located 110 feet above the property line on Massachusetts Avenue) and a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 8.0, of which no less than 4.5 FAR must be residential in use. The site is located in Housing Priority Area A. However, because the subject property is a historic landmark, it has no housing requirement, and the permitted FAR is limited to 6.0, all of which may be commercial in accordance with paragraph 1707.4 of the Zoning Regulations.

PLANNING AND POLICY ISSUES

The Office of Planning offers the following comments for the consideration of the Zoning Commission in this case:

1. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

The entirety of Square 514 is designated Moderate Density Residential on the Comprehensive Plan Generalized Land Use Map. Yet, it should be noted that the Comprehensive Plan designation for this area has not changed since the Zoning Commission, in response to the Comprehensive Plan, zoned the Yale Steam Laundry site DD/C-2-C. Thus, it would appear that the proposed use of the site is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. OP will evaluate this issue further if the case is set down for a public hearing.

2. Consistency with Existing Zoning

The existing DD/C-2-C zoning permits hotel use and thus also permits a bridge connecting two segments of a hotel (if approved by the Zoning Commission).

3. Consistency with Criteria in the Public Space Utilization Act of 1968

The Zoning Commission's jurisdiction in the execution of airspace leases, pursuant to the District of Columbia Public Space Utilization Act of October 17, 1968, requires in part that:

"The Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia, after public hearing and after securing the advice and recommendations of the National Capital Planning Commission, has determined the use to be permitted in such airspace and has established regulations applicable to the use of such airspace consistent with regulations applicable to the abutting privately owned property, including limitations and requirements respecting the height of any structure to be erected in such airspace, off street parking and floor area ratios applicable to such structure, and easements of light, air, and access...."

Height. The proposed height of the bridge above the ground, at 22.5 feet, is well above the 15 feet normally established to allow vehicle passage, and thus likely to be acceptable by the Department of Public Works and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. The 8-foot wide bridge itself would be only one story in height, and with a span of only 15 feet would require little depth to accommodate structural members.

Parking. The proposed bridge would add 120 gross square feet of FAR space to the planned hotel. Because the bridge would add no additional sleeping rooms, it would add no additional requirement for parking. In fact, because the bridge would encourage guests to walk from the lobby rather than drive to their rooms in the westernmost "building", it would likely relieve potential automobile congestion on the site. With 408 sleeping rooms and the largest function room encompassing approximately 4,000 square feet, the hotel is required to provide a minimum of 230 parking spaces. The plans include approximately 230 on-site parking spaces in 3 parking levels.

FAR. As noted above, the bridge would add 120 gross square feet of FAR space to the hotel, or .0023 FAR. The overall FAR, at 5.23, is well within the allowed FAR of 6.0. The bridge would not be used other than for a pedestrian connection at the third floor.

Light and air. The bridge would have little impact on light and air. Its 8-foot width, 15-foot length and 22.5 foot height suggest that it would have essentially no "tunnel effect" on users of the alley. (Notwithstanding this fact, the bridge would provide lighting for the alley below.) It would have little impact on public space along New York Avenue or in Browns Court because it would be set back over 70 feet from New York Avenue and over 45 feet from Browns Court. It would be glass enclosed with a minimum of opaque materials. Its potential visual impact is discussed below.

Access. Access to the bridge would be internal to the hotel and its guests and staff. It would have no impact on vehicular or pedestrian access along the alley between Browns Court and New York Avenue.

The Office of Planning will further assess the degree to which the proposed use of airspace meets the above criteria if this case is set down for a public hearing.

4. Need to Utilize Air Space

The Comprehensive Plan contains many objectives and policies toward the location of new hotels in the area of the new convention center north of Mt. Vernon Square. The proposed hotel would not only be consistent with those policies, it would also represent the first instance of revitalization of the New York Avenue corridor east of 7th Street and west of the tracks.

The proposed bridge is an important, if not essential, component of the Yale Steam Laundry hotel complex. As noted above, the alley is to be bridged to connect the lobby in the historic Yale Steam Laundry building with the western guest room tower, providing hotel guests access between all of the buildings and functions of the Yale Steam Laundry site without having to confront the elements or compete with vehicular traffic in the alley. It would maintain the existing alley system and through-block connector between M Street and New York Avenue. The applicant originally considered moving the alley segment to the west, off-line with the northern component, but the adjacent neighborhood was strongly opposed. The applicant also considered provision of a below grade connection, but ruled it out because the historic buildings to be connected do not contain below grade space, because of the difficulty and cost of providing vertical access down to a below grade level and because the alley is believed to contain a major sewer pipe that would likely have to be relocated.

5. Compatibility of Proposed Bridge with Other Development in the Area

The proposed bridge has been designed in a contemporary industrial vernacular, consistent with the industrial character of the historic buildings and proposed new hotel structure. It would consist of glass sheathing, encasing a metal structural framework. According to the

applicant, bridge structures between industrial type buildings are often found in the older cities along the East Coast.

The bridge would be visible from New York Avenue and from Browns Court; it would not be visible from M Street because of the way the alley bends at Browns Court. The hotel proposal, including the bridge, has received conceptual approval from the Historic Preservation Review Board. It is also undergoing Large Tract Review. The historic preservation and large tract review processes will both address compatibility issues and will provide an opportunity for neighborhood input to the project.

6. Community and Agency Comments

If this case is set down for a public hearing, OP will refer the application to the appropriate District agencies and elicit the position of Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 1B. According to the applicant, the ANC supported the project before the Historic Preservation Review Board, although some concerns about the height of the hotel buildings have apparently been expressed in recent meetings with the applicant.

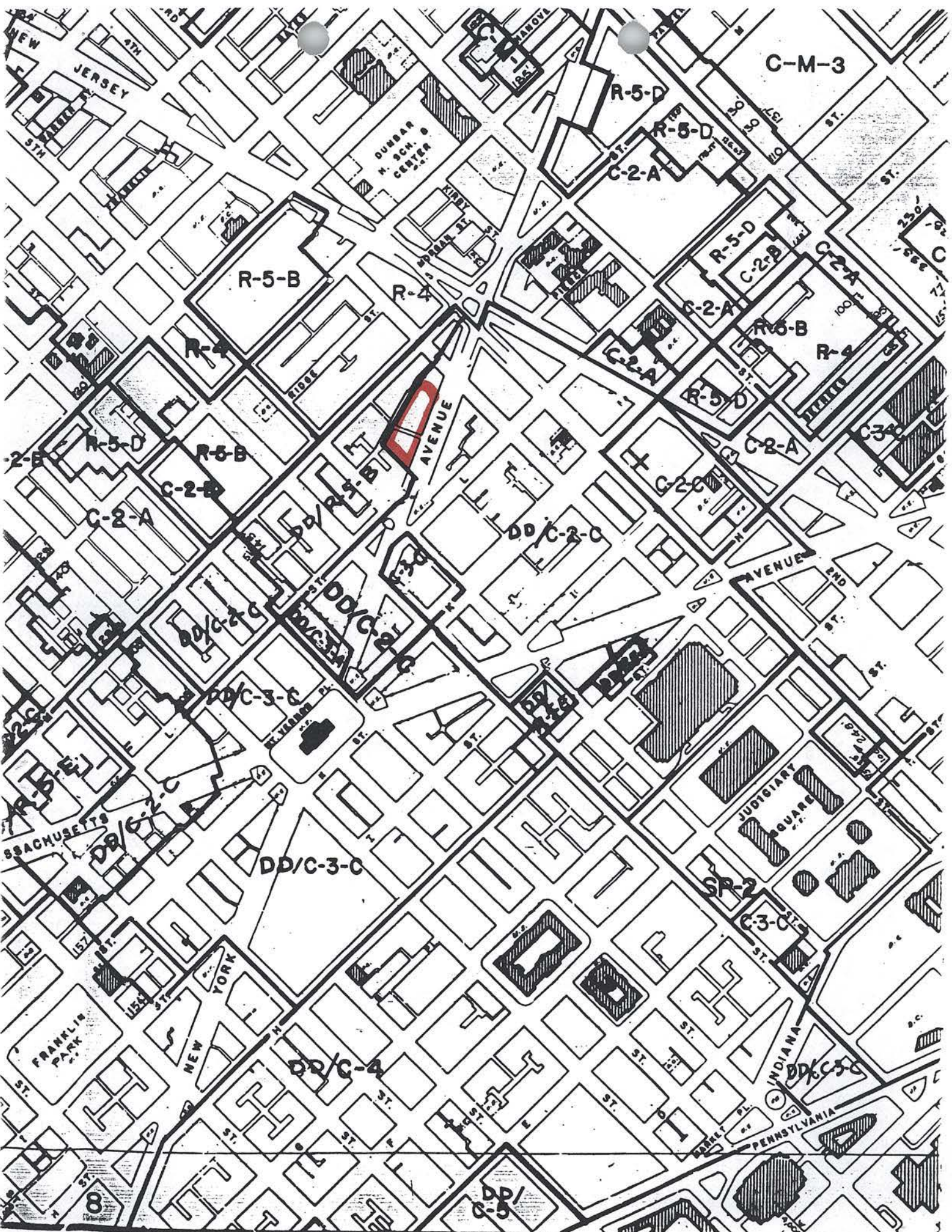
RECOMMENDATION

The applicant proposes to execute a lease for the use of airspace with the Government of the District of Columbia to construct a bridge over an alley, connecting two elements of a proposed 408-room hotel to be located less than two blocks from the new convention center on a portion of New York Avenue that has long awaited redevelopment. The hotel proposal, including the bridge, has received conceptual approval from the Historic Preservation Review Board, and appears to be strongly consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed bridge is an important functional component of the overall project. A public hearing would provide a forum in which any outstanding issues could be addressed.

Thus, the Office of Planning recommends that this application be scheduled for a public hearing.

Attachments

AA/dc



C-M-3

R-5-D

R-5-D

C-2-A

R-5-B

R-4

R-5-D

C-2-B

C-2-A

R-5-B

R-4

R-4

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AVENUE

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