

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



MEMORANDUM

TO: Zoning Commission

FROM: Andrew Altman
Director

DATE: December 10, 2003

SUBJECT: Z.C. 03-32
Cornell University – Further Processing & Special Exception

APPLICATION

The applicant, Cornell University, requests approval of an amendment to its approved campus plan and further processing to permit the space expansion for current programs and administrative functions to the basement of its building located in an R-5-B Zone District in Square 69, Lot 82. Such amendment is permitted by grant of a special exception under §§210.2 352.1 and §3104, in accordance with §3035.1.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

OP supports the amendment and further processing of Cornell University's request to permit the proposed expansion to include the basement of the building at 2148 O Street, N.W.

SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The subject site is located on the southeast corner of the intersection of 22nd and O Streets, N.W. The applicant, Cornell University, occupies the first floor of the building as the campus of its Cornell-in-Washington program. The property was developed in 1926 as a four story, 35-unit apartment building of approximately 26,077 square feet in gross floor area, including the basement and four floors. Since 1983, three upper floors provide 27 residential apartments for staff and students. These apartments are matter-of-right in the R-5-B Zone District. The university currently owns the building and occupies the first floor for its academic programs.

THE ADOPTED CAMPUS PLAN

The current Cornell University Campus Plan was adopted pursuant to BZA Order 14044 (1983) and subsequently renewed in 1987 (BZA Order 14623). Initially, the plan proposed use of the first floor of the subject premises as an institution of higher learning for Cornell University, including seminar rooms, lecture rooms, library, studio, faculty and administrative offices and the Cornell Club of Washington. The administrative staff constitutes an Executive Director of the program and one full-time administrative secretary. The Cornell Club room stores the membership files and provides space for club activities. The second, third and fourth floors are

assigned matter-of-right residential units for student and faculty. All uses are contained within the building and there are no outdoor recreational facilities associated with the program.

PROPOSAL

The University wishes to expand its campus space plan to include the basement of the building. This expansion requires an amendment to the approved campus plan and further processing pursuant to §3104, under §§352.2 and 210.1 of the Zoning Regulations.

ANALYSIS

§352.2 states that... “ A college or university use... shall be permitted as a special exception in an R-5 District if approved by the Zoning Commission under §3104.” OP’s review of the application’s compliance according to criteria outlined in §210.1 is as follows:

210.2 *Use as a college or university shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to neighboring property because of noise, traffic, number of students, or other objectionable conditions.*

The university has occupied and operated its programs at this location for over twenty (20) years. It offers selective programs for seventy-five (75) students, as specified in its original order. The requested amendment to its campus plan involves increasing the existing space to include occupancy of the basement level of the building to accommodate more on-campus room for existing programs, including research rooms for established academics of the institution. This increase does not involve an increase in the student population or additional programs. The educational use will be self-contained within a masonry building and basement, therefore the noise impact will be minimal.

Operation of programs on the first floor has not been objectionable to neighboring property for the past 20 years. Since the material facts upon which original approvals were based have not changed, OP does not believe that expansion of use to the basement would create any objectionable conditions for the neighborhood.

210.3 *In R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5-A, and R-5-B Districts, the maximum bulk requirements normally applicable in the Districts may be increased for specific buildings or structures; provided, that the total bulk of all buildings and structures on the campus shall not exceed the gross floor area prescribed for the R-5-B District. In all other Residence Districts, similar bulk increases may also be permitted; provided, that the total bulk of all buildings and structures on the campus shall not exceed the gross floor area prescribed for the R-5-D District. Because of permissive increases as applicable to normal bulk requirements in the low-density districts regulated by this title, it is the intent of this subsection to prevent unreasonable campus expansion into improved low-density districts.*

The gross floor area prescribed for all structures in the R-5-B District is 1.8 FAR. According to the applicant’s submission, the academic and administrative uses, which will occupy the first floor and the proposed basement, include approximately 1.6 FAR of the existing building.

210.8 *As an integral part of the application requesting approval of new building construction pursuant to a campus plan, the college or university shall certify and document that the proposed building or amendment is within the floor area ratio (FAR) limit for the campus as a whole, based upon the computation included in the most recently approved campus plan and the FARs of any other buildings constructed or demolished since the campus plan was approved.*

The proposed amendment is within the FAR limit for the campus as a whole.

210.9 *Before taking final action on an application for use as a college or university, the Commission shall submit the application to the D.C. Office of Planning and the D.C. Department of Transportation for review and written reports.*

The Department of Transportation's report will be submitted separately.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS

According to the applicant, ANC 2B voted unanimously to support the amendment to the campus plan.

RECOMMENDATION

The proposed amendment is completely within the campus plan boundary, with minimal impact predicted on parking, vehicular circulation or other conditions, which may be deemed objectionable by the neighborhood. The university does not propose an enrollment increase in the student population nor to its staff. The amendment seeks only to provide additional office, meeting and conference rooms for existing programs and established academics.

The proposed FAR is within the conditions of the previous campus plan approval as described in the applicant's submission. OP has no information that the university's current activities have become objectionable to residents of the neighborhood. Therefore, granting the special exception will be in harmony with the general purpose of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map and OP supports the amendment to allow an increase of Cornell University's campus space to **include the basement level** of the building at 2148 O Street, N.W., and **amendment of conditions 1 and 2** outlined in its previous BZA Order # 14623, as follows:

1. The use of the first floor **and basement** shall be limited to the academic and administrative functions of the Cornell-in-Washington program.
2. The Certificate of Occupancy for the first floor **and basement** of the building shall be issued for the period of time that Cornell can demonstrate to the Zoning Administrator that the second through fourth floors are residential only, for students and faculty affiliated with the Cornell-in-Washington program.

with conditions 3 through 10 of the Order to remain in effect.