



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: January 6, 2010
TO: Public Space Committee
FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner
SUBJECT: 1500 New Hampshire Avenue, NW

APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

Applicant: Chris Frankenberg (Authorized Agent)
Location: The site of the two proposed signs is located on 19th Street, NW at the corner of Dupont Circle and New Hampshire Avenue, NW. The site is located in a DC/C-3-C zone, as well as within the Dupont Circle Historic District and Massachusetts Avenue Historic District.
Proposal: The applicant is proposing to install two, internally-lit signs advertising the adjacent restaurant and including menus. The signs are 5'-4" in height and 20" in width.

BACKGROUND

The applicant presented plans for the enclosed café that were approved by the Historic Preservation Review Board in November 2006. At that time, the approval of the enclosed café was specifically associated with changes to the public space, including restoring the landscaped area so that it was more consistent with the character of this site and the surrounding historic district. Other elements included in the design were limiting the impact of the enclosed cafe onto public space and increasing the amount of landscaping. In November 2009, the Office of Planning received the public space application for the additional sign in public space. The application was approved by historic preservation staff in November 2009.

BASIS OF REPORT

The Office of Planning (OP) has reviewed the application, considered existing site conditions, visited the site, and completed research on the site to prepare this report. OP also referred to the Comprehensive Plan and building code as part of completing this report:

Comprehensive Plan

HP-2.5 Historic Landscapes and Open Space

More than almost any other feature, the exceptional width and openness of Washington's parks and streets define the basic character of the city. These spaces include the major monumental greenswards of the Mall, riverfront and street valley parks, and the green space of estates,

cemeteries, and campuses. Tree-lined streets and landscaped front yards unite many historic neighborhoods, and there are small green oases scattered throughout the city. Some are public owned, and others are private. Many provide the setting for historic buildings, creating a balance between the natural and built environment that is a unifying feature of the city. Such settings should be protected and maintained as significant landscape in their own right or as contributing features of historic landmarks and districts.

Policy LU-2.2.1: Code Enforcement as a Tool for Neighborhood Conservation

Recognize the importance of consistent, effective, and comprehensive code enforcement to the protection of residential neighborhoods. Housing, building, and zoning regulations must be strictly applied and enforced in all neighborhood of the city to prevent deteriorated, unsafe, and unhealthy conditions; reduce illegal activities; maintain the general level of residential use, densities, and height, and ensure that health and safety hazards are promptly corrected.

DCMR Title 12: Building Code

3107.7.8 Signs on public space. No structure or standard used as a sign, bulletin, or advertisement of any sort shall be built, placed, erected, hung, maintained, or left in or upon any street, avenue, alley, highway, footway, sidewalk, parking or other public space in the District of Columbia, unless specifically approved by the code official, including the use of directional signs as described in Section 3107.6.6, in accordance with provisions of this Section.

DCMR Title 24: Public Space and Safety

Section 24-108. SIGNS, POSTERS, AND PLACARDS does not allow for the type of sign proposed in this application.

KEY ISSUES

The proposed sign and menu board would be a permanent fixture in public space. Its location extends the identity of the adjacent business into public space, giving it the appearance that it is private property and not public space. It detracts from the park-like character of the public street, and is inconsistent with building code regulations that does not allow signs in public space.

The identity of the District is closely tied to one of a “green” city. This association is directly tied to the amount of parks and open spaces throughout the city, as well as regulations that reinforce the public space along streets and avenues as landscaped areas. The area between the sidewalk and property is called “public parking”, and is part of the District’s park and open space system.

The introduction of permanent signage into this area detracts from its public character and gives the appearance of it being appropriated for private use by the adjacent property.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The proposed sign and menu included in this application is inconsistent with the goals of the District to maintain this area of public space as part of its park and open space system. As an alternative, the Office of Planning recommends that the sign and menu be more closely associated with the façade of the adjacent building and not located as a free standing object in public space.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be denied.