

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

FROM: Brandice Elliott, Case Manager
Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review

DATE: December 31, 2013

SUBJECT: BZA Case 18685 – request for special exception relief under § 3104.1 to locate solar panels on top of an existing office and penthouse roof at 1200 1st Street, N.E.

The Office of Planning has reviewed the application submitted for the property located at 1200 1st Street, N.E., and has determined that additional information is necessary before a recommendation can be provided. The applicant proposes to install three solar panels on top of an existing office building; two would be located on top of the penthouse, while a smaller panel would be located at a lower height on top of an office platform. The Zoning Administrator has determined that relief is required for the reduced setback that has been provided between the solar panels and the edge of the building, as well as for the placement of several structures on the roof, which are required to be located in one enclosure.

Of utmost concern is whether or not the proposed solar panels would be in compliance with the Height Act. The existing office building stands 130 feet tall with a penthouse that is 18.5 feet in height. The proposed solar panels would add approximately 18 feet in height above the penthouse, and it is questionable as to whether this additional height can be permitted. The applicant has been notified of this concern and was directed to obtain an interpretation from the Zoning Administrator. As of the date of this writing, the interpretation is outstanding.

In concept, OP is supportive of additions that would improve the environmental performance of buildings. In this case, however, sufficient information has not been provided to address how the proposed solar panels would meet the criteria of a special exception. This, in combination with concerns regarding the Height Act, suggests that the applicant requires additional time to provide the necessary information and address any resulting concerns. The applicant is aware of these concerns and has indicated that a postponement would be requested; however, at last check, the request had not been received by the Office of Zoning. OP continues to encourage the applicant to request a postponement so that we may acquire sufficient detail to make a recommendation.