



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
OFFICE OF PLANNING



**PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW**

**DATE:** April 9, 2010  
**TO:** Public Space Committee  
**FROM:** Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner  
**SUBJECT:** 1644 31st Street, NW

**APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF**

**Applicant:** Brendan Burns (Authorized Agent)  
**Location:** The site is located on the west side of 31<sup>st</sup> Street NW between R Street NW and Q Street NW. The property is a landmarked building located in the Georgetown Historic District. It is located in a D/R-1-B zoning district.  
**Proposal:** The applicant is requesting an over-height fence, landscaping and widening of an existing curb cut.

**BACKGROUND**

The Office of Planning received the public space application for review on February 26, 2010. The application has been approved by the DC Historic Preservation Office.

**BASIS OF REPORT**

The Office of Planning (OP) has reviewed the application, considered existing site and adjacent site conditions, visited the site, and completed research on the site and neighborhood to prepare this report.

OP also referred to several policies in the Comprehensive Plan as part of its review.

**Policy HP-2.5.4: Landscaped Yards in Public Space**

Preserve the continuous and open green quality of landscaped front and side yards in public space. Take special care at historic landmarks and in historic districts to protect this public environment from intrusions, whether from excess paving, vehicular access and parking, high walls and fencing, or undue disruption of the natural contours or bermed terraces.

**Policy UD-2.2: Designing for Successful Neighborhoods**

The sense of place in the Districts neighborhoods is a function of their cultural history, physical features and visual qualities. This is especially evident in both historic row house neighborhoods as well as single family neighborhoods where particular set backs, architectural styles, and building forms prevail. In neighborhoods of high architectural quality and strong identity, a greater emphasis on design compatibility and appropriate scale is needed.

## **KEY ISSUES**

The existing scale and architecture of public space in the Georgetown neighborhood include retaining walls that respond to natural topography, low and open fences at the grade of the sidewalk, and generous landscaping. This creates an open, park-like character for the neighborhood and long views along streets with limited visual obstructions. Its visual quality plays a role in defining the image of the District and the neighborhood.

The intent of the District's regulations for fences in public space is to provide a consistent treatment along city streets. They provide for continuous lengths of fences that may be different in design, but collectively have a uniform height. Two effects of this consistent height on urban design is continuous views along city streets and increased pedestrian safety.

The house is a landmark structure, the Willis-Addison House, located on approximately three acres of land.

Depending on whether the dimensions on the drawing or the application are correct, the proposed fence, while attractive and in keeping with the architecture on the street, would be from 1' to 2' 2" over the regulation height of 42".

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION**

The central premise for the design and regulation of Washington's public space has been wide open streets with long vistas. OP has concerns about the proposed height of the fence.

**The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the condition that the height of the retaining wall/fence on 31<sup>st</sup> Street, NW, not exceed 42" or that it be relocated to the property line.**