

January 20, 2016

VIA IZIS

Chairman Anthony Hood
District of Columbia Zoning Commission
441 4th Street NW, Suite 210S
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Z.C. Case No. 15-13 – Applicant’s Pre-Hearing Submission

Dear Chairman Hood and Members of the Commission:

The above-referenced case was set down for a public hearing at the Commission’s November 9, 2015 public meeting. This letter serves as the Applicant’s statement in support of its pre-hearing submission, and the Applicant requests that you schedule a public hearing for as soon as possible.

Additional information and explanations are provided as described below.

1. **Responses to comments from OP and the Commission**

Explanations of Design Choices

A. Lack of rear yard

The intent of this project is to develop a distinctive site plan suitable for this uniquely-shaped lot. Myriad complications arise trying to assign a clear rear yard to this site, so the Applicant chose, instead, to allocate the open space to various courtyards more suitable for the site and use. The larger shared common areas will promote a more urban experience among neighbors

As shown in the illustration in Exhibit A, if rear yards were provided, then the harmony of the site plan would be diminished, and it would become much more like typical suburban development. The attached illustration shows the same amount of open space through theoretical rear yards instead of courtyards. While a rear yard theoretically could be provided, the site plan would resemble a suburban development, which is completely unsuitable for this very urban environment. Indeed, constructing to the property long along the southern block is

much more contextually appropriate than a rear yard. In addition, the southern block of townhouses would be squeezed so much that they would lose significant light and air.

The proposed site plan uses courtyards to provide approximately the same amount of open space that a rear yard would provide. There will be no adverse impact from not providing a rear yard. To the south, where the rear yard would otherwise be provided, is a 30-foot alley with an industrial building across. The alley will provide sufficient separation from nearby properties. Properties on the other sides of the project site would not benefit from the provision of a rear yard because the same amount of open space would be provided; in fact, some of the properties to the west may be adversely impacted because of the greater concentration of massing that would result from a rear yard. Therefore, the absence of a rear yard is justified by the reallocation of open space provided elsewhere on the site.

B. Location of garage entrance

The Applicant selected the west side of the south block of the site for the garage entrance because necessity for design efficiency and functionality. As the attached illustration in Exhibit B demonstrates, the garage entrance will allow for the best maneuvering of cars without obstructing the alley, and it will avoid having to eliminate or reduce the central courtyard in the south block.

C. Ventilation and light for units without rear exposure

Only four units surrounding the northern courtyard near E Street do not have rear exposures, but they will have ample light and air. As the floor plans attached as Exhibit C show, the units are designed with the stair tower and bathrooms at the rear, where immediate access to air and light is less important. In addition, the roof decks above will allow natural light to filter from top level down to the main level. The primary living and sleeping spaces will be at the fronts, with immediate access to windows to provide ample light and air.

D. "Bridge" across the courtyard in the south block

The "bridge" will connect the project so that it will be one building for zoning purposes. The project must be a single building so that it can occupy the single record lot that will comprise the subject site. Individual record lots for many of the units is not possible, so the building must be connected for the site plan to be possible.

Security and Site Circulation

E. Security from E Street passageway

The pedestrian passageway from E Street will be without a gate and will remain open at all times. The Applicant created this passageway to improve the pedestrian access from E Street to the residences on the alley, not just for this project, but for everyone who lives on the alley. This passageway also will limit people from walking on the north-south branch of the alley east of the

project site, where conflict with automobiles is much more likely. The passageway must remain open to accomplish these goals, and the ANC prefers that it remains open.

F. Pedestrian access and site circulation

The circulation plan for the project is attached as Exhibit D. Primary pedestrian access will be from E Street under the passageway, with additional pedestrian access via the alley access points further east off G and E Streets. Automobile and truck access similarly will be via the alley access points off G and E Streets.

The primary pedestrian access route from E Street to the southernmost townhouses on the south block traverses only a small portion of the alley. This alley portion is a wide dead-end that will have little traffic other than that for this project, and certainly no traffic will be traveling at high rates of speed. Pedestrian access in alleys with dwellings is not uncommon in the District – such as in Naylor Court, Blagden Alley, or Archibald Walk – and it contributes to the activation of these alleys. For these reasons, pedestrian-automobile conflicts are unlikely, and the small alley portion is an appropriate pedestrian access route to the southernmost units.

Design Elements

G. More “modern” architecture

The Applicant designed the project to recall the history of the neighborhood as both industrial and residential and to take cues from its surroundings without trying to mimic the existing residential or industrial buildings. For this reason, the Applicant avoided something that appears too modern that would appear out of context. The Applicant believes that the proposed design is a balance of the neighborhood context and a more modern style.

H. Standing seam on upper level

The Applicant believes that standing seam on this portion of the building is appropriate because it is high quality material that is more appropriate to this style of building. Other materials that the Applicant considered, like cement board panel and traditional lap siding, were a departure from a typical urban building material. The standing seam also provides for a light textural quality while retaining the vocabulary of a more industrial styled building.

I. Lighting plan

The Applicant prepared a lighting plan that illustrates the locations of lights and the type of lights. The plan is attached as Exhibit E.

J. “Watkins Alley” painted on brick on south elevation

This feature is purely a design detail that will help create an identity for the project. It is not intended to be a designation for the alley itself. The Applicant chose to add this feature because,

while painted signs on buildings were often used for advertising in the past, it was not uncommon for them to simply be place labels. The lettering along this particular alley will not only be an identifier, it also will serve as visual modulation along a long length of brick façade.

Additional Images

K. Parking spaces along the alley to the south

There is no legal parking along the alley to the south of the project site. Showing this was an error on the previous drawings.

L. Birds-Eye view

The birds-eye view of the project, attached as Exhibit F, provides another perspective to better understand the project design and site plan. The site is oddly shaped, which results in an unusual site plan. The birds-eye perspective allows for a better comprehension of both the elevations and the site plan.

M. Context of E Street elevation with neighboring buildings and sightline

The rendering attached as Exhibit G shows the E Street elevation among the neighboring buildings for most of the E Street block from the sightline across the street.

Miscellaneous Issues

N. Environmental tests for site

The Applicant completed soil tests for any potential contamination on the site. The test results indicated volatile levels were below detection levels (except for acetone, which was low but more likely indicative of a lab problem).

O. Ownership structure of the project and parking

The project will be a condominium ownership structure. Parking will be included with each unit, including the IZ units.

P. Locations and types of Inclusionary Zoning units

The proposed IZ unit locations are shown in the attached Exhibit H. The Applicant will devote 10% of the gross floor area to IZ units, as required. Also, as required, half of the IZ units will be for households making 50% or less of the AMI, and half will be for households making 80% or less of the AMI. All of the IZ units will be for sale.

2. Additional information regarding public benefits package

In addition to the project amenities already described in the application, the Applicant will provide the following public benefits of special value:

1. The Applicant will design the interior of at least one residential unit for a “senior unit.” The design will include features and fixtures for suitable for seniors, such as grab bars, lever door handles, etc.
2. The Applicant will pay the cost of installing a new Capital Bikeshare station near the Potomac Avenue Metrorail station, at an exact location to be determined by DDOT.
3. The Applicant will repair and upgrade the 18 vegetable gardens at Watkins Elementary School.
4. The Applicant will add to and upgrade street lighting and tree box planters for the sidewalks surrounding Square 1043, in coordination with DDOT and based on all necessary public space approvals.
5. The Applicant will install \$150,000 worth of lighting in the north-south portion of the 16-foot alley to the east of the PUD site, from south of the PUD site to G Street, in coordination with DDOT and based on all necessary public space approvals.
6. The Applicant will work with WMATA and two other PUD applicants to develop a scoping plan for improvements to the Potomac Avenue Metro Plaza and will furnish and install \$50,000 worth of these improvements, as coordinated with WMATA and the two other developers.

3. Transportation Assessment

The Applicant’s transportation consultant, Wells & Associates, prepared a transportation assessment. The TA is attached as Exhibit I, but some of its highlights are the following:

- A transportation demand management plan is included to reduce the potential of the project contributing to traffic and parking congestion.
- A loading management plan is included to reduce potential congestion in the alley.
- The project will result in a **net decrease** of trips from the current uses on the site.

Sincerely,



John Epting



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