

Special Exception

ZONING COMMISSION
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 09-17

EXHIBIT NO. 4

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**BEFORE THE ZONING COMMISSION
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

STATEMENT OF REASONS IN SUPPORT OF AN APPLICATION FOR A SPECIAL EXCEPTION,
PURSUANT TO PROPOSED ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS AT 11 DCMR § 403.4, AND 2108.3
TO ALLOW CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW NEIGHBORHOOD LIBRARY WITH AN INCREASE IN MAXIMUM
PERMITTED LOT OCCUPANCY AND A REDUCTION IN THE MINIMUM NUMBER OF OFF-STREET
PARKING SPACES AT 3660 ALABAMA AVENUE, S.E., PAR 207/64,
PART OF U.S. RESERVATION 518 (THE "PROPERTY").

This Statement of Reasons is submitted on behalf of the applicant, District of Columbia Public Library (the "Applicant" or the "Library"), which controls the Property, pursuant to a Transfer of Jurisdiction from the National Park Service.

THE PROPERTY AND THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD

Property Description. The Property is located on the northwest side of Alabama Avenue, S.E., between 36th Place and Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E., and contains approximately 15,300 square feet of land area. The property is currently unzoned.

The Property is improved with a full-service neighborhood library constructed in 1958. The Property has approximately 150 feet of frontage along Alabama Avenue and slopes significantly away from the street. The existing library building is situated on the eastern portion of the lot and abuts federal park land on three sides. The eastern side yard setback is just six (6) feet, while the western side yard setback is more than 40'. To the immediate west of the Property is Anne Beers Elementary School, which is also located on U.S. Reservation 518. The portion of U.S. Reservation 518 upon which Anne Beers Elementary School is located is also under the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia, but has been classified in the R-5-A Zone District.

Current Property Use. The Property is in use as a full-service neighborhood library, which is known as the Francis A. Gregory Library.

The Surrounding Neighborhood. The property is located on Alabama Avenue, SE, a major arterial, southwest of Pennsylvania Avenue in relatively close proximity to the District of Columbia border with Prince George County, Maryland. It is separated by a small strip of parkland from the Anne Beers Elementary School, which is classified within the R-5-A Zone District. The rest of U.S. Reservation 518 remains unzoned and used for federal park land, part of the circle of forts which was established to protect the city during the Civil War.

Immediately across Alabama Avenue, the land is designated “Moderate Density Residential” on the Future Land Use Map, and features low-scale, garden apartments and townhouses. It is zoned R-5-A. Approximately .1 mile to the northeast, the Fairfax Village Shopping Center, is zoned C-2-A; across Pennsylvania Ave, is the Ft. Davis Shopping Center.

Zoning. The Property is currently unzoned. Concurrent with this application, the Applicant has submitted a Petition for an Amendment to the Zoning Map seeking to classify the Property within the R-5-A Zone District, which is consistent with the zoning classification of the adjacent elementary school. The R-5 Districts are General Residence Districts designed to permit flexibility of design by permitting in a single district all types of urban residential development, including institutional and semi-public buildings that are compatible with adjoining residential uses. 11 DCMR § 350.1.

PROPOSED USE OF THE PROPERTY

The Applicant proposes to construct a new full-service neighborhood library on the Property. The District of Columbia operates 25 neighborhood libraries and a central library in downtown Washington, D.C., all of which are located on land owned by the government of the District of Columbia or the United States. The Applicant has recently begun a major overhaul of its neighborhood library branches, with significant upgrades and renovations and/or demolition and reconstruction of new, modern library facilities fit for the 21st Century. As part of its 21st Century Capital Construction Projects, DCPL has identified Francis A. Gregory Neighborhood Library for replacement. DCPL has developed certain minimum standards for physical facilities and programs in its 21st Century Capital Construction Projects, which are attached to this application. These standards are based on best practices for library facilities throughout the country and on the needs of the District of Columbia Public Library patrons.

The 21st Century Capital Projects Standards include: (1) a building which is “a destination, an anchor, a place for learning and meeting that is welcoming and comfortable for the whole community;” (2) facilities providing a minimum of 20,000 to 22,000 square feet of gross floor area, designed in a flexible manner to accommodate future change; and (3) a requirement to include principles of sustainable design, with new facilities meeting the United States Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification standards and complying with the recently-enacted District of Columbia Green Buildings Act, which requires such certification (at a Silver rating) for all new District of Columbia government facilities. Libraries also must be ADA-accessible on both the interior and

exterior, providing appropriate ramps and elevators to allow access to all public portions of the library for all patrons. Bicycle racks, accessible parking convenient to building entrances, lighting, signage, and landscaping are all an integral part of providing a welcoming and convenient facility for all.

The proposed new library building will provide approximately 18,500 square feet of gross floor area on two floors above grade (with additional space on the lower level, which is below grade at street level and partially exposed in the rear), and will occupy approximately 74% of its lot. The building will be constructed to a floor area ratio of approximately 1.22. Additionally, the Library seeks to eliminate off-street parking spaces on the site.

As mentioned above, the Library has concurrently filed a Petition to Amend the Zoning Map to zone the Property R-5-A. The Library has also filed herewith a Petition to Amend the Zoning Text to create separate area requirements for public libraries in Residence Districts. Public libraries are currently subject to the same restrictions on lot area, buildable envelope, and floor area ratio as residential structures. The proposed text amendments seek to have libraries treated in the same manner as schools and other public facilities, with greater flexibility to accommodate these public uses on residentially-zoned property, subject to the requirements and standards for granting a special exception, pursuant to 11 DCMR § 3104.1. In the event the Zoning Commission approves the proposed Map Amendment and Text Amendments, the new library branch, as proposed, will require special exceptions allowing an increase in the maximum permitted lot occupancy (pursuant to proposed 11 DCMR § 403.4) and approving the elimination of all off-street parking spaces (pursuant to proposed 11 DCMR § 2108.3).

SPECIAL EXCEPTION CRITERIA

The Board is authorized to grant a special exception where it finds:

- (1) The proposed use is in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zone Maps; and
- (2) The proposed use is not likely to adversely affect the use of neighboring property,

subject to the specific conditions specified in the Zoning Regulations for that particular special exception use. 11 DCMR § 3104.1. The BZA's discretion in reviewing an application for a special exception is limited to a determination of whether the applicant has complied with requirements enumerated in the specific section of the Zoning Regulations pursuant to which the applicant is seeking the special exception. If the applicant meets this burden, the Board ordinarily must grant the application. *First Baptist Church of Washington v. District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment*, 432 A.2d 695, 698 (D.C. 1981); *Stewart v. District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment*, 305 A.2d 516, 518 (D.C. 1973).

The Proposed Use is in Harmony with the General Purpose and Intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zone Maps. The Property is located in a neighborhood characterized predominantly by low-density residential development, institutional uses, moderate-density commercial development and federal park land. The proposed development will continue the library use on the Property, but will result in enhanced and updated library services at the Francis A. Gregory Library branch, consistent with other neighborhood libraries in Ward 7 and Ward 8

which are currently being renovated or replaced (specifically, the Anacostia, Benning Road, and Washington Highlands branches).

Neighborhood libraries are designed to serve the communities in which they are located. It is anticipated that the vast majority of library patrons should be able to walk to the branch situated in their local community. The current parking regulations require a great deal of parking—1 space per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area in excess of 2,000 square feet—for neighborhood libraries in residential zones. Given the Library's program requirements, the proposed square footage of the new Francis A. Gregory Branch would, under the current regulations, require 16 parking spaces. Likewise, the current regulations restrict development of properties in the R-5-A Zone District to a maximum permitted lot occupancy of just 40%. The Property is only 15,300 square feet; thus, in order to accommodate 18,500 square feet of gross floor area and the required parking spaces without exceeding the maximum permitted height in the R-5-A zone (40 feet), the Library must either construct underground parking, in limited site area and at significant cost, or seek a variance from the parking regulations and the maximum permitted lot occupancy. The proposed text amendments permit the Board of Zoning Adjustment to reduce or eliminate the off-street parking requirements for public libraries, and to permit up to 75% lot occupancy.

The proposed use is not likely to adversely affect the use of neighboring property. The library will pose no threat to the use of surrounding property. Although the proposed development will modestly increase the existing footprint of the library, it will not result in the development of any additional park land. U.S. Reservation 518, in its entirety, comprises more than 18 acres. The Property, in contrast, is just 15,300 square feet—less than 2% of the larger

parcel. Both side yards and the rear yard abut areas reserved for park land which are currently undeveloped and will remain part of the National Park Service system in the District of Columbia. The perceived impact of additional lot occupancy will be minimal, if not imperceptible. The current library has existed on the site for more than 40 years, with no apparent significant adverse impacts.

Neighborhood libraries are designed to serve the communities in which they are located, and have been located so that the majority of library patrons will be able to walk to the facility. A significant number of on-street parking spaces are available on both sides of Alabama Avenue between 36th Place and Pennsylvania Avenue, directly in front of and immediately adjacent to the Property. Finally, two major Metrobus routes run within one block of the Property, along 37th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, providing easy access to transit for patrons traveling to the library from outside the immediate area. In addition, it is expected that demand for auto access is low, given that the Far Northeast/Far Southeast area greatly exceeds the city-wide norm for percentage of population under 18, and is slightly higher than the city-wide norm for percentage of population over 65. In addition, the Library is located immediately adjacent to an elementary school.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, it is respectfully submitted that, upon receipt of all of the Applicant's proof and all other support of record for the special exceptions requested, such relief be granted.

Respectfully submitted,

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EXHIBIT LIST

- A. Application Form
- B. Self-Certification Form
- C. Plat
- D. Photographs of Site
- E. Architectural Plans & Elevations
- F. Names and Mailing Addresses of all property owners within 200' of the Property