

February 29, 2016

VIA HAND DELIVERY

Chairman Hood
D.C. Zoning Commission
441 4th Street, NW
Suite 210-S
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Case No. 15-16: Pre-hearing Statement

Dear Chairman Hood and Members of the Commission:

At its public meeting on November 23, 2015, the Zoning Commission set down the above-referenced application for a public hearing. The Applicant has spent the past three months revising its plans to respond to the Commission's comments as well as comments it heard from numerous District agencies at its interagency meeting on January 8, 2016. The primary changes to the program are as follows:

I. Site Plan

- **Block 5:** The Applicant is splitting Block 5 into two separate buildings. It is incorporating Block 5b into the Second Stage PUD application for consolidated approval and Block 5a will remain in the First Stage PUD. The Applicant is proposing a seven story mixed-use building for Block 5b, consisting of ground floor retail along Rhode Island Avenue, one story of office use and five stories of residential use.¹

The building will include approximately 106 residential units, 5,000 square feet of retail space, approximately 24,000 square feet of office space, and 156 parking spaces. The building design will adopt the same industrial theme that informs the aesthetic of Blocks 1a and 1b. The design juxtaposes masonry materials with metal panels to create a warehouse feel for the building. The rooftop incorporates a saw-tooth design that distinguishes the building from both Blocks 1a and 1b while also establishing a presence along Rhode Island Avenue.

¹ The Applicant seeks flexibility to convert the level of office use to residential space in the event the market for office use is lacking in this location, as outlined in Section V.

Blocks 5b and 1b mark the only presence for the development along Rhode Island Avenue. Given that both blocks abut entrances into the development from a major thoroughfare, the Applicant thought it important to proceed with a consolidated PUD for the parcel. Increasing the project's presence along Rhode Island Avenue from the outset will bring attention to the project and attract individuals to the site, including the proposed retail.

- **Block 2:** The Applicant has bifurcated Block 2 into two separate buildings and is in talks with a theater operator to occupy Block 2b. The proposed theater has just nine screens and caters to adults by limiting entrance to 18 years and older unless accompanied by a parent/guardian, providing table service during the movies, and allowing patrons to order both food and beverages as they watch the movie. The theater is meant to attract individuals to the site and to anchor the other retail uses that are proposed.

Dedicating Block 2b solely to theater use represents a shift in the uses proposed for the site. While the proposed height remains 90 feet, the proposed FAR is reduced to approximately 60,000 square feet (the theatre requires 30 foot floor to ceiling heights). The mix of uses in Block 2a remains ground floor retail with residential uses above.

- **Streetscape:** The Applicant has modified the streetscape to address comments it heard concerning the width between buildings. While the width of the drive lanes remains unchanged, the Applicant varies the width of the pedestrian zones. This creates a more comfortable scale between buildings and maintains the urban character of the neighborhood. See Sheets L1.17-L1.19.
- **Curbcuts:** Per comments from the Office of Planning, the Applicant has eliminated the curbcut from 4th Street that previously served Block 4.
- **Open Space:** The Applicant has incorporated several areas of public open space throughout the project. The three primary areas are the plaza area in front of Block 3, the plaza in front of Block 1b and Bryant Street Park.

The plaza area on the western edge of the site is located in the southeast corner of Block 3, along Bryant Street. This area is an immediate focal point upon entering the project and it provides an opportunity to link the interior retail space with the exterior space to create an outdoor area to gather, eat, and commune. The Applicant has enlarged the area of the plaza by over 5,000 square feet since its first submission.

The site plan incorporates another plaza on the southeast corner of the Property, immediately to the north of Block 1b. Whereas the plaza on the west end of the property welcomes vehicular visitors to the site, the plaza on the east end is both an entrance for cyclists and pedestrians and a destination within the site. It is proximately located to the Metropolitan Branch Trail, Bryant Street Park, the

pedestrian ramp to the Metro station, and retail and residential uses, making it well situated to serve as a passive recreation area.

Finally, the Applicant is proposing to create an approximately one-half acre park in the northeast corner of the site, named Bryant Street Park. The park is intended to serve as a respite for cyclists using the MBT, neighborhood residents, and visitors to the site. It links the MBT with the project and welcomes patrons and visitors who may not otherwise plan a stop at this location. Its location, which is adjacent to the MBT, Edgewood Commons, Blocks 1a and 1b, the pedestrian ramp to Metrorail and the Block 1b plaza help to make it a community amenity space, unlike if it were located on the interior of the site and isolated from the broader neighborhood. While the park has connectivity with Rhode Island Avenue via the sidewalk grid throughout the project, it also has direct links to the greater community through the MBT, the pedestrian bridge across Rhode Island Avenue and the staircase connection to Edgewood Commons.

The outdoor plaza and Bryant Street Park are linked through a landscaped green park that winds alongside the MBT. To the west of the landscaped area is a curbless drive that provides access to Block 1a. By providing a curbless drive, the area can easily be converted to pedestrian area for special events that will complement the space reserved in both the plaza and the Park. When it is used as a vehicular drive, its distinct pavers will put drivers, pedestrians and cyclists on notice that the area is a shared space. The Applicant anticipates closing the drive aisle periodically on nights and weekends to host special events, such as outdoor markets, movie nights, and events sponsored by local community groups. It sees this area, including the plaza and Park, as an opportunity to create community gathering space not just for residents of the project, but for existing residents in the neighborhood. Because the park is insulated from the noise of Rhode Island Avenue, these events can provide a true respite for the community.

II. Landscaping

- **Hardscape:** The Applicant incorporates hardscape features throughout the site that serve multiple functions. The Applicant is utilizing stone pavers in the eastern plaza area as well as the roadway that loops around Block 1a, which create an attractive aesthetic reminiscent of historic cobblestone streets, but better suited for pedestrians and cyclists. In addition to their aesthetic qualities, the pavers also provide directional cues to cyclists, pedestrians, and vehicles to alert them of their travel lanes without overt signage. The colors and direction of the pavers vary depending on the mode of transportation they serve; the difference in color and pattern establish the designated paths for each cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles. The vehicular path is being proposed as a curbless roadway, much like those seen throughout Europe where pedestrian and vehicular paths merge. This will enable an easy conversion of this space to a pedestrian plaza during special events.

- **Green space:** The Applicant is proposing five and ten foot tree pits for the street trees. It will utilize silva cells to protect the trees to ensure healthy growth.
- **Lighting:** The Applicant has provided a lighting plan on Sheet L1.16.

III. Metropolitan Branch Trail

The Applicant has met with DDOT to discuss its treatment of the property in public space along the MBT. The Applicant is continuing to work with them, as well as other interested parties, to develop appropriate wayfinding signage along the trail and through the site. It also continues to work with DDOT regarding its maintenance obligations for all improvements in public space.

IV. Retail Plan

This project is located along the burgeoning Rhode Island Avenue NE retail corridor. The boundaries of this submarket generally run from North Capitol Street to the west to Eastern Avenue to the east. As of first quarter of 2016, the supply within this area includes 600,000 square feet of existing retail space. An additional 500,000 square feet of new or redeveloped retail is regarded as “planned,” bringing the total amount of retail supply anticipated for Rhode Island Avenue to 850,000 square feet. In its 2011 “Diamond of the District” analysis for this corridor, the Great Streets Initiative recommended over 500,000 square feet of new retail based on the retail leakage occurring in the submarket with demand increasing by 20% by 2020. According to the report:

This market area households’ incomes and typical consumer expenditure patterns indicate total potential spending of \$226.9 million per year, including \$90.7 million for convenience goods, typically purchased close to home (groceries, other food and beverages, drugstore items), \$47.3 million for food away from home, \$88.8 million for shoppers goods (types of merchandise typically sold in department stores (GAFO). Approximately \$90 million in retail sales are made outside the corridor.

In particular, the submarket lacks several large anchor tenants, including a full-service gym or movie theater, and only has one full-service grocer.

Retail Vision Statement – 680 Rhode Island Ave NE

The primary goal of the retail strategy is to develop an interactive, urban, streetscape experience, anchored by a regional entertainment draw, full-service grocery store and full service gym, supplemented by community-serving tenants, and merchandised with an enticing mix of retail and restaurant uses. Because the retail in the project is a substantial and important percentage of the total square footage, the street level program is what will give the project its personality and create a compelling destination now and for years to come along Rhode Island Ave, NE.

The vitality of a pedestrian-friendly retail street is dependent upon creating a targeted merchandising strategy that achieves a balance between retail tenants who offer goods and services to the local community and an environment that appeals to visitors from across the District. For example, the Applicant expects a variety and range of restaurant tenants that will offer either a “quick bite” or a more leisurely “fine dining” experience for the daytime workforce, residents, and regional visitors. At full build-out, other goods and services tenants such as a pet store, salon, dry cleaner, and bike store could complete the merchandising mix.

The Applicant believes that the success of the retail offering will be derived from a strong sense of community ownership. While the new retail will draw from a broader trade area, the long term success of the retail will rest on the ability of the merchandising mix to draw upon and connect to the local market. A great place evolves by properly blending the needs of the local community with those of the larger marketplace. The PUD is uniquely positioned to achieve this balance due to its historical use as a shopping area, its location at the nexus of the Edgewood, Eckington, Brookland, and Brentwood neighborhoods, and its immediate access to bus, bike, rail, and automobile transportation.

Active, Pedestrian-Friendly Street Environment

Reinforcing an accessible pedestrian environment will encourage the use of public transportation and greatly reduce the number of trips taken by vehicle. The goal for the retail is to create an environment that will promote a balance between patrons who cycle, walk, drive and use public transportation to access the site.

Additionally, the Applicant’s intention is to bring the best of “main street” practices to the pedestrian-scaled elements of the project. It will place a strong emphasis on urban placemaking and the design of the streetscape, plaza, curbside street, and sidewalk. A variety of urban plazas, small parks, and green areas will be woven together with sidewalk, streetscape, interesting architecture, pedestrian-scale signage and wayfinding design elements to create a vibrant pedestrian experience.

V. Phasing

Multiple construction phases are proposed for this project. Currently, the Applicant is seeking consolidated approval of the first phase only. The first phase will begin immediately and will focus on a full-service gym anchor and a variety of restaurants. With the completion of subsequent phases, a broader mix of neighborhood goods and service tenants, including a movie theater and full-service grocery store, will be introduced to the site.

The development team also sees the diversity of the tenant mix changing over time. As additional phases are brought online, the added program density will achieve a new retail threshold. This will increase the marketability of the site to specialty tenants that require a higher critical mass of retail and those that have particular co-tenancy objectives.

The Applicant proposed phasing language in its initial submission that it would like to simplify with the following proposed language:

The Second Stage PUD approved by the Zoning Commission for Block 1a shall be valid for a period of two years from the effective date of this Order. Within such time, an application must be filed for a building permit for the Block 1a building. Construction of the Block 1a building must begin within three years of the effective date of this Order.

The Second Stage PUD approved by the Zoning Commission for Blocks 1b and 5b shall be valid for a period of four years from the effective date of this Order. Within such time, an application must be filed for a building permit for each the Block 1b and Block 5b building. Construction of the Block 1b and 5b buildings must begin within six years of the effective date of this Order.

The First Stage PUD approved by the Zoning Commission for Blocks 2, 3, 4, 5a and 6 shall be valid for a period of ten years. A Second Stage application for each Block must be filed within ten years of the effective date of this Order.

VI. Flexibility

- *Use:* The Applicant is requesting flexibility to provide retail uses in Blocks 1a along its eastern facades, facing the MBT. As noted above, the Applicant has developed a retail plan; however, given the isolation of the eastern frontage, retail may not be feasible immediately. The Applicant would like the flexibility to dedicate this space for residential use and allow a conversion to retail use, as feasible. More specifically, the Applicant seeks this flexibility to convert approximately 15,000 square feet in Block 1a from residential to retail uses.

The Applicant also seeks flexibility to convert one floor of Block 5b from residential use to office use, if market demands allow. Block 5b is located along Rhode Island Avenue and provides an opportunity to provide boutique office use in a location where office use does not currently exist. Again, market demands may not allow this use immediately, however, the Applicant seeks flexibility to convert approximately 23,250 square feet of residential space to commercial office use (the second floor of the building) if and when market conditions allow.

The Applicant seeks flexibility to provide an additional level of parking for Blocks 1a, 1b and 5b; these numbers are included in the parking space ranges provided on Sheet 0.10.

The Applicant also requests flexibility to provide interim uses on-site before construction of the later phases begins. This will help generate interest in the site and will activate the site prior to the application for a Stage 2 application. Otherwise, the property will sit dormant and will not contribute to either the community or the

success of the project. The parking and loading spaces provided for Blocks 1a and 1b will also serve the temporary uses.

- **Loading:** The Applicant requests relief from the loading requirements for each development block. Each block, with the exception of Block 2b, requires 1-55 foot berth for the residential use, whereas the Applicant is proposing a 40 foot berth, which will be shared with the retail uses. The specific breakdown of the loading requirement and what is being provided is detailed on Sheet 0.10. In sum, 24 loading berths are required for this site (11@55' and 13@30'); the Applicant is providing 12 loading berths (3@55' and 9 @ 40').
- **Section 2516:** The Applicant is proposing nine buildings on a single record lot, which is permitted pursuant to Section 2516. The Applicant requires flexibility from Section 2516.5(b), which requires front yards for each principal building and 2516.5(c), which requires a rear yard for each building. None of the buildings are providing a front yard, as the Applicant believes it is more appropriate to pull the building faces as close to Bryant Street as possible. This creates a more urban site plan, as opposed to setting the buildings back. Rear yard relief is required for Blocks 2a and 2b, which are not set back from the northern lot line, rather than the requisite 18.75 feet. There is a significant grade change immediately to the north of the building, which requires a retaining wall along the northern property line; as such, there is no adverse impact from the reduction in the depth of the rear yard.
- **Parking:** Parking flexibility is required for Blocks 2b, 5a and 5b. Though these blocks do not meet the parking requirement on-site, parking demand will be satisfied by the garages constructed on the other blocks. The Applicant will supplement the record with a parking and loading analysis confirming that the amount of parking it is providing is appropriate.

VII. Benefits and Amenities

The Applicant is not proposing a PUD-related map amendment for this PUD. While the Applicant is benefiting from the additional height that the PUD process affords, the proposed density associated with this project is actually 658,113 square feet *less* than what is permitted as a matter-of-right. The Applicant is not securing any additional density through this PUD process. Nevertheless, the Applicant has put together a robust benefits and amenities program, which has been refined since the Commission set this application down for a public hearing. The Applicant will continue to refine the proposed package prior to the public hearing:

- **Employment:** MRP is working with Councilmember McDuffie's office to create a collaborative employment program targeting District residents. The goal of the program is to partner with an organization that will focus on creating opportunities for District residents, specifically Ward 5, where feasible, to use their skills in constructing this project. The details of the program will be refined prior to the public hearing.

- **Affordable housing:** 8% of residential GFA will be dedicated to affordable housing: 6% of residential GFA will be reserved for households with an annual income no greater than 80% AMI and 2% of residential GFA will be reserved for households with an annual income no greater than 50% AMI.

- **Preservation of art work:** The Applicant will preserve, restore, or replace in-kind (depending on the structural integrity of the wall) the existing mural on the northern retaining wall and create an opportunity for a local artist to paint a mural on the northern party wall with 705 Edgewood Street NE. In addition, the Applicant will preserve, restore, or replace in-kind the existing mosaic along the 4th Street SE wall of the “Forman Mills” building. The Applicant is also preserving and relocating sculptures that are present on-site today.

- **Public spaces:** The site plan has been designed to incorporate a public park, two public plazas, and a public bike trail, all on private property. The site plan also establishes the street grid through the site, again, through use of private property. The Applicant will also improve the MBT along those portions that immediately abut the property, including lighting, landscaping, wayfinding, passive recreation, and maintenance.

- **BID:** The Applicant is contributing \$5,000 to Rhode Island Main Streets to explore the feasibility of a Business Improvement District for new development along Rhode Island Avenue.

- **Circulation:** The Applicant is providing a Capital Bikeshare station along the MBT. The Applicant is also providing a welcome package to the first residents of each unit in Blocks I and V.

The Applicant will also install two pedestrian stairs that provide pedestrian access to the site from Edgewood Commons. Designing these points of access is challenging given the grade change between the properties. Nevertheless, the Applicant is including the design, construction and maintenance of these stairs in its project.

- **LEED:** The project will be certified at the LEED Silver level.

- **Safety:** The Applicant is installing security lights and cameras on its residential buildings at the request of MPD. It is also working with the NoMA BID to purchase and install one security call box along the MBT in front of the Project.

- **Neighborhood Serving Retail:** Consistent with the findings of the Great Streets Initiative, the Applicant is proposing a grocer, gym and theater as retail tenants in the project. These tenants will anchor the site and serve both the future residents of the project as well as the existing community.

- **Transit Oriented Development:** The Applicant is proposing approximately 1,500 residential units, proximately located to a Metro station, where there currently are no residential uses. Introducing residential use on this site, allows the District to introduce new residents into the city

and it also provides an opportunity to incorporate additional affordable housing into the District, at lower AMI levels than is otherwise required.

VIII. Community Outreach

The Applicant began its outreach on this project well before it filed this PUD application. Over the course of the past two years, the Applicant has met with and made presentations to the Advisory Neighborhood Association 5E, Single Member District representatives Davis and Williams², Edgewood Civic Association, Eckington Civic Association, Brentwood Civic Association, the Community Preservation and Development Corporation and the residents of Edgewood Commons, Mt. Calvary Church, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Washington Area Bicyclist Association and Rhode Island Avenue Main Street. The Applicant also co-sponsored a Holiday Market on the site of the PUD. The market included 30 local vendors and was a remarkable success. The Applicant used the opportunity to present the project, on-site, to local residents. It set up a booth at the entrance of the market and had its entire project team, consultants included, on-hand throughout the entire day to speak to residents and provide information on the PUD. In all, the Applicant spoke to several hundred residents over the course of the day and received a significant amount of positive feedback.

VII. Conclusion

The Applicant asks that a public hearing be scheduled for this application at the earliest convenient date.

Sincerely,



Christine Roddy

² Single Member District Representative Davis was recalled in the middle of this process in December 2015. Commissioner Williams assumed the Single Member District position for this project in January 2016.


Certificate of Service

The undersigned certifies that a copy of the foregoing materials was sent by hand or by first class mail to the following addresses on February 29, 2016:

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Christine Roddy