



MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Jennifer Steingasser, Deputy Director

DATE: July 12, 2011

SUBJECT: BZA Case 18240
Request for a rear yard variance for an addition to the Mt. Pleasant Library,
3160 16th Street, NW

I. RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) **recommends approval** of the required variance relief:

- (§404) Allow a rear yard of zero feet where 15 feet is required.

II. BACKGROUND

In August 2010, the Zoning Administrator issued a building permit to allow renovation to and expansion of the existing Mount Pleasant Library located at 3160 16th Street, NW. Work has commenced in accordance with this approval.

ANCs 1C and 1D subsequently submitted an appeal of the Zoning Administrator’s decision to issue the building permit, Case 18152, citing non-conformities to the zoning regulations. The appeal was heard in January, 2011. The Board, at its June 21, 2011 public meeting, rendered a decision to uphold the appeal with regards to the need for rear yard relief.

In anticipation of this possibility, the applicant had submitted the variance request to permit the rear yard relief.

III. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Address	3160 16 th Street, NW
Legal Description	Square 2595, Lot 830
Ward and ANC	1D

Lot Characteristics	Located at the corner of 16 th Street and Lamont Street; Five-sided lot with existing, historic library structure; Symmetrical building with entrance centered on the corner of Lamont and the spur of 16 th Street.
Zoning	R-5-D (General residential (apartments) with institutional and semi-public buildings)
Adjacent Properties	Apartment buildings to the south and west and across Lamont Street to the north; Small triangular park across spur of 16 th Street to the east. Rowhouses further to the west along Lamont Street.
Surrounding Neighborhood Character	Along 16 th Street corridor primarily apartment buildings with religious and educational uses, as well as some rowhouse residential; Mt. Pleasant Street corridor has apartments as well as retail.

IV. PROJECT DESCRIPTION IN BRIEF

Applicant	District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL)
Proposal	An addition to the existing library building
Relief Required	Rear yard

V. ZONING REQUIREMENTS

The application requests a zero-foot rear yard, where the R-5-D district requires a 15 foot rear yard. No other relief from the R-5-D requirements was requested.

VI. ANALYSIS

In order to be granted a variance, the applicant must demonstrate how the property meets the three-part test described in §3103.

- 1. Does the property exhibit specific uniqueness with respect to exceptional narrowness, shallowness, shape, topography or other extraordinary or exceptional situations or conditions?**

At 16,576 square feet, the subject lot is unusually small for its intended purpose. Other similar libraries have larger lots. For example, the Benning Road Library and the Washington Highlands Library have lot sizes of 25,067 and 29,793 square feet, respectively. The subject property is “landlocked” and cannot expand by acquiring more land. Furthermore, at risk windows on the apartment building on the south property line and a small encroachment onto the subject property by another building to the northwest affects the ability to practically expand in those areas.

The property is also subject to historic preservation design limitations. The “Children’s Stair” on the western exterior cannot be disturbed, and the visual symmetry of the building cannot be unbalanced by any new construction.

Also, DCPL mandates a broad program for each Full Service Neighborhood Library such as the Mt. Pleasant Library. Each facility must have a minimum of 20,000 to 22,000 square feet and house over 80,000 books, as well as magazines, cds and dvds. The library would also contain a variety of child, teen and adult function areas, plus computer areas, study rooms, administrative space and at least 200 reader seats. In addition, all libraries are required to accommodate a community meeting room that could hold a minimum of 100 people.

2. Does the extraordinary or exceptional situation described in the first part of the variance test impose a practical difficulty which is unnecessarily burdensome to the applicant?

The programmatic requirements of the library, combined with the small size of the lot and the historic nature of the property, combine to create a practical difficulty for the applicant. There are no areas within the existing building to locate the large community meeting room. The only areas where space exists for a new addition, including a meeting room, would be the southwestern portion of the lot (behind the building) and the northwestern portion of the lot (beside the building).

Historic preservation concerns, however, prohibit new construction on the northwestern portion of the lot, beside the building. A new wing in that location could have compromised the Children's Stair and imbalanced the symmetry of the original structure. That means that the only viable location on the lot for the addition would be the rear of the building. The floorplate resulting from the meeting room and its attendant entry and storage space intrude, therefore, into the rear yard.

3. Can the relief be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without substantially impairing the intent, purpose and integrity of the Zoning Regulations and Map?

Relief can be granted without detriment to the public good and without impairing the intent of the Regulations. The regulations for rear yard intend to promote a pattern of development which would protect light and air for the subject site and for adjacent properties. In this case the library would be at a minimum 20 feet from the nearest structure, including on the sides of the building where no setback is required. The design protects and does not approach the at-risk windows on the property to the south and the encroachment from the building to the northwest. Light and air would continue to be available to adjacent properties.

It has come to the attention of OP that members of the community are concerned about fire equipment access to the rear of the building. OP contacted the Fire Marshal, Chief Bruce Faust, who stated that for adequate fire protection access to the rear of the building was not required.

VII. HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The subject property is in the Mt. Pleasant Historic District and is a contributing structure to the historic district. The design has received approval the Commission of Fine Arts, which must approve District government projects.

VIII. COMMENTS OF OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES

Besides the aforementioned conversation with the Fire Marshal, the Office of Planning has received no comments on this application from other District agencies.

IX. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

As of this writing, the Office of Planning has received no comments regarding the proposal from the ANC or from the community.

IX. ATTACHMENTS

1. Vicinity Map and Aerial Photos

JS/mrj
Matt Jesick, Project Manager

Attachment 1 Vicinity Map and Aerial Photos



