

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

**FROM:** Anne Fothergill, Case Manager  
*JL* Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review

**DATE:** August 31, 2018

**SUBJECT:** BZA Case 19775 (1755 Newton Street, N.W.) to permit the installation of rooftop mechanical equipment at Bancroft Elementary School

**I. OFFICE OF PLANNING RECOMMENDATION**

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the following special exception relief:

- Subtitle C §1502.1 (b) and (c), pursuant to Subtitle C § 1504.1 (three penthouse mechanical units: 8’, 7’6”, 8’1” setback required; 6’4”, 1’7”, 1’8” setback provided)

**II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION**

Address	1755 Newton Street, N.W.
Legal Description	Square 2619, Lot 0654
Ward	1
Lot Characteristics	The subject property is 179,819 SF and improved with a two-story school building and ancillary structures
Zoning	RF-1 and unzoned
Existing Development	Two-story elementary school building, permitted in this zone
Historic District	Mount Pleasant
Adjacent Properties	Across the street to the west, east and south are residential properties; parkland is to the north
Surrounding Neighborhood Character	The surrounding neighborhood is residential

**III. APPLICATION IN BRIEF**

The Applicant is modernizing the entire school including renovating the existing building, constructing a new building, and doing related site work. As part of the project, the Applicant proposes to install new mechanical equipment on the roof of the school buildings. Three of the five mechanical units, labeled as RTU-2, RTU-3, and RTU-5/6 in Exhibit 5, would have the required screening but the Applicant states they cannot meet the 1:1 setback requirement due to building layout, mechanical requirements, structural restrictions, construction cost limitations, and energy efficiency requirements.

**IV. ZONING REQUIREMENTS**

<b>R-4</b>	<b>Regulation</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Relief</b>
C § 1502.1 Penthouse 1:1 setback	8', 7'6", 8'1"	6'4", 1'7", 1'8"	<b>Relief required</b>

**V. OFFICE OF PLANNING ANALYSIS**

**Special Exception Relief**

**Special Exception Relief from Subtitle C § 1502.1 (b) and (c), pursuant to § 1504.1:**

*Relief to the requirements of Subtitle C §§ 1500.6 – 1500.10 and 1502 may be granted as a special exception by the Board of Zoning Adjustment subject to Subtitle X, Chapter 9 and subject to the following considerations:*

- (a) The strict application of the requirements of this chapter would result in construction that is unduly restrictive, prohibitively costly, or unreasonable, or is inconsistent with building codes;*
- (b) The relief requested would result in a better design of the roof structure without appearing to be an extension of the building wall;*
- (c) The relief requested would result in a roof structure that is visually less intrusive;*
- (d) Operating difficulties such as meeting D.C. Construction Code, Title 12 DCMR requirements for roof access and stairwell separation or elevator stack location to achieve reasonable efficiencies in lower floors; size of building lot; or other conditions relating to the building or surrounding area make full compliance unduly restrictive, prohibitively costly or unreasonable;*
- (e) Every effort has been made for the housing for mechanical equipment, stairway, and elevator penthouses to be in compliance with the required setbacks; and*
- (f) The intent and purpose of this chapter and this title shall not be materially impaired by the structure, and the light and air of adjacent buildings shall not be affected adversely.*

The Applicant plans to install five rooftop mechanical units as part of the school modernization project and two of the units are fully compliant and do not need setback or any other relief from penthouse regulations. The Applicant is proposing to install three rooftop mechanical equipment units with screen enclosure heights of 8', 7'6", and 8'1" and has requested relief from the setback requirements. The screened mechanical units require a 1:1 setback but the Applicant has proposed a setback from the building walls of 6'4", 1'7", and 1'8" respectively.

The Applicant has outlined in Exhibit 17 that there were various impediments to compliance including building geometry, interior mechanical acoustical requirements, structural column locations, construction cost limitations, and energy efficient requirements. LEED Gold certification requirements for mechanical system efficiency and noise required the units be sited in the proposed locations. The units' screening wall posts would be located near established structural columns and alternative locations would have been cost prohibitive and caused negative impacts to the interior space below. The proposed locations and size of the mechanical equipment are intended to reduce the visible bulk of the penthouse installations and do not require extensions of the brick building wall, which would be structurally difficult and cost prohibitive.

In terms of visibility and adverse impacts to the use of neighboring properties:

- RTU-2 would be located on a one-story building and needs relief for less than two feet of setback; it would be visible from the street but there would be a 7'3" brick parapet wall along the side of the screen wall and overall the screened unit would be significantly lower than the 60' building height limit

- RTU-3 would be located on a one-story building on an internal courtyard and would be blocked by a two-story building; it would not be visible from the public right of way
- RTU 5/6 would be located on a building wall that is set back more than 50 feet from the side property line with limited visibility from the street

As such, OP finds that the application meets the review criteria and recommends approval of the requested special exception relief.

## **VI. COMMENTS OF OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES**

DDOT filed a report stating that “DDOT has no objection to the approval of the application” (Exhibit 35). This project was reviewed and approved by the Historic Preservation Office.

## **VII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS**

The ANC submitted a report in support of the special exception relief (Exhibit 18).