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NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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Patricia E. Gallagher, AICP

IN REPLY REFER TO:
NCPC File No. Z.C. 03-16

JUN - 8 2004

Zoning Commission of
the District of Columbia
2nd Floor, Suite 210 South
441 4th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Members of the Commission:

The National Capital Planning Commission, at its meeting on June 3, 2004, approved the enclosed action on the modification to the Planned Unit Development at 2650 Virginia Avenue, NW to allow the conversion of the Watergate Hotel to an apartment house. Also enclosed, for your information, is a copy of the Staff Recommendation for the project.

Sincerely,

Patricia E. Gallagher, AICP
Executive Director

Enclosures

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO. 03-16
EXHIBIT NO. 165

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia
CASE NO.03-16
EXHIBIT NO.165

COMMISSION ACTION

NCPC File No. Z.C. 03-16

NCPC
NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION

MODIFICATION TO THE PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT IN SQUARE 8, LOT 807 2650 VIRGINIA AVENUE, NW
Washington, DC

Submitted by the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia

June 3, 2004

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of comments to the District of Columbia Zoning Commission pursuant to Section 8 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8724(a)) and D.C. Code § 2-1006(a).

Commission Action

The Commission:

Concludes that the proposed modification to the planned unit development at 2650 Virginia Avenue, NW to allow the conversion of the existing Watergate Hotel to a cooperative apartment building would not adversely affect the identified federal interests and is consistent with the the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.

Deborah B. Young
Secretary to the National Capital Planning Commission

NCPC File No. Z.C. 03-16

NCPC
NATIONAL CAPITAL PLANNING COMMISSION

MODIFICATION TO THE PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT IN SQUARE 8, LOT 807 2650 VIRGINIA AVENUE, NW

Washington, DC

Submitted by the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia

May 27, 2004

Abstract

The Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia has submitted to the Commission a proposal to modify an existing Planned Unit Development (PUD) at 2650 Virginia Avenue, NW, Lot 807, Square 8, known as the Watergate. The modification to this PUD would allow the conversion of the existing Watergate Hotel to a cooperative apartment building. The PUD contains approximately 37,897 square feet of land in an area zoned SP-2.

Federal Interests

The identified federal interests relevant to this project include the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, federal reservations 26H, 26K, 26L, 98, and 134, Special Streets, and the Potomac River.

Commission Action Requested by Applicant

Approval of comments to the Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia pursuant to Section 8 of the National Capital Planning Act (40 U.S.C. § 8724(a)) and D.C. Code § 2-1006(a).

Executive Director's Recommendation

The Commission:

Concludes that the proposed modification to the planned unit development at 2650 Virginia Avenue, NW to allow the conversion of the existing Watergate Hotel to a cooperative apartment building would not adversely affect the identified federal interests and is consistent with the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

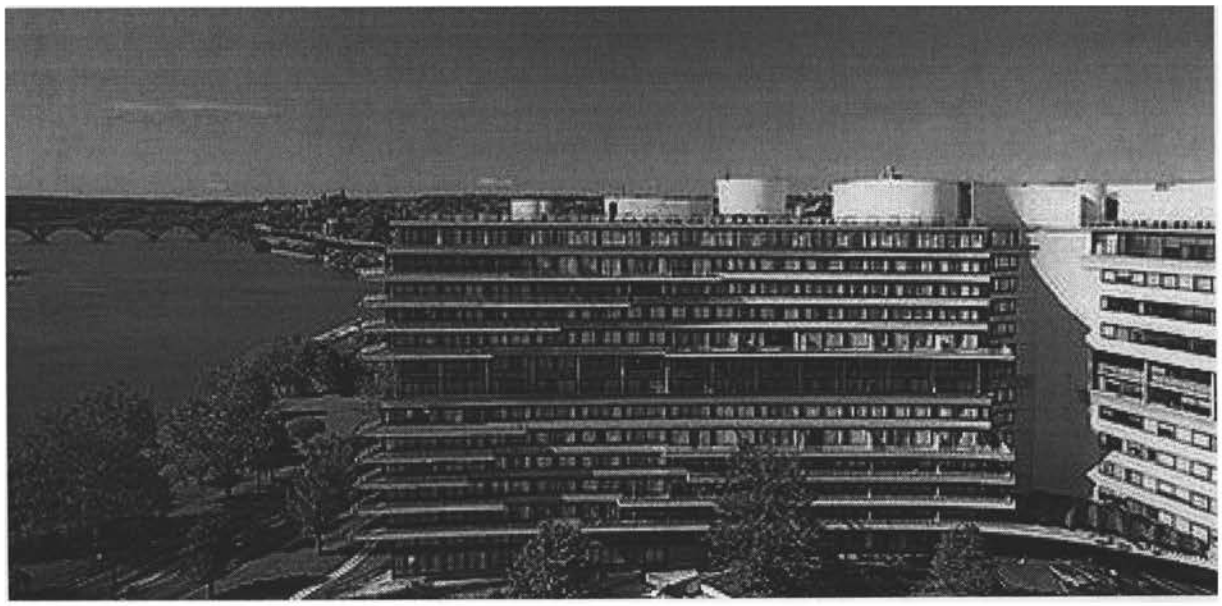
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PROJECT SUMMARY

Site Description

The site is situated at 2650 Virginia Avenue, NW, and consists of Lot 807 in Square 8. The site is located southwest of the 2600 Virginia Avenue office building. The property has no street frontage on Virginia Avenue but has access from Virginia Avenue by means of a driveway which runs between the 2600 office building and the Watergate West apartment building at 2700 Virginia Avenue. The site faces Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway but has no access from the Parkway. The site contains approximately 37,897 square feet of land area and is developed with a 250-room hotel consisting of three below-grade levels and fourteen stories above grade.

The site is part of the Watergate complex, bounded by Virginia Avenue on the northeast, the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway on the west, New Hampshire Avenue on the southeast and F Street on the south. The overall Watergate complex includes three apartment buildings, two office buildings, a hotel and interior retail spaces.



The buildings which surround the submission site are all part of the Watergate complex. To the northwest, east and southeast are the three existing apartment buildings. To the northeast is one of the two office buildings. To the west and south are the Rock Creek Parkway and the Potomac River.

The complex is in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood. The area is characterized by a mixture of land uses, predominantly in high rise buildings including apartment houses, a dormitory for the George Washington University, office buildings, two gasoline service stations and the Kennedy Center.

The site is currently zoned SP-2. The SP-2 District permits an apartment house as a matter-of-right; offices and hotels now normally require approval of the Board of Zoning Adjustment as a special exception.



Background

The Watergate complex was one of the first PUDs approved after the adoption of the PUD regulations in 1958. The original PUD for the Watergate complex was first approved in 1962. The original plan contained a mix of uses and an overall site plan featuring the curvilinear design which is emblematic of the Watergate. The project was divided into four stages:

- Stage I was the apartment house now known as Watergate East at 2500 Virginia Avenue, containing 301 apartment units and also including approximately 50,000 square feet of retail and service commercial uses above and below ground;
- Stage II was the office building and the subject hotel, at 2600 and 2650 Virginia Avenue, respectively, to also include approximately 25,000 square feet of additional retail and service commercial uses;
- Stage III was the apartment house now known as Watergate West at 2700 Virginia Avenue, containing 143 apartment units; and
- Stage IV was to be an apartment house located along the New Hampshire Avenue and F Street side of the property and was to contain approximately 850 apartments.

The total development was to contain approximately 1,600 dwelling units including 1,300 apartments and 300 hotel rooms, 185,000 square feet of office space, 80,000 square feet of retail and service uses and 1,250 parking spaces.

The PUD was amended in 1968 to change the site plan and uses proposed for Building No. 1 (Stage IV), to allow up to 260,600 square feet of special purpose office uses with 325 dwelling units and 24,000 square feet of retail and service commercial uses.

The PUD was amended again in 1974 to allow general office use in Building 1 (Stage IV) at 600 New Hampshire Avenue and in 1976 to allow general office use in the Stage II office building at 2600 Virginia Avenue.

The PUD was amended again in 1989 to allow for a 2,000 square foot expansion of the health club in the Watergate Hotel on the B-3 level. With that approval, the project consisted of over 500,000 square feet of office space, a 237-room hotel, 644 apartment units, 1,240 parking spaces located in a 3-level common garage which serves the entire complex, a health club, and a significant amount of retail space.

The site is not presently a designated historic landmark nor is it within a historic district. During the course of the proceedings on this case, The Committee to Preserve the Watergate Heritage, Inc. filed an application with the Historic Preservation Review Board to have the entire Watergate complex designated as a historic landmark. No action had been taken on that request by the time the application was decided by the Zoning Commission.

Proposal

The proposed modification to the PUD is to allow the option to convert the existing hotel, currently operating as the Watergate Hotel, to an apartment house of 133 units. The new apartment building would be a cooperative, the same form of ownership as the three existing apartment buildings in the Watergate complex. The changes necessary to affect the conversion will be mostly internal to the building, resulting in the removal of certain hotel related uses on lower levels and the conversion of the guest rooms on the upper levels to apartments. The building would continue to contain a restaurant and a health club. All other uses and buildings in the complex will remain as approved and existing. There is no change in zoning requested for the site.

There are currently ninety-five parking spaces available to the existing hotel. The existing eighty-five below-grade spaces would continue to be available to the apartment house. In addition, eleven spaces would be added on the B-3 level in space which is now part of the health club. Thirty-seven spaces would be added on the B-2 level in space now part of the hotel support area. Seven spaces would be added on the B-1 level in space now part of the hotel bar and storage. Six spaces would be added on the surface in carports.

A new restaurant would contain a maximum of 3,000 square feet, for approximately 120 seats. The restaurant would be located on the B-1 level of the building and would have no street frontage. The nature and type of service of the restaurant use will be determined in consultation with the residents of the Watergate. The restaurant is intended to serve the residents of the project. To the extent that there would be persons who drive to the site, valet parking will be provided for patrons of the restaurant.

The proposed modification would not change the exterior of the existing building in any significant way. Exterior changes will include the replacement of existing windows, the construction of six carports on the surface adjacent to the pool at the rear, and the construction of additional stairways for access from the top floor units to the roof deck.

The area where the carports will be located is adjacent to the entrance to the parking garage. This area is currently paved and used by the hotel valet service for parking. Part of the area will be transformed into private terraces for new residential units being created inside the building on the B-1 level.

There are already multiple enclosures on the roof for mechanical equipment and building service functions. Additional stairs to the roof will provide access to private roof decks from six units on the top floor of the building. Those stairs will be integrated into and alongside of the existing roof structures and there will be no increase in the total number of roof structures. There will also be screen walls attached to the existing roof structures to provide some privacy for the individual roof terraces. All the stair enclosures and screen walls meet setback requirements. The new construction on the roof has been held to the lowest possible height, so as to minimize the mass and visual appearance of the new construction.

The proposed modification to the PUD would not change the zoning computations or cause any noncompliance with zoning regulations. An apartment house in an SP-2 District requires a minimum of one parking space for each four units; the proposed 146 spaces for 133 units exceed that requirement.

The following benefits and amenities will be created as a result of the modification to the PUD:

- Residential development, in an area of the city which could use additional long-term residents, provides significant benefit to the neighborhood and the District as a whole;
- Because the exterior configuration of the existing building will be retained, the project will continue to conform to the overall landscaping and design scheme of the Watergate complex. The curvilinear nature of the design remains a distinctive feature, not often duplicated in Washington architecture;
- The building will continue to include the health club and a restaurant on the lower levels. These are uses of special value to the existing residents of the Watergate complex; and
- The applicant agreed to provide 3,000 square feet of affordable housing in the District of Columbia, by contributing $250,000 to an affordable housing provider.

Commission of Fine Arts Review

Due to its location adjacent to the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and the Potomac River, the project design is subject to review by the Commission of Fine Arts under the Shipstead-Luce Act. At its meeting held June 19, 2003, the Commission had no objection to the concept for proposed conversion, including new stair enclosures on the roof, and new canopies for existing surface parking.

District of Columbia Department of Transportation Review

The District Department of Transportation reviewed the impact of the proposed modification and concluded that the proposed conversion of the hotel to apartments will generate fewer automobile trips and will have a positive impact on capacity and level of service in the area road network. The department also concluded that the proposed parking supply will be adequate to meet the parking demand of this project with little or no spillover into surrounding areas.

District of Columbia Office of Planning Review

The Office of Planning found that the proposal would have limited, if any, negative impacts on the surrounding area or on the operation of the city as a whole. The Office of Planning found that the proposed modification would not lessen any of the benefits afforded by the original PUD and would provide additional housing.

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A

By resolution dated January 27, 2004, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2A voted to support the modification.

FEDERAL INTEREST EVALUATION

Executive Summary

Identified federal interests that could potentially be affected by this proposal include the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, federal reservations 26H, 26K, 26L, 98, and 134, Special Streets, and the Potomac River. Review and analysis of the proposal finds no incompatibilities with the proposed action on those federal interests.

Consequently, staff recommends that the Commission conclude that the proposed modification to the planned unit development in Square 8, lot 807, 2650 Virginia Avenue, NW, Washington D.C., would not adversely affect the identified federal interests and is consistent with the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
The Watergate complex is immediately north of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. However, the modifications to the PUD will not affect the center.

Federal Reservations
Several federal reservations are in close proximity to the Watergate complex. However, only minor modifications will occur to the exterior of the building, and no interior modifications or use changes will affect the use of the reservations. Therefore, the proposed change to the PUD will not affect the reservations, which will retain their current configurations and uses.

Special Streets
Virginia Avenue, New Hampshire Avenue, and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway are Special Streets in the vicinity of the Watergate complex. However, because the complex has no direct access from the parkway, and because the proposed change to the PUD is expected to decrease the amount of traffic generated by the complex, the modifications to the PUD will not affect any Special Streets.

Potomac River
The Watergate complex is directly east of the Potomac River, across the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Only minor modifications will occur to the exterior of the building and no interior modifications or use changes will affect the river. Therefore, the proposed change to the PUD will not affect the river, which will be retained in its current condition at this site.

Therefore, I have determined that the proposed modification to the PUD would not adversely affect the federal interest, or be inconsistent with the Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan.