

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT

Applicant’s Statement of Mount Sinai Baptist Church and Washington Literacy Center

1646 3rd Street, NW (Square 520, Lot 109)

I. INTRODUCTION AND NATURE OF RELIEF SOUGHT.

Mount Sinai Baptist Church (the “Church”, or “Owner”) is the owner of the property located at 1646 3rd Street, NW (Square 520, Lot 109) (the “Subject Property”), which is zoned RF-1. The Subject Property is currently improved with a building constructed as a matter-of-right and used as a “Sunday School Building With Administrative Offices” pursuant to its Certificate of Occupancy (the “Building”). The Washington Literacy Center (the “WLC”) (hereinafter known collectively with the owner as the “Applicant”) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers by teaching literacy skills to adults in Washington DC. The Church desires to lease two floors of the Building and a portion of the basement to the WLC.

Subtitle U § 320.1(b) permits a community service center in the RF-1 Zone, provided that the organization is “created for the purpose of improving the social or economic well-being of the residents of the neighborhood in which the center is proposed to be located which may include but not be limited to centers for job training, family counseling, consumer cooperatives, and such other facilities as are similar in nature and purpose.” The WLC meets this definition, as it is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the literacy skills of DC’s adults (specifically in Ward 5 where the Subject Property is located) and providing complementary job-related life skills and employment opportunities. Accordingly, the Applicant is requesting relief pursuant to U § 320.1(b).

II. BACKGROUND.

A. Mission and Philosophy.

The Washington Literacy Center (WLC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in the District of Columbia. Established in 1963 and incorporated in 1965, WLC has become the premiere adult literacy center in the District. Its mission is to be the re-entry point into education for adults who struggle to read and to provide complementary job-related life skills and employment opportunities. These services provide students with the foundational skills required to break their cycle of poverty and provide a pathway to employment or further education.

Washington, DC enjoys one of the highest educational attainment rates in the country, with 50% of the Washington metro region holding a bachelor's degree or higher. However, almost 90,000 District adults read below a 6th grade level and a significant proportion of DC residents lack basic numeracy, English language, problem solving, and digital literacy skills needed to be successful in their careers and lives.

According to the WLC, this skill gap has contributed to the District's high unemployment rate, income inequality, and intergenerational poverty. The goal of the WLC is to address these issues by teaching literacy, numeracy, and valuable workforce skills that allow students to obtain jobs, improve in their current jobs, or continue their education.

B. Subject Property and Surrounding Area.

The Subject Property is a corner lot located at 1646 3rd Street, NW and is zoned RF-1. The Subject Property is currently improved with a building constructed as a matter-of-right and used as a "Sunday School Building With Administrative Offices" pursuant to its Certificate of Occupancy. The Subject Property also includes twenty-one (21) parking spaces. Abutting the Subject Property to the south is a one-family dwelling. To the north, east, and west are R Street, 3rd Street, and an improved public alley, respectively. The area is primarily characterized by a mix of residential uses. The Shaw-Howard Metro Station is located five-tenths of a mile (0.5 mi.) from

the Subject Property. Mt. Sinai Baptist Church is located at 1615 3rd Street, NW, about half a block from the Subject Property.

III. THE APPLICATION SATISFIES SPECIAL EXCEPTION REQUIREMENTS OF SUBTITLE U § 320.1(b).

A. Overview.

Pursuant to Subtitle X § 901.2 of the Zoning Regulations, the Board is authorized to grant special exception relief where, in the judgment of the Board, the special exception will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps, and will not tend to affect adversely the use of neighboring property, subject also, in this case, to the specific requirements for relief under Subtitle U § 320.1(b) of the Zoning Regulations.

In reviewing applications for a special exception under the Zoning Regulations, the Board's discretion is limited to determining whether the proposed exception satisfies the relevant zoning requirements. If the prerequisites are satisfied, the Board ordinarily must grant the application. See, e.g., *Nat'l Cathedral Neighborhood Ass'n. v. D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment*, 753 A.2d 984, 986 (D.C. 2000).

B. Requirements of Subtitle X § 901.2.

The granting of a special exception in this case “will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps” and “will not tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps ...” (11 DCMR Subtitle X § 901.2).

The Zoning Regulations specifically permit the use of a community service center in this zone. The Washington Literacy Center is a community-serving non-profit organization dedicated to helping adults in DC improve their literacy skills. Accordingly, the use will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the zoning regulations.

C. Requirements of Subtitle U § 320.1(b).

Subtitle U § 320.1(b) permits a community service center in the RF-1 Zone, provided that the organization is “created for the purpose of improving the social or economic well-being of the residents of the neighborhood in which the center is proposed to be located which may include but not be limited to centers for job training, family counseling, consumer cooperatives, and such other facilities as are similar in nature and purpose.” The WLC is dedicated to improving the literacy skills of DC’s adults in order to remove barriers to employment. The relief is also subject to the following conditions:

(1) A community service center shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to neighboring properties because of noise or other objectionable conditions;

Due to the nature of the use, the WLC is not likely to become objectionable to neighboring properties because of noise or otherwise objectionable conditions. The Subject Property has 21 parking spaces which can be used by staff and students of the center. The average class size is relatively small, between 8-10 students with 3-4 classes per day. The hours of operation are between 8:30AM-5:30PM. There will be a total of 18 employees, five of whom are part-time teachers. During the summer, the WLC offers special class sizes (between 20-25 students). The Building already exists and operates as an office used by the church and the intensity of the proposed use will not noticeably increase the number of people visiting the Subject Property. The proposed hours of operation are consistent with an office and the employees and students will likely be out of the Building by the time nearby residents return home from work. As the Building has 21 parking spaces and is located within one-half mile (0.5 mi.) of a Metro Station, the use is unlikely to increase traffic conditions in the neighborhood.

(2) The use shall be reasonably necessary or convenient to the neighborhood in which it is proposed to be located; and

The Subject Property is located in Ward 5 which has the third highest illiteracy rate in the city (Ward 7 and 8 rank the highest, respectively). For the 2017-18 academic year, the largest number of WLC students resided in Ward 5. Accordingly, the proposed use is reasonably necessary to the neighborhood in which it is proposed to be located.

(3) A community service center shall not be organized for profit, and no part of its net income shall inure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.

The Washington Literacy Center is organized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and no part of its net income inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF A COMMUNITY-SERVICE CENTER.

Subtitle B defines a community service use as “A not-for-profit use established primarily to benefit and serve the population of the community in which it is located.” Subtitle U § 320.1(b) further provides that in order to qualify for a special exception, the organization has to be “created for the purpose of improving the social or economic well-being of the residents of the neighborhood in which the center is proposed to be located which may include but not be limited to centers for job training, family counseling, consumer cooperatives, and such other facilities as are similar in nature and purpose.”

The WLC meets this definition primarily because (1) of its job training and educational character, and (2) the services take place on-site and therefore as a matter of course help serve the surrounding neighborhood. The WLC improves the well-being of the residents of the District overall, and the proposed location will improve the well-being of the residents of Ward 5 and this neighborhood. Further, the fact that the service provided by WLC is in-person and on-site at this location, the community service is indeed a local service.

There are other organizations approved under this section that have much in common with the mission of WLC:¹

Case No. 16491. In BZA Case No. 16491 of McKendree-Simms Brookland United Methodist Church, the applicant requested, and the Board granted relief in order to operate a temporary community service center for the distribution of food and clothing in a church annex located at 2411 Lawrence Street, N.E and zoned R-1-B. The church used the property as the outreach house for neighbors and the homeless or who do not have the ability to provide food or clothing for themselves.

Case No. 17080. In BZA Case No 17080 of Asian American LEAD, the applicant requested, and the Board granted relief in order to operate a community-service center at 1323 Girard Street, NW and zoned R-4 (now RF-1). Asian American Lead is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organized "to nurture Asian American youth and families, to develop leadership, and to strengthen community building through a partnership between youth and adults." The community center would serve the needs of Asian-American youth and families, particularly in the Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant communities, through three core programs: (i) an after-school academic enrichment/tutoring program for students ages 6 to 19; (ii) a family-strengthening program that will provide educational, social, and parenting support services; and (iii) a mentoring program.

Case No. 19388. In Case No. 19388 of Hope and a Home, the applicant requested, and the board granted relief in order to operate a community service center in the cellar of an existing

¹ These examples are provided primarily to show that a "community service center" use does not need to be restricted or limited to serving solely its immediate neighborhood, in order to qualify as a special-exception-approvable community service center under this section of the Zoning Regulations.

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flat in the RF-1 Zone at premises 1236 Columbia Road N.W. Hope and a Home is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit and non-governmental organization dating back to 1976 with a mission to empower low-income families with children in DC to create stable homes of their own and to make lasting changes in their lives. The applicant proposed to reconfigure the cellar level of the flat and use the space Applicant proposes to use the cellar for primarily administrative work, although it was noted that infrequent scheduled meetings with family clients may occur at the site each week.

V. CONCLUSION.

For the reasons stated above, this Application meets the requirements for special exception approval by the Board, and the Applicant respectfully requests that the Board grant the requested relief.

Respectfully submitted,

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