

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment  
**FROM:** Karen Thomas, Case Manager  
 JL Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review  
**DATE:** September 6, 2019

**SUBJECT:** BZA Case 20110 - Special Exception to construct an apartment house in the RA-1 Zone at 2483 Alabama Avenue, S.E.

### **I. OFFICE OF PLANNING RECOMMENDATION**

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

- Apartment Building, Subtitle U § 421.1 pursuant to Subtitle X § 900.

### **II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION**

Address	2483 Alabama Avenue SE
Applicant	The Way of the Cross Church Inc.
Legal Description	Square 5730, Lots 7, 9, 11, 118-126, 800, 801
Ward, ANC	8/ANC 8B02
Zone	RA-1: permits low- to moderate-density development, including detached dwellings, rowhouses, and low-rise apartments.
Lot Characteristics	The site is located in the Knox Hill Neighborhood. It's an irregularly shaped site comprised of several smaller lots, and no improved alley access at this time. A 20-foot paper alley currently bisects a portion of the site, which will be developed and incorporated into the development site.
Existing Development	The combined lot is currently developed with a former church building and accessory surface parking lot.
Adjacent Properties	The site is bounded by Alabama Avenue to the west, a 16-foot wide public alley to the east, a residential building to the north, and residential buildings to the south. A 20-foot paper alley currently bisects a portion of the site. The abutting lot north of the subject lot is currently undergoing matter-of right redevelopment.
Surrounding Neighborhood Character	The neighborhood is predominantly developed with small walk-up apartment buildings and some churches in the RA-1 and the RA-3 district.

<b>Proposed Development</b>	<p>The proposal includes razing the former small church building, and constructing a new, three-story 86-unit residential building with surface parking at the rear. The apartment building would consist of 26, 3-bedroom units, 28, 2-bedroom units and 32, one- bedroom units.</p> <p>The unimproved alley would be improved as a 20-foot wide alley to connect with the improved portion of the alley and provide access to 21 parking spaces at the rear and (1) 38-foot loading berth and one (1) 20-foot service/delivery space. Trash collection is expected to occur in an area accessible from the 16-foot public alley, with the other loading and delivery activity taking place in the loading berth accessible from the 20-foot public alley.</p>
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### LOCATION MAP and AERIAL



### III. ZONING REQUIREMENTS and RELIEF REQUESTED

Zone- RA-1	Regulation	Existing	Proposed	Relief
Height F § 303.1	40 ft. max.	12 ft.	37 ft. 3 stories	None Required
Lot Width	N/A.	variable	variable	None Required
Lot Area	N/A	60,787 sf	60,787 sf	None Required
Floor Area Ratio F § 302.1	0.9 max.; 1.08 (IZ)	N/A	1.03	None Required
Lot Occupancy F § 304.1	40 % max.	Not Provided	40 %	None Required
Rear Yard F § 305.1	20 ft. min.	Not Provided	20 ft.	None Required
Side Yard F § 306	8 ft. min.	Not Provided	10 ft.	None Required
Green Area Ratio F § 307	0.4 min. (2,287 sf)	N/A	2,332 sf	None Required
Parking C § 702.1(c) (5) 1/3 xs. of 4 units (27 sps.) 50% reduction within 0.25 mls. of priority corridor /metrobus route	14 spaces	N/A	21 spaces	None Required
<b>New Residential Development U § 421.1</b>	Special Exception Review	Church and surface parking lot	86-unit multi- family building	<b>Special Exception</b>

### IV. OFFICE OF PLANNING ANALYSIS

#### Special Exception Relief from Subtitle U § 421

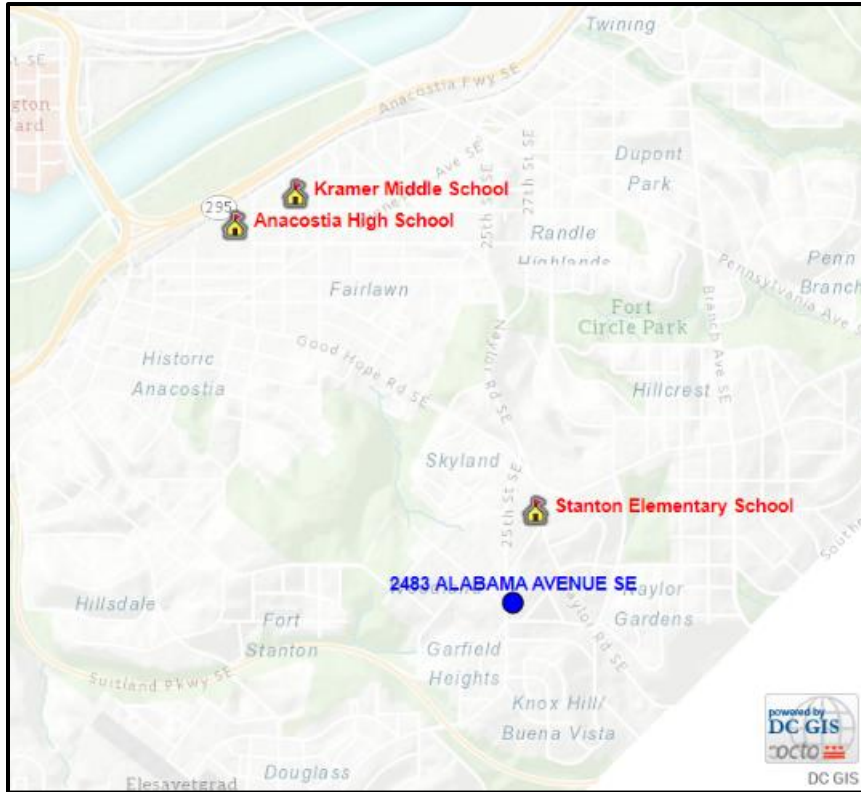
#### 421 NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS (RA-1 and RA-6)

*421.1 In the RA-1 and RA-6 zones, all new residential developments, except those comprising all one-family detached and semi-detached dwellings, shall be reviewed by the Board of Zoning Adjustment as special exceptions under Subtitle X, in accordance with the standards and requirements in this section.*

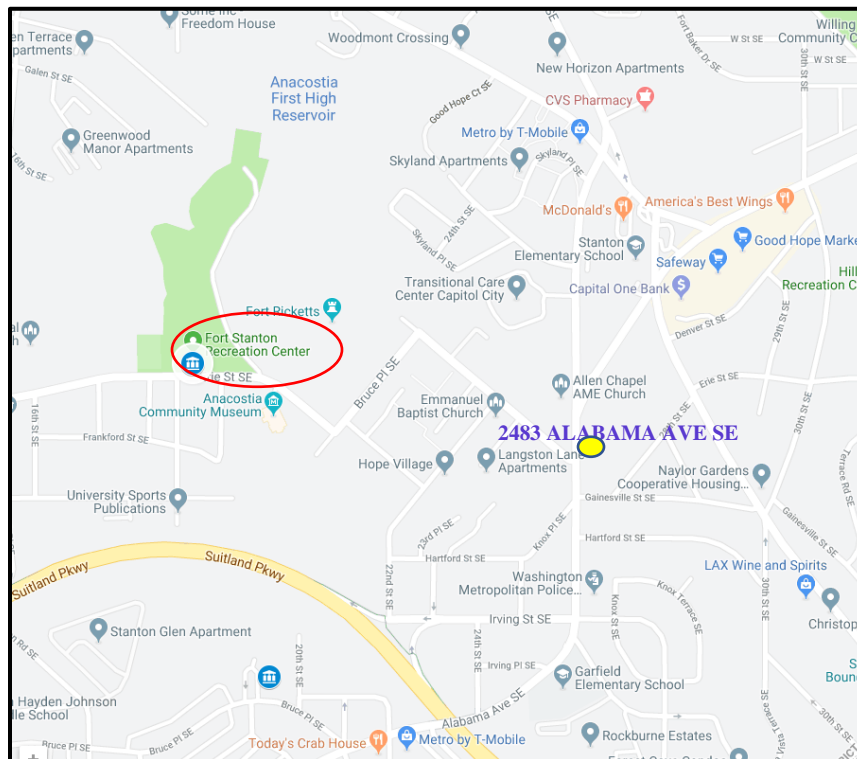
*421.2 The Board of Zoning Adjustment shall refer the application to the relevant District of Columbia agencies for comment and recommendation as to the adequacy of the following:*

*(a) Existing and planned area schools to accommodate the numbers of students that can be expected to reside in the project; and (b) Public streets, recreation, and other services to accommodate the residents that can be expected to reside in the project.*

The application was forwarded to the Department of Recreation and to the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) for comments (Exhibits 17, 21). DDOT's comments would be submitted separately to the record. The District's public schools (DCPS) and Department of Recreation (DPR) websites provide information on the project site's school feeder patterns and neighborhood recreation facilities as follows:



The map at left shows the location's in-bound elementary school as Stanton Elementary School. Eleven bus lines serve this area. The school feeds into Kramer Middle School and Anacostia High School. The schools are part of the neighborhood cluster including Woodland/Fort Stanton, Garfield Heights and Knox Hill. Based on the proposed number of family-sized units, including 26, 3-bedroom units, it can be anticipated that the existing schools could accommodate potential families with school-aged children who may reside in the building.



The location is also within walking or biking distance of the Fort Stanton Recreation Center, which is equipped with specialized program areas such as a fitness center, computer lab, multi-purpose rooms, indoor gymnasium, outdoor pool and other on-site recreational facilities. It is not anticipated that these facilities would be overburdened by the number of residents who may eventually reside in the apartment building.



*421.3 The Board of Zoning Adjustment shall refer the application to the Office of Planning for comment and recommendation on the site plan, arrangement of buildings and structures, and provisions of light, air, parking, recreation, landscaping, and grading as they relate to the surrounding neighborhood, and the relationship of the proposed project to public plans and projects.*

Site Plan and Design ([Exhibits 5A1, 5A2](#)):

The siting and scale of the proposed building would provide the required side yards and rear yard, ensuring sufficient light and air to and through the development. The proposal would also satisfy the bulk requirements for the zone.

The 3-story building with cellar would mimic the lot's shape and topography and is oriented toward the Alabama Avenue frontage, reviving an underutilized gap on the avenue. The building design is sympathetic to the site's variable topography, resulting in reduced site grading, as the site's elevation is highest towards the north on Alabama Avenue and slopes down towards the 16-foot wide north/south alley parallel to the east side lot line. A landscaped interior courtyard would also include portions of a surface parking area accessible via an improved 20-foot wide public alley, where no improvement currently exists.

The materials palette is highlighted on the Architectural Plans Page 23 ([Exhibit 5A2](#)) and shows a mix of brick and painted siding. A generous ground floor entrance lobby and location of the leasing office presents an inviting entrance to the residential building. Access to the roof is only provided for maintenance purposes.

The 86-unit building would be comprised of one, two and three-bedroom units, more or less evenly distributed among the cellar through the third floor. A breakdown of the unit types and the distribution is as follows:

Unit Type (Plans: Pg 10)	Quantity	Location & # Units				GSF (each)	GSF total
		1st	2nd	3rd	Cellar		
<b>A -1 bdrm</b>	32 (37.2%)	7	8	8	8	576 sf	18,432 sf
<b>B – 2 bdrm</b>	28 (32.6%)	7	7	7	6	816 sf	22,848 sf
<b>C – 3 bdrm</b>	18 (20.9%)	7	8	6	7	840 sf	15,120 sf
<b>D – 3 bdrm</b>	9 (9 %)					1,080 sf	8,640 sf
	86 units						46,610 sf

Laundry, bike, trash and electric rooms are located in the basement area, with access to the exterior via a ramp to the 16-foot wide alley.

OP's Design Division forwarded comments on design-related elements to the applicant. Each OP comment is noted in *italics* followed by the applicant's response:

- Encourage use of balconies on Alabama Avenue façade. Building appears to be set back from property line and all areaway, ramp and step projections appear to be on private property.

*Unfortunately, balconies would add significantly to the cost of the project because of the doors, structural engineering, labor, water proofing, and materials that are required for them. As an all-affordable project, this project is unable to absorb additional significant costs, so it is not feasible to add balconies.*

- Building could move forward with those projections into public space as they all appear to be within allowances if they were to extend over the property line.

*Early in the building's design, it was on the front property line, but we shifted it back to keep the stairs and ramp on our property. This was a request from DDOT that all stairs and ramps be located on private property. Shifting the building forward would conflict with DDOT's desire, disrupt the building's composition, and cause some issues with the floorplan. Thus, it's not a feasible change to shift the building.*

- May also be an opportunity to add oriel or bay windows that would break up the scale of the building. Projections should follow allowances defined in the construction code of window projections, which will break up the mass of the façade.

*The development team disagrees that this would enhance the building's composition. The building is already broken into three separate masses to break up the scale. Oriel or bay windows would add unnecessary cost to design and construction and would, in our opinion, not be appropriate for this building in this context. The design is intended to be simple and contemporary, not similar to a rowhouse.*

- Add street trees along curb on Alabama Avenue.

*Street trees will be added. These will be shown on the landscaping plans that will be included with our prehearing filing on August 28*

OP understands the applicant's cost concerns for an all affordable building and recognizes potential conflicts with DDOT's recommendations. As such, the applicant has adequately addressed these comments.

#### Site Accessibility, Parking and Loading

The main entrance to the apartment building would be a pedestrian entrance at Alabama Avenue. An existing bus stop close to the building's entrance serves as a stop for eleven routes for residents along this route. Short term bike access would be included in the project at the Alabama Avenue frontage. Thirty long-term spaces would be provided within the building's basement, accessed via the 16-foot wide alley, which connects to 28<sup>th</sup> Street to the east and Gainesville Street at the south.

Twenty-one on-site parking spaces would be provided on a surface lot and will be accessible from the 20-foot public alley, which currently exists in part only in paper form but would be incorporated into the site area through an alley closing. The remainder of the alley is publicly accessible from a curb cut to the north of the site from northbound Alabama Avenue. The site's redevelopment would remove two existing curb cuts on the Alabama Avenue frontage and no

new curb cuts are proposed. Loading vehicles would also access the site from the 20-foot wide alley, while trash trucks would use the 16-foot wide alley accessible from 28<sup>th</sup> Street.

The applicant submitted a transportation statement for DDOT's review dated August 4, 2019 and is included in the record as Exhibit 31. DDOT will submit their report separately to the record.

#### Landscaping and Environmental Elements

Landscaping features would include shrubs within the side yards, lawn, and canopy trees at the front of the building. The roof would have a combination of green roof and solar panel installation. A 1,500 square foot lot is placed on the portion of the lot, located between the 20 foot paper alley and the existing 16-foot wide alley. The applicant has agreed to plant street trees along the Alabama Avenue frontage.

The property is not covered by a Small Area Plan.

*421.4 In addition to other filing requirements, the developer shall submit to the Board of Zoning Adjustment with the application a site plan and set of typical floor plans and elevations, grading plan (existing and final), landscaping plan, and plans for all new rights-of-way and easements.*

The required plans of this provision are included in the record as [Exhibits 5A1 and 5A2](#).

### **X § 900 SPECIAL EXCEPTION**

#### **i. Is the proposal in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps?**

The apartment use is permitted in the zone subject to the criteria under U § 421, which the proposal satisfies, including the overall density and area requirements of the regulations. The development would fill in an underutilized gap on the block with new housing, including all affordable units.

#### **ii. Would the proposal appear to tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property?**

The use of neighboring property should not be adversely impacted, as area requirements to maintain light and air for abutting neighbors and all other bulk requirements would be satisfied. Required parking would be located onsite, consistent with Subtitle C § 701.2 to alleviate potential impacts to the on-street parking supply.

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

DDOT's comments would be submitted separately to the record.

### **VI. COMMUNITY COMMENTS TO DATE**

ANC 8B's report is included in the record at Exhibit 30.