

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: June 16, 2008
FROM: Chris Shaheen
ADDRESS: 1834 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
APPLICATION: Unenclosed Sidewalk Cafe

Site Information

Zone: C-2-A
Historic District: Georgetown Historic District
CFA: Yes
Neighborhood Character: Neighborhood Commercial District

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on April 26th, 2010. The proposed café must be reviewed and approved by historic preservation office staff and the Commission of Fine Arts. Based on the information sent to the Office of Planning for review, it is not clear if this café is for a business with a Certificate of Occupancy for a restaurant or grocery store.

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 Georgetown neighborhood on Wisconsin Avenue, NW, between R and 34th streets, NW. It is located in an area zoned C-2-A. It is across the street from a junior high school. There is a moderate level of pedestrian activity during working hours and at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as medium density residential with row houses and apartment buildings, with a vibrant commercial area along Wisconsin Avenue.

The sidewalk where the sidewalk café is proposed is approximately 15 feet wide; the adjacent business has a 3 foot shop window projection. There are 3 feet at the curb set aside for a continuous tree box. The proposed seating area includes 10 tables and 20 seats in an area that is approximately 273 square feet.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 273 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 18 seats; the application is for 20 seats.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 5 feet. This leaves 4 feet of unobstructed sidewalk between the café and the continuous tree box. 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.]

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial area. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. However, this application proposes a number of seats that is more than the proposed café area can accommodate and narrows the adjacent sidewalk to a width that is less than the Public Space Committee can approve. It appears that the sidewalk can accommodate a smaller café area with fewer seats, and still maintain a 6' adjacent sidewalk.

The Office of Planning's recommends that the application be approved with modifications to the site plan that reduces the café area so that an adjacent 6' sidewalk is maintained, and that the number of seats is reduced accordingly.