

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: July 12, 2010

FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner

ADDRESS: 1015 15th Street, NW

APPLICATION: Unenclosed sidewalk café for 6 tables and 24 seats

Site Information

Zone: C-4

Historic District: No

CFA: No

Neighborhood Character: Downtown commercial district

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on June 7, 2010. This café is for an adjacent Subway sandwich shop. In September 2009, the Public Space Committee approved with conditions a sidewalk café at 805 15th Street, NW, and required that a minimum 15' clearance from the curb needed to be maintained.

Relevant Policies of Planning Initiatives

Policy T-2.4.4: Sidewalk Obstructions

Locate sidewalk cafes and other intrusions into the sidewalk so that they do not present impediments to safe and efficient pedestrian passage. Maintain sidewalk surfaces and elevations so that disabled or elderly pedestrians can safely use them. 410.8

Policy UD-3.1.8: Neighborhood Public Space

Provide urban squares, public plazas, and similar areas that stimulate vibrant pedestrian street life and provide a focus for community activities. Encourage the “activation” of such spaces through the design of adjacent structures; for example, through the location of shop entrances, window displays, awnings, and outdoor dining areas.

Policy UD-3.10: Sidewalk Cafes

Discourage the enclosure of sidewalk cafes in manner that effectively transforms them into indoor floor space. The design of sidewalk cafes should be compatible with the architectural qualities of the adjoining buildings, should complement the street environment, and should not impede pedestrian movement.

KEY ISSUES

The property is located Downtown on 15th Street, NW, between K and L Streets, NW. It is located in an area zoned C-4. There is high level of pedestrian activity during working hours and a medium level at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as commercial.

The sidewalk where the proposed café is located along 15th Street is 33 feet wide. The adjacent business has no shop window projection. There are 4 feet at the curb set aside for tree boxes and

other street furniture. This leaves 29 feet to accommodate for pedestrians and café seating. The proposed seating area includes 6 tables and 24 seats in an area that is 315 square feet.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 13 feet. This leaves 16 feet of unobstructed sidewalk between the café and the furniture zone at the curb.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 315 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 21 seats; the application is for 24 seats.

The application proposes a fence around the perimeter of the café. The proposed fence of the fence is not clear from the submitted drawings. The Public Space Committee needs to ensure from the applicant that the fence will be a maximum of 42'' in height and fifty percent open. Also the Public Space Committee should make sure that the applicant is proposing to use a removable fence, so that it can be moved when the café is not in use.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial areas. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. However, the café as proposed has too many proposed seats for the amount of square footage being requested. The applicant should have enough room to increase the square footage of the café, maintain an 10' clear adjacent sidewalk, and obtain the 24 seats requested in their application.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the condition that the square footage of the café is increased in order to accommodate the proposed 24 seats as long as a minimum clear pedestrian path of 10 feet is maintained. Alternatively the number of seats should be reduced to a maximum of 21 seats with the square footage as proposed. In addition, the fence can be a maximum of 42'', be fifty percent open, and should be removable.