


MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Zoning Commission

FROM:  Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director

DATE: July 7, 2014

SUBJECT: Public Hearing Report for ZC #14-06
50 M Street, SE
Zoning Commission Design Review Pursuant to the Capitol Gateway Overlay

I. SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

The application generally addresses the criteria of the Capitol Gateway Overlay and the Office of Planning (OP) supports the project, subject to:

- Further façade articulation for the north wall, which faces another future development site but which may be highly visible for some time;
- More detailed renderings of the proposed signage at the street level and on the higher levels of the facades; and
- Clarification of the proposed glass embellishment visible on both the south and west elevations; or its replacement with a glass handrail matching the handrail on a portion of the rest of the roof.

II. APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

Location: 50 M Street, SE (the “Subject Property”)
(south portion of Square 699 west of Cushing Place SE, east of Half Street SE, immediately north of M Street SE)
Ward 6, ANC 6D

Applicant: KCG 50 M LLC

Zoning: C-3-C / CG (Medium-High Commercial/Capitol Gateway Overlay)

Site Description: The site is 15,567 sf. and rectangular in shape, with frontage on Half Street, Cushing Place SE, and M Street SE.

Proposed Development: The applicant proposes an 11-story hotel with ground floor retail uses.

Relief: Pursuant to 11 DCMR §1610.7, the following relief is required in order to develop as proposed:

1. Special Exception for Reduction of Parking Spaces (§ 2108).

III. SITE AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The Subject Property is located on the north side of M Street, SE between Cushing Place and Half Street SE, comprising part of the southern half of Square 699. The site is bounded on the east by Cushing Place and the west by Half Street. The property is bounded on the north by property owned by the United States, which is improved with a two-story warehouse building. M Street has a 90 foot right-of-way, Cushing Place is a 30 foot wide public alley, and Half Street is 80 feet in width. The site is located between the two entrances to the Navy Yard Metro Station.

The site is zoned C-3-C / CG (Medium-High Density Commercial / Capitol Gateway Overlay), as are several other properties on the north side of M Street. South of M Street the properties are largely zoned CR/CG (Commercial Residential). East of First Street the properties are zoned CR / SEFC (Southeast Federal Center Overlay). Properties to the north of the Subject Property are zoned C-3-C and are within the Southeast receiving zone. Please refer to the Vicinity Map on page 3.

The subject site is currently used for temporary seasonal surface parking lot for baseball games at Nationals Park.

IV. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The application proposes one building on M Street, SE between Cushing Place and Half Street, with frontages on all three streets. The eleven-story building would include approximately 140,000 square feet of new hotel and retail use, with approximately 4,800 square feet of the ground floor devoted to retail/service. The building would also include one below-grade parking level, providing a total of 40 automobile parking spaces and 12 bicycle parking spaces. Parking and loading facilities would be accessible from Cushing Place. Retail uses associated with the hotel but available to the public would occupy all of the ground floor on M except for the hotel lobby and the fire control room. The primary entrance to the hotel and lobby would be on M Street. The roof would include a green roof, as well as a terrace area open to guests.

The height of the building would be 110 feet and the FAR would be 8.98, as permitted pursuant to §§1602.1(a) & 1602.1(e). The building is designed to be in accordance with LEED-Silver certification.

Design

The application includes renderings demonstrating its relationship to adjacent streets, adjacent buildings, and the ballpark. The architecture proposed for the building generally uses a modern vernacular. Elevations show the exterior to be comprised primarily of red and dark grey brick; dark grey aluminum punched windows; and dark gray cast stone sills, all of which are designed to provide distinct compositions on each of the building's three public facades.

The ground level renderings along M Street show retail façades designed to improve the pedestrian experience and to compliment the design of the hotel facades above. Because the retail would be a component of the hotel, the facades are not customized to individual tenants. The signage is appropriately sized and is consistent with the metallic color scheme featured elsewhere on the façade; however, the applicant should provide more detailed renderings of the ground level, including proposed signage.

OP is generally supportive of the massing and overall design of the proposal. The red brick would provide a contrast with the color and texture of materials on the surrounding buildings in the immediate area, which are largely clad in glass and metallic grey panels (see pages 26 and 27 of the Applicant's June 27, 2014 submission). OP has reservations about the glass embellishment at the corner of the south and west elevations. The Applicant should clarify the appearance of this embellishment, as it appears differently on pages 19, 26, and 27. As an alternative to the embellishment, OP would support extending the glass guardrail visible on the south elevation to the southwest corner of the roof. In addition, OP supports improved façade articulation for the north elevation, which faces other future development sites but which may be highly visible for some time.

The project would fit in with the urban feel of this part of the city and would not impede views to any major monuments, buildings or the waterfront. The Capitol Gateway Overlay, as described in additional detail later in this report, seeks to create an active pedestrian and transit-oriented environment and a vibrant entertainment district, especially in the area north of the ballpark. This project should help achieve those aims.

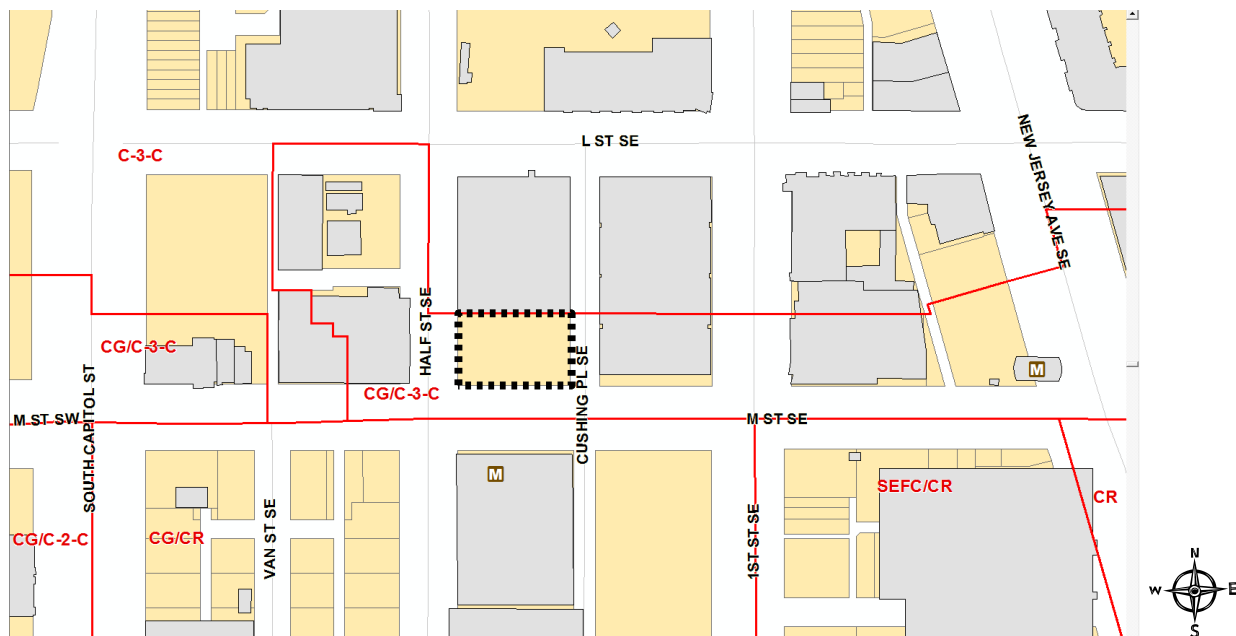


FIGURE 1
VICINITY MAP

V. ZONING

The subject site is zoned C-3-C / CG (Medium-High Density Commercial / Capitol Gateway Overlay). The Capitol Gateway Overlay is intended to encourage a mix of uses while creating a pedestrian-friendly environment. The Subject Property is located in the Capitol South Receiving Zone for transferable development rights (“TDR”), which permits a building height of 110 feet and a building density of 9.0 FAR. The applicant’s proposal requires relief from regulations regarding parking spaces, described below.

1. Special Exception for reduction of parking spaces (§ 2108)

Pursuant to § 2108.2 of the Regulations, the Applicant requests that the Zoning Commission grant a reduction in the amount of required parking of up to 25 percent. The Applicant proposes to provide 40 spaces whereas the Regulations require 53 spaces, resulting in a reduction of 25 percent. The Applicant anticipates that 40 parking spaces should be sufficient to address the parking needs of the building. The proposed hotel would be directly across the M Street SE from the Navy Yard Metrorail Station and would be located in an area with a dense, walkable urban fabric in close proximity to various amenities. Therefore, OP does not object to the required relief.

VI. CRITERIA OF THE CAPITOL GATEWAY OVERLAY

The Capitol Gateway Overlay District lists a number of objectives for the area and provides specific criteria for the Zoning Commission review of proposed developments. The following is OP’s analysis of these standards as applied to the application.

§1600.2 The purposes of the CG Overlay District are to:

- (a) **Assure development of the area with a mixture of residential and commercial uses, and a suitable height, bulk and design of buildings, as generally indicated in the Comprehensive Plan and recommended by planning studies of the area;**

Hotel and retail are the primary uses proposed for the site. The proposed height of 110 feet and the design shown by the applicant are appropriate to an area near the center of the city, accessible by Metro, and developing with a modern style of architecture. These characteristics of the development are consistent with Comprehensive Plan policies.

- (b) **Encourage a variety of support and visitor-related uses, such as retail, service, entertainment, cultural and hotel or inn uses;**

The project proposes a hotel, which would meet the intent of this section. The proposed retail would also cater to visitors to the neighborhood. The mix of uses within the project, including hotel and retail uses, would contribute to the overall entertainment district that is developing near the baseball stadium.

- (e) **Require suitable ground-level retail and service uses and adequate sidewalk width along M Street, S.E., near the Navy Yard Metrorail station;**

Because of the hotel use and the ground floor retail, the proposed development would create an active pedestrian character on M Street. The application would meet the intent of the CG Overlay provisions by providing as much retail on the ground floor as possible, which would help to activate the streetscape. Renderings of the ground floor environment suggest transparent windows allowing complete visual access to activated interior retail space through all of the storefront windows, resulting in a retail experience that would encourage pedestrian activity and significant interaction between the indoor private space and outdoor public space.

The public realm design appears to generally comply with DDOT standards for M Street and would include scored concrete paving, street trees, and planters, but public space design will be separately reviewed by the DDOT Public Space Committee. The sidewalks along M Street, while wide enough to accommodate pedestrian movement, do not appear to provide sufficient space for outdoor seating, as the entire 10 ft. of sidewalk clearance should be needed for pedestrian circulation.

§1610.3 In addition to proving that the proposed use, building, or structure meets the standards set forth in § 3104, an applicant requesting approval under this section must prove that the proposed building or structure, including the siting, architectural design, site plan, landscaping, sidewalk treatment, and operation, will:

- (a) **Help achieve the objectives of the CG Overlay District as set forth in §1600.2;**

Based on the materials submitted to date, the project would generally further the objectives of the CG Overlay. The project would assure that the area is developed with a mix of uses, including ground floor retail. The development would provide adequate sidewalk width along M Street, Half Street, and Cushing Place.

- (b) **Help achieve the desired mixture of uses in the CG Overlay District as set forth in §§ 1600.2(a) and (b), with the identified preferred uses specifically being residential, hotel or inn, cultural, entertainment, retail or service uses;**

The proposal would provide a mix of uses, including hotel and retail.

- (c) **Be in context with the surrounding neighborhood and street patterns;**

The proposed development would respect and enhance the surrounding neighborhood and street patterns. The neighborhood has an emerging architectural character with some of the new buildings on M Street and the baseball stadium sharing a modern vernacular. The design of the proposed building would expand on that trend by using modern forms and materials and incorporating active street-level retail typical of an urban entertainment area.

(d) Minimize conflict between vehicles and pedestrians;

The proposed design would minimize conflict between vehicles and pedestrians. OP supports the current parking and loading plan, which designates that all parking and loading would be accessed from Cushing Place, which serves as the alley for this square. On M and Half Streets pedestrians would have wide sidewalks and would be buffered from traffic by parked cars and landscaping. OP supports additional landscaping along Half Street, but notes that the large WMATA vent precludes landscaping along the entire length of the street.

Transit access is assured as the proposed development is across the street from an entrance to the Navy Yard metro station. Pedestrian movement should also be adequate with the reconstruction of public space to include new sidewalks, tree boxes and street furniture. Pedestrian movement would also be encouraged by the significant amount of ground floor retail on M Street. Improving M Street would enhance the pedestrian experience for visitors to the ballpark or the Anacostia River.

The applicant is proposing 12 bike parking spaces on the parking level, and should clarify if they are for staff or guests.

(e) Minimize unarticulated blank walls adjacent to public spaces through facade articulation; and

OP is generally supportive of the ground floor design, uses, and articulation. OP suggested to the applicant that the somewhat blank party walls on the north side should be further articulated, such as with brick banding. Because these walls may be visible for an indeterminate period of time, OP strongly suggests that the applicant further revise the wall articulation.

(f) Minimize impact on the environment, as demonstrated through the provision of an evaluation of the proposal against LEED certification standards.

The application materials indicate that the project would reach the equivalent of LEED Silver. A significant amount of the roof area would be a green roof.

VII. AGENCY COMMENTS

As of this writing OP is not aware of any other agency comments.

VIII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

As of this writing the Office of Planning has received no comments on the project from the community.