

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: August 9, 2010

FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner

ADDRESS: 1801 14th Street NW

APPLICATION: Unenclosed sidewalk café for benches with seating for 32

Site Information

Zone: ARTS/C-3-A

Historic District: Greater U Street

CFA: No

Neighborhood Character: Neighborhood commercial district

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on August 3, 2010. This café is for an adjacent restaurant. The proposed café has been reviewed and approved by historic preservation office staff. However the historic preservation office does have some concerns that need to be addressed. The existing fence that was used by the previous business should be decreased in height to comply with fence regulations. In addition, some landscaping should be added at the corners of the site to reinforce that this area is part of the District's park and open space network.

In February 2010, the Public Space Committee approved a sidewalk cafe at 1825 14th Street NW with 4 tables and 14 seats in 218 sq/ft. The application was approved with the condition that the stanchion surrounding the seating be removed.

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 in the 14th Street neighborhood on 14th Street, NW, between S and T Streets, NW. It is located in an area zoned ARTS/C-3-A. There is a medium level of pedestrian activity during working hours and a high level of pedestrian activity at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as mixed use residential and neighborhood serving commercial.

The sidewalk where the café is proposed to be located is along S Street and is 28 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 24 feet to accommodate pedestrians and café seating. The proposed seating area includes benches that have seating for 32 in an area that is 768 square feet.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 16 feet. This leaves 8 feet of unobstructed sidewalk between the café and the 4 foot furniture zone at the curb. District regulations require a 10' clear pedestrian path adjacent to a sidewalk café, although the Public Space Committee has the authority to approve an adjacent clear pedestrian path of 6 feet. As proposed, S Street is not the primary sidewalk for this commercial area and an 8 foot clear sidewalk is appropriate.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 768 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 51 seats; the application is for 32 seats on benches.

There is an existing over-height fence from the previous business that is along the perimeter of the proposed café. The applicant needs to reduce the height of this fence to not exceed a maximum height of 42". In addition, the fence must be fifty percent open and be movable, so that it can be removed when the café is not in use.

Also, the area where the café is proposed to be located is called the "parking" area, because it is intended to be landscaped and is part of the District's park and open space network. Any seating in this area should be located within a landscaped area. This can be accomplished by adding landscaping at the corners and along the border of the proposed café area.

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 existing fence needs to be reduced in height to a maximum of 42'. Additional landscape needs to be added at the corner and along the café area so that the seating is located within a landscaped area.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the conditions that the existing over-height fence be reduced to a maximum of 42" and that landscaping is added at the corners and along the border of the proposed café area.