

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** District of Columbia Zoning Commission  
**FROM:** Maxine Brown-Roberts, Development Review Specialist  
*JLS*  
 Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director, Development Review and Historic Preservation  
**DATE:** May 1, 2023  
**SUBJECT:** ZC 20-08B: Howard University - Interim University Use at 1901 – 1911 5<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.

**I. SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

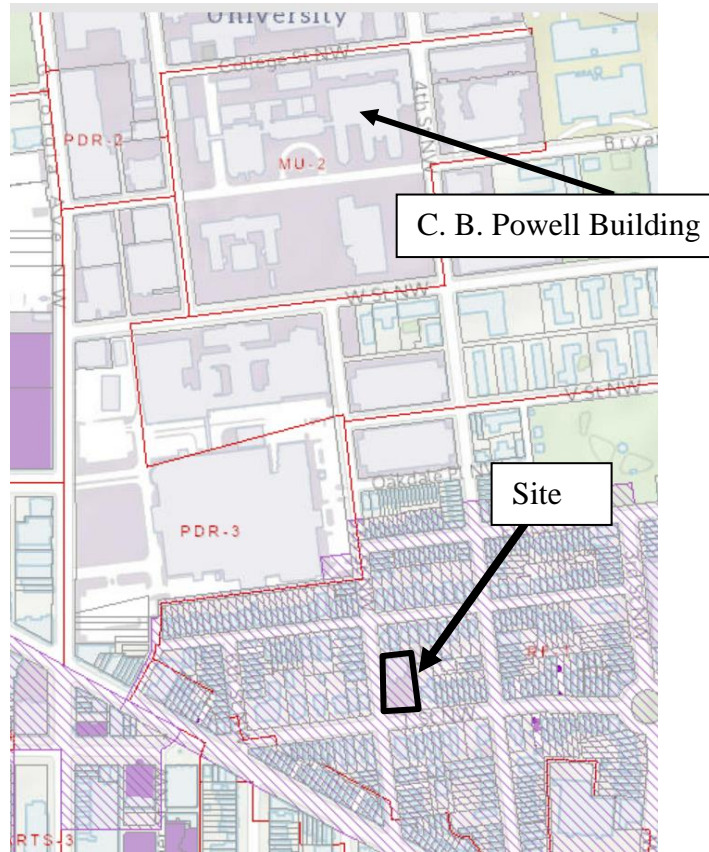
Howard University (“University”) proposes to use the building at 1901 – 1911 5<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. for administrative offices on an interim basis, five years. The Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the requested special exception, pursuant to Subtitle X, § 101.10 and Subtitle X, 901 to permit the proposed use with the following condition:

- Interim university use for a period of five-years after the granting of the Certificate of Occupancy (C of O).

**II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION**

<b>Address</b>	1901 – 1911 5 <sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.
<b>Applicant:</b>	Howard University
<b>Legal Description:</b>	Square 3090, Lot 41
<b>Ward/ANC:</b>	1/1B
<b>Zone:</b>	RF-1
<b>Historic District:</b>	The property is within the LeDroit Park Historic District.
<b>Lot Characteristics:</b>	The property has a land area of 16,600 square feet fronting of 5 <sup>th</sup> Street and T Street, NW.
<b>Existing Development:</b>	The property is improved with a row of three, three-story former residences and had served as a day care center for employees of the nearby Howard University Hospital, until it closed in 2010. The property has been vacant since the closing of the day care.
<b>Adjacent Properties</b>	The property is surrounded to the east, north and south by detached dwellings while to the west are detached and semi-detached dwellings .

<b>Surrounding Neighborhood Character</b>	The area around the site is generally developed with a mix of two- and three-story detached and semi-detached buildings along with a few low scale apartment buildings.
---	---



Site Location and Zoning

### III. BACKGROUND

The Howard University 2020 Central Campus Plan (“2020 Plan”) was approved by the Zoning Commission on April 29, 2021. The University has committed, where possible, to the long-term management and maintenance of its existing facilities, to house academic, administrative, and support functions. However, some facilities are beyond reasonable repair due to structural and health safety issues and will have to be decommissioned.

The 2020 Plan shows buildings to be renovated and those slated to be decommissioned due to their deteriorated condition. The approved plans show the C. B. Powell Building as being in critical condition and is slated to be decommissioned (Attachment 1-Building 13). The Plan indicates that over the years the building has deteriorated and does not meet ADA requirements and has plumbing, HVAC, electrical, environmental, health and safety systems which have exceeded their useful life.

The Campus Plan outlines that the C. B. Powell site will be substantially altered to house the new Health Sciences Complex (D) and STEM Center (E) (Attachment 2). To the south of this site, the

new Howard University Hospital (H1) and Medical Office Building (G) will be constructed. Together, these projects are programmatically linked to deliver a new “health sciences corridor.” Due to the deterioration of the C. B. Powel building, the University has been looking for alternate space to accommodate the administrative offices but has been unable to find any suitable space within the campus boundary. The building on 5<sup>th</sup> Street, NW is owned by the University, is vacant and is located in close proximity to the campus, approximately one block to the south-of the University. The University found the building to be suitable to accommodate the administrative offices as it could accommodate the staff load and the would be less impactful on the residential community than its former use. The University states that the use of the property for administrative offices would be for five years.

#### **IV. PROPOSAL**

The proposal is to relocate the administrative staff from the C. B. Powell building at 525 Bryant Street to the building at 1911 5<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. The building would be renovated internally to accommodate approximately 7,000 square feet of office space to accommodate administrative staff only with no external changes or additions to the building. There are currently eight surface parking spaces on the property which would be retained for use by the administrative staff who are already in the University’s traffic counts. Because the interim location is in such close proximity to the campus, it is anticipated that there would be no change in commuting, transportation, or parking patterns and are covered by the Campus Plan. The University is also proposing to provide an open green area on site for community use.

#### **V. OP ANALYSIS**

Subtitle X, § 101.10 allows interim use of land off-campus as follows:

***101.1 Within a reasonable distance of the college or university campus, and subject to compliance with Subtitle X § 101.2, the Zoning Commission may also permit the interim use of land or improved property with any use that the Zoning Commission may determine is a proper college or university function. The land need not be included in the campus plan. When a major new building that has been proposed in a campus plan is instead moved off-campus, the previously designated site shall not be designated for, or devoted to, a different major new building unless the Zoning Commission has approved an amendment to the campus plan applicable to the site; provided, that for this purpose a major new building is defined as one specifically identified in the campus plan.***

The campus boundary of Howard University is approximately a block north of the subject property at 1911 5<sup>th</sup> Street, NW. The existing building formerly housed a day care center but has been vacant for over ten years. The interim use would activate the site with a use that should not significantly disrupt the residential community. Per the Campus Plan, the relocation of the uses in the C. B. Powell Building would enable the construction of the new health sciences corridor which includes a new Howard University Hospital. Compliance with Subtitle X § 101.2 is addressed below:

**101.2 *The uses shall be located so that they are not likely to become objectionable to neighboring property because of noise, traffic, parking, number of students, or other objectionable conditions.***

**Noise**

The building would accommodate offices for 25 to 30 staff persons. Operations would be limited to general office hours, between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm weekdays, with no extended day or weekend activities. The proposed administrative offices are not expected to have students going to and from the offices and the office use would be entirely contained within the existing building. Thereby, the use is not expected to generate any noise to disturb the adjacent residences.

**Traffic and Parking and Loading**

The site currently has eight parking spaces which would be used solely by the administrative staff who would work in the building. The boundary of the main University campus and facilities are approximately one block north of the subject site within walking or biking distance. The property is approximately 0.3 miles, or a 7-minute walk, to the Shaw/Howard University Metro Station. The site would be served by the 90 and 92 buses with a bus stop to the west of the property at T Street and Florida Avenue, NW. Several other Metrobus routes along 7th Street/Georgia Avenue NW. The University participates in the Smartbenefits Program which encourages faculty, staff, and students to use alternatives to the car to come to the campus. The University has also committed to providing a bike rack to discourage car use. It is not expected that traffic to the site would have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

The University states that this location would be included in the University’s Physical Facilities Management contracts for waste management. All loading and trash pickup would be done on-site and would therefore have no impact on traffic movements along 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The District’s Department of Transportation (DDOT) will provide further comments on traffic, parking and loading under separate cover.

**Number of Students**

It is anticipated that the building would be used by 25 to 30 administrative staff. These offices would not directly serve students so students visiting the site should be minimal.

**Other Objectionable Conditions**

It is not anticipated that the proposed interim use of the 1911 5<sup>th</sup> Street building would produce any objectionable conditions to negatively affect the surrounding neighborhood and residents.

Subtitle X, § 101 - CAMPUS PLAN states:

*101.1 Education use by a college or university shall be permitted as a special exception subject to review and approval by the Zoning Commission under Subtitle X, Chapter 9 after its determination that the use meets the applicable standards and conditions of this chapter.*

Subtitle X § 901 SPECIAL EXCEPTION REVIEW STANDARDS

*901.1 The Board of Zoning Adjustment will evaluate and either approve or deny a special exception application according to the standards of this section.*

901.2 *The Board of Zoning Adjustment is authorized under § 8 of the Zoning Act, D.C. Official Code § 6-641.07(g)(2), to grant special exceptions, as provided in this title, where, in the judgment of the Board of Zoning Adjustment, the special exceptions:*

(a) *Will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps;*

It is the intent of the Zoning Regulations that a university function outside of the campus boundary be accommodated if stated requirements are met. As demonstrated above, the proposal would meet the requirements of Subtitle X, § 101.10.

(b) *Will not tend to affect adversely, the use of neighboring property in accordance with the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Maps; and*

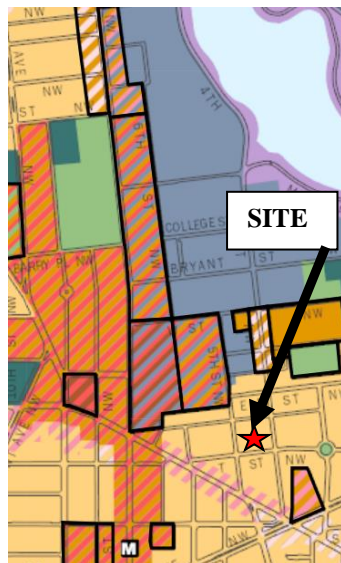
The proposed office use would activate a building within the community that has been vacant for over ten years and prior to that had been uses a child development center. The use would not adversely affect the use of neighboring properties as the office use should not generate any noise to affect the neighbors and generally activities on the property would be limited to daytime hours. There would be eight parking spaces on the site for the employees and therefore should not impact the on street parking which residents use.

(c) *Will meet such special conditions as may be specified in this title.*

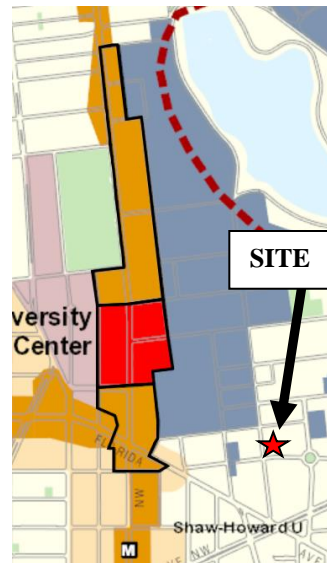
OP does not propose any special conditions.

## VI. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

**Future Land Use Map**



**Generalized Policy Map**



The Future Land Use Map recommends moderate-density residential and the Generalized Land Use Map designates the site as a Neighborhood Conservation Area. The proposed use of the site is not inconsistent with these designations as the Comprehensive Plan contemplates the institutional uses that are compatible with the surrounding community, and the zoning regulations allow for university use within residential zones as a special exception.

## **A. Comprehensive Plan Context Equity**

The Implementation Element calls for “*the Zoning Commission to evaluate all actions through a racial equity lens as part of its Comprehensive Plan consistency analysis*”<sup>2501.8</sup>. Equity is conveyed throughout the Comprehensive Plan, particularly in the context of zoning, where avoiding displacement of existing residents, the provision of affordable housing and creating access to opportunity is a priority. One of the keyways the Comprehensive Plan seeks to address equity is by supporting additional housing development.

The proposed interim use would be for five years and is not associated with any residential use for students or staff. The site does not have any residential use and the proposed interim use of the site would not result in the displacement of any tenants or residents but would facilitate the opportunity for on-campus redevelopment and in particular for the construction of a new hospital and other medical facilities that would serve the University, the surrounding neighborhood, as well the majority Black or African American residents which the hospital currently serves. The new hospital would be an asset to the university and the neighborhood and on balance, the proposed interim use would not be inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Citywide Elements:**

#### ***Land Use Element***

##### ***Policy LU-3.3 Institutional Uses 317***

*The growth of private institutions has generated significant concern in many neighborhoods. These concerns relate both to external impacts, such as traffic and parking, and broader concerns about the character of communities where institutions are concentrated or expanding. 317.6*

As shown above, the proposed administrative offices would have minimal impact on traffic and parking in the neighborhood and its limitation to five years would not cause a concentration or expansion of institutional use in the community.

#### ***Education Element***

##### ***EDU-3 Colleges and Universities 1211***

*The campus plan requirement provides a formal process for community input on a range of growth-related issues. They are an important tool to proactively address issues that may be of concern to the neighborhood and limit campus expansion into residential areas. However, most of Washington, DC’s colleges and universities are engaged in ongoing discussions with the communities around them. Frequently raised issues include the need for student housing, the loss of historic buildings, the compatibility of proposed campus structures with nearby residential areas, and the loss of taxable land associated with university growth. Campus plans have responded to these concerns in a number of ways, such as increasing building intensity on-site to avoid the need for land acquisition, development of new dormitories, and implementation of numerous programs to manage parking, traffic, noise, and other environmental impacts. 1214.3*

The proposal would allow university use on a university owned property for a limited period of time in order to allow for the construction of improved facilities on campus which would serve the university as well as the wider community.

***EDU-3.3.11: Access to Recreational, Educational, and Cultural Opportunities***  
*Support continued access by local neighborhoods to university offerings, such as concerts and lectures, campus green space, continuing education, and low-cost programming for older adults. Encourage residents to learn about and appreciate campus culture. 1214.16*

The University would allow a portion of the property dedicated to open, green space to be accessed and used by neighborhood residents.

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

The District Department of Transportation will submit a report under separate cover.

## **VIII. ANC COMMENTS**

The site is within ANC-1B. At the time of this report, there was not an ANC recommendation in the file.

## **IX. COMMUNITY COMMENTS**

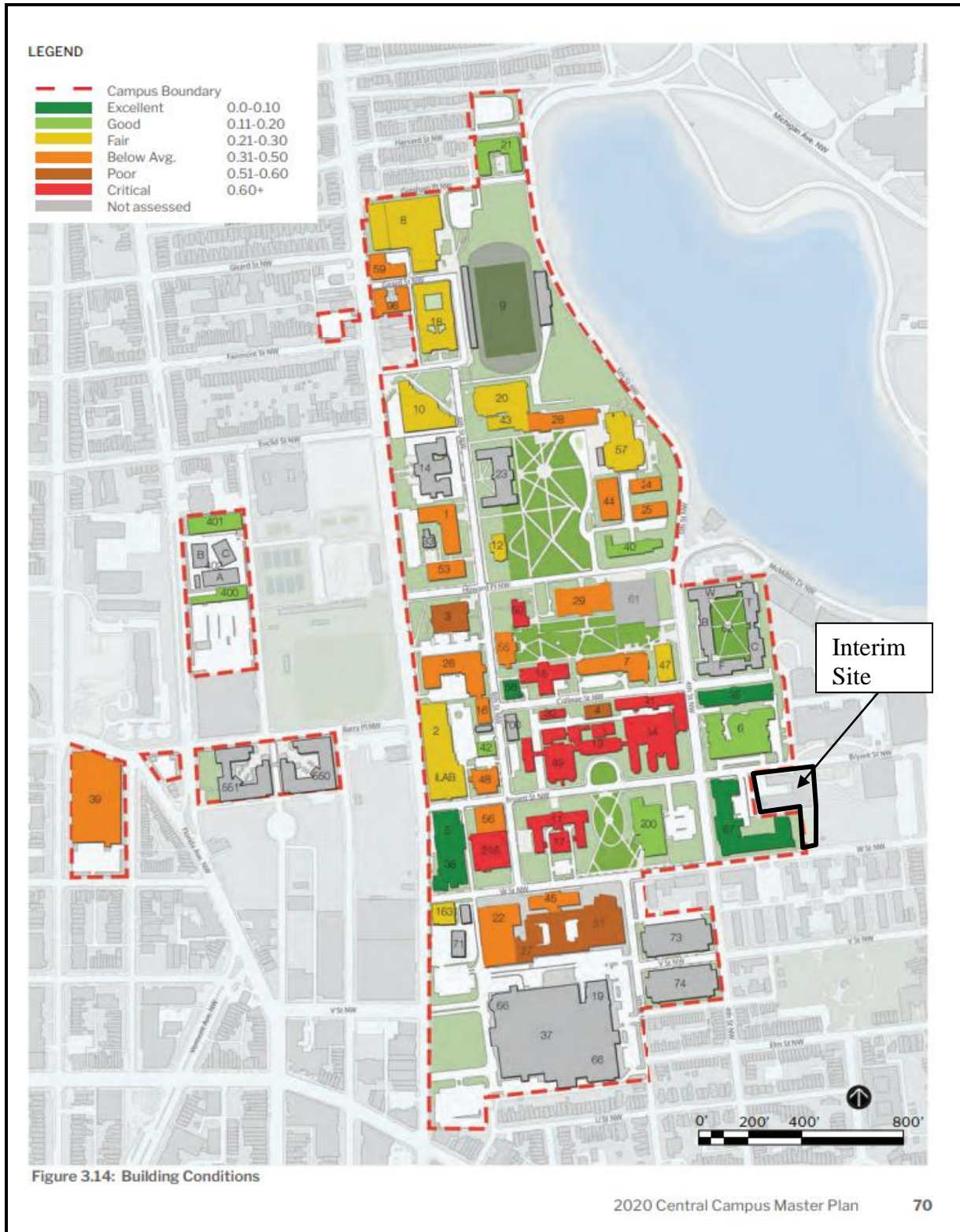
At the time of this report, there were no community comments in the file.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1 – Building Condition

Attachment 2 - Proposed New Buildings

Attachment 1 – Building Condition



Attachment 2 – Proposed New Buildings

