



MEMORANDUM

From: DM
David Maloney
State Historic Preservation Officer

To: District of Columbia Zoning Commission

Date: October 4, 2019

Re: "The Lady Bird" PUD Application (Case No. 19-10)

Summary

This report by the DC Historic Preservation Office is submitted to the Zoning Commission pursuant to Title 11-X 308.4 of the DC Zoning Regulations. It provides

- 1) Clarification that although the PUD boundaries include the Massachusetts Avenue Parking Shops property, a District of Columbia historic landmark designated on July 19, 1989, the PUD is not subject to the review of the Historic Preservation Review Board ("HPRB"); and
- 2) An assessment of the proposed Lady Bird Planned Unit Development (PUD), and its relationship to the Massachusetts Avenue Parking Shops ("Parking Shops").

Overall, the project would enhance the character of the Parking Shops by improving its architectural setting through compatible design and superior execution as ensured through the PUD process.

The Massachusetts Avenue Parking Shops at 4841-59 Massachusetts Avenue, NW (Square 1499, Lots 8, 802 and 803) is one of the oldest planned neighborhood shopping centers in the metropolitan area, and was nationally recognized at the time of its construction in 1936 as a model of the building type. The one-story building includes an arcade of shops, gas station, and forecourt with off-street parking.

Development on the SuperFresh site is not subject to HPRB review. Although the proposed PUD boundary includes the Parking Shops, exclusive of the gas station (Lot 8), no construction is proposed on the site of the landmark (Lots 802 and 803), except for low trash enclosures along the 20-foot rear alley of the shops to contain the numerous dumpsters now stored along and in the alley. Under the PUD, building construction would occur on the SuperFresh site (Lot 9) across the alley. The HPRB review is limited to the site of the landmark and they do not have review authority over the SuperFresh site (see definition of historic landmark, DC Official Code §6-1102(a)(6); alteration, §6-1105(a); and new construction, §6-1107(a)).

The proposed PUD would have no direct physical impact on the historic landmark, aside from improving the dumpster enclosures. It would, however, alter the setting of the landmark and have a significant visual impact. These effects can be evaluated using the compatibility test applied by the DC Historic



Preservation Review Board, and considering the purposes of the preservation law, which are for historic landmarks:

- (A) To retain and enhance historic landmarks in the District of Columbia and to encourage their adaptation for current use; and
- (B) To encourage the restoration of historic landmarks.

The setting of the landmark would be positively improved by the proposed upgrading of the rear alley and reconfiguration of the street wall line along Yuma Street to the east. This improvement would enhance the shopping center by creating a better-designed space along its alley front, controlling the unsightly collection of dumpsters, and reinforcing the feel of a minor street. In addition, the recessed Yuma Street plaza and lower building height at the entrance to the proposed grocery store would respond spatially to the chamfered rear corner of the shopping center and reinforce the visual character of the shop frontages along Yuma.

The visual effect of the proposed project on the Parking Shops would also be significant. The west façade of the new building would be clearly visible rising behind the landmark. This larger building scale has already been established by the American University building to the south of the landmark. While the proposed structure is several floors higher than the SuperFresh store that is currently visible behind the landmark, the more important difference is one of design. The rear wall of the SuperFresh and its rooftop mechanical equipment is undesignated and unattractive, thereby detracting from the landmark, while the rear wall of the proposed structure is a well-designed primary façade in a compatible architectural style using materials, coloration, fenestration and a window-to wall ratio that harmonize with the landmark. Its horizontal massing with forward-projecting end pavilions echoes the arm-like embrace of the horizontal shopping center and its forecourt, responding in a similar way to the dignified character of Massachusetts Avenue.

Although the proposed building is taller, it does not visually overwhelm the landmark. Its closest façade is a comfortable 60 feet behind that of the southern arm of shops, and 110 feet behind the shopping center tower (measured perpendicular to the proposed façade). In a frontal view of the tower, the proposed building would not rise behind it given the angled layout of the landmark. The generous separation between the buildings and their difference in orientation avoids the oppressive visual character that can result from a building rising directly behind and co-planar with historic facades. Overall, the would improve the architectural setting of the landmark through compatible design ensured through the PUD process.

Some testimony has challenged the assembly of development rights in the PUD proposal, asserting that it would deprive the landmark of future preservation options by hindering its development potential should the building be threatened with dereliction or disrepair. Since its historic designation 30 years ago, the Parking Shops has been successfully maintained and adapted under preservation regulations. The landmark is a relatively simple one-story structure in good condition and devoid of elaborate architectural detail that might require expensive upkeep or overhaul, so there is little reason to anticipate extraordinary rehabilitation costs. The enhanced customer base from more than 200 adjacent residential units is far more likely to benefit the landmark by ensuring local customers for the retail establishments.