

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment

**FROM:** Matt Jesick, Case Manager  
*JL* Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review

**DATE:** June 1, 2018

**SUBJECT:** BZA #19689 – 2300 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW – Meridian International Center  
 Special Exceptions to permit the expansion of an existing private school and the construction of a multifamily dwelling

**I. RECOMMENDATION**

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the following requested special exceptions:

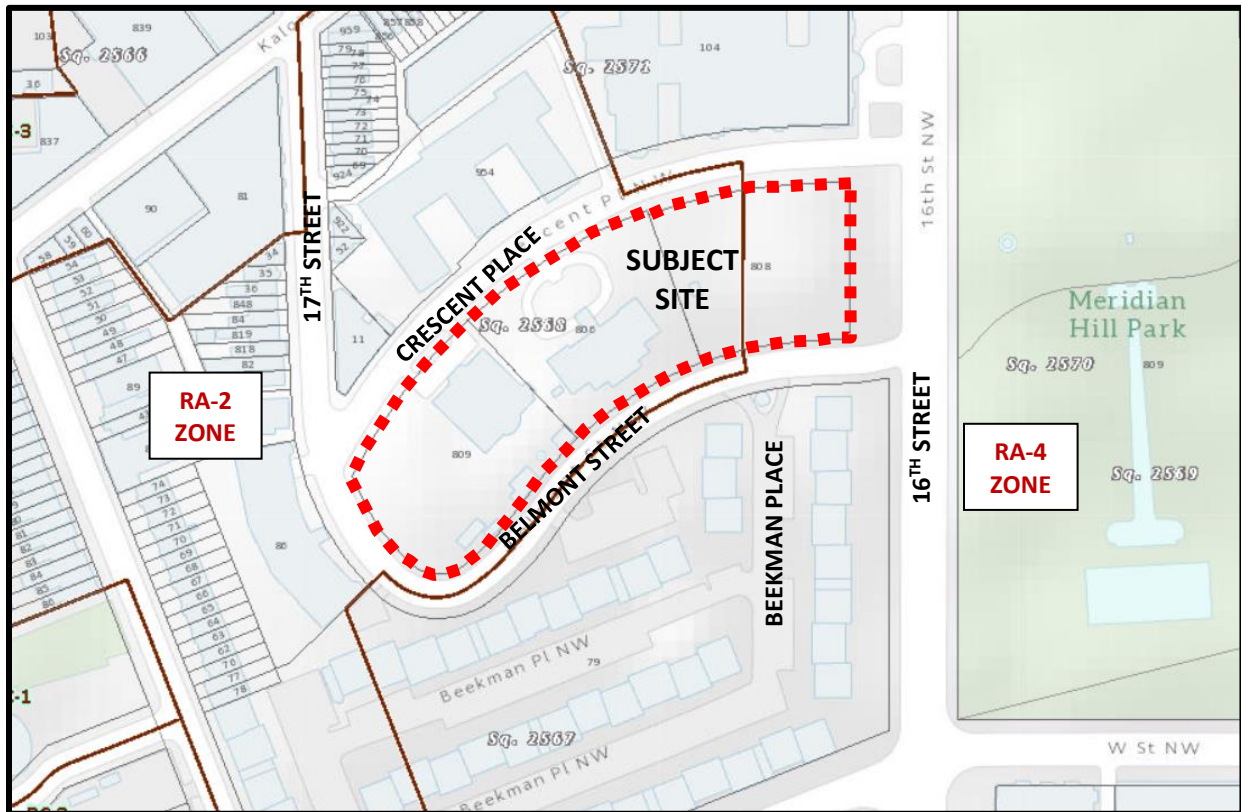
- Pursuant to Subtitle X Chapter 9, X § 104, Private School Plan (Special exception review required for a private school);
- Pursuant to Subtitle X Chapter 9, A § 207.2, Extending Standards of a Zone When a Zone Boundary Crosses a Lot (35’ move of RA-4 zone standards to the west).

The most recent BZA approval for the Meridian International Center, case number 17070, from 2003, had four conditions of approval. OP would now support the deletion of those conditions, as most are no longer applicable, and with the acknowledgement that the Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) drafted by the community and the applicant provide much more specific guidance on the size and nature of events at the Center and the operations of the Center and the proposed multifamily dwelling. OP supports the MOUs, but also defers to DDOT and its evaluation of the traffic impacts of the project. For additional discussion of the previous conditions of approval, please refer to Section IV of this report.

**II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION**

Applicant	MIC9 Owner, LLC
Address	2300 16 <sup>th</sup> Street, NW
Legal Description	Square 2568, Lots 806, 808 and 809
Zoning	RA-4 (Medium/High Density Apartment, along 16 <sup>th</sup> Street) RA-2 (Moderate/Medium Density Apartment, interior of the site)
Ward and ANC	1, 1C
Historic District or Resource	Meridian Hill Historic District, as well as the following landmarks: White-Meyer House (Lot 806, middle of the site); Meridian House (Lot 809, west end of the site).

<p>Lot Characteristics and Existing Development</p>	<p>The property is bound by 16<sup>th</sup> Street on the east, Crescent Place on the north, and Belmont Street on the south and west. The site slopes steeply from 16<sup>th</sup> Street, with an approximate elevation of 155', up to the west, reaching a maximum of about 190'. The site is improved with two historic landmarks – the White-Meyer House and the Meridian House, which both front on Crescent Place. The easternmost portion of the property is used for parking for the Meridian Center.</p>
<p>Adjacent Properties and Neighborhood Character</p>	<p>East – Meridian Hill Park;        South – Rowhouses fronting on Beekman Place;        West – Moderate density multi-family, with underground parking used by the Meridian Center;        North – Medium density multi-family and institutional.</p> <p>Surrounding neighborhood is a mix of apartments and rowhouses. North of this site, on the west side of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, are a number of medium density apartment buildings.</p>
<p>Project Description</p>	<p>Expand in size an existing private school through the addition of meeting and work spaces; Construct a 111-unit, ~80' tall, 8 story plus habitable penthouse condo building along 16<sup>th</sup> Street; Project would include an underground garage for both the condo and the private school.</p>



### III. ZONING REQUIREMENTS

The table below lists the zoning parameters of the project.

Item	Existing	Regulation	Proposed	Relief
Lot Width	170' (at 16 <sup>th</sup> Street)	n/a	n/a	Conforming
Lot Area* (Lot 806 + Lot 808)	67,162 sf	n/a	No change	Conforming
FAR* (Lot 806 + Lot 808)	0.22 (14,825 sf White-Meyer House)	n/a	2.11 (141,996 sf = 14,825 White-Meyer + 127,171 new project)	Conforming
<b>Lot Area* (per zone)</b>	<b>RA-2 48,639 sf</b> <b>RA-4 18,523 sf</b>	n/a	<b>RA-2 (with 35' move) 42,551 sf</b> <b>RA-4 (with 35' move) 24,611 sf</b>	<b>Zone Line Move Requested</b>
<b>FAR* (per zone) F § 302</b>	<b>RA-2 0.30 (14,825 sf)</b> <b>RA-4 0 (0 sf)</b>	<b><u>Permitted w/ Current Zone Boundary</u></b> <b>RA-2 – 2.16 (104,585 sf)</b> <b>RA-4 – 4.2 (77,796 sf)</b> <b>Total – 2.7 (182,381 sf)</b>  <b><u>Permitted w/ Zone Boundary Moved</u></b> <b>RA-2 – 2.16 (91,910 sf)</b> <b>RA-4 – 4.2 (103,366 sf)</b> <b>Total – 2.9 (195,276 sf)</b>	<b><u>Proposed</u></b> <b>RA-2 – 0.91 (38,630 sf)</b> <b>RA-4 – 4.2 (103,366 sf)</b> <b>Total – 2.1 (141,996 sf)</b>	<b>Zone Line Move Requested</b>
Height F § 303	Not provided	RA-2 50' RA-4 90'	RA-2 50' RA-4 80'4"	Conforming
Lot Occupancy* F § 304	Not provided	RA-2 60% RA-4 75%	RA-2 35% RA-4 73%	Conforming
Rear Yard F § 305	Not provided	4 in. / ft. of ht.; 15 ft. min.	33' (for new building, measured to CL of Belmont Street)	Conforming

Item	Existing	Regulation	Proposed	Relief
Vehicle Parking C § 701.5	86 (47 on surface lot + 39 in 2200 Belmont Street garage)	<u>Multifamily</u> 1 per 3 units in excess of 4 units = $((111 \text{ units} - 4) / 3) = 36$  <u>Private School</u> 2 per 3 teachers or employees = $(106 * (2/3)) = 71$  1 per 10 seats in largest auditorium = $175 / 10 = 18$  <u>Total Required</u> = 125	<u>Multifamily</u> = 72  <u>Private School</u> = 86 (47 in new garage + 39 in 2200 Belmont Street garage)  <u>Total</u> = 158	Conforming
Bike Parking C § 802.1	Not provided	Long Term = 38 Short Term = 11	Long Term = 38 Short Term = 11	Conforming
Loading C §§ 901.1 and 902.2	Existing loading from front of mansions	1 30' berth 1 20' space	1 30' berth 1 20' space	Conforming

\* For the purposes of FAR and Lot Occupancy, the applicant is basing calculations on the lot area of only lots 806 and 808, the easternmost lots, which will be combined into a single record lot for the new construction. Lot 809, at the western end of the site, will remain a separate lot, and is included in the application because it is part of the overall private school campus.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

The applicant requests special exception approval for a private school use, and a special exception to apply the standards of a more intense zone, RA-4, 35 feet into a more restrictive zone, RA-2. OP's evaluation of the relevant criteria are below.

#### SUBTITLE X § 104 PRIVATE SCHOOL PLAN

*104.1 Education use by a private school shall be permitted as a special exception subject to review and approval by the Board of Zoning Adjustment after its determination that the use meets the applicable standards of Subtitle X, Chapter 9 and conditions of this section.*

The applicant operates a private school on the subject site and seeks to expand the facility, pursuant to the criteria of this section.

*104.2 The private school shall be located so that it is not likely to become objectionable to adjoining and nearby property because of noise, traffic, number of students, or otherwise objectionable conditions.*

The physical expansion of the school should not be objectionable to nearby properties. The Meridian Center currently uses the two mansions for its operations. The new portion of the school would add workstations for employees and a meeting space that could hold up to 175 people. The applicant states in Exhibits 9 and 52 that the additional space would not result in an increase in the number of staff of the school, which is presently 106, but allow for new office spaces. Nor, according to the applicant, would there be an increase in the number of events; The new meeting space would allow for alternative and flexible space for events of various size that already happen at the property. To memorialize the levels of activity at the school, the Meridian Center would enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the neighborhood governing the number, size and times of meetings, and how logistics such as guest arrivals, car valets, deliveries and trash are handled.

It is anticipated, therefore, that the overall amount of traffic to and from the school would not change significantly from the current quantity. Because of the new location of the parking entrance to the school, which would move from Crescent Place to Belmont Street, Belmont may see some increase in the amount of traffic. But because the segment of Belmont closest to 16<sup>th</sup> Street is two-way, traffic could exit directly from the school to 16<sup>th</sup> Street, rather than circling through the neighborhood and exiting via Crescent Place. The applicant has proffered improvements to the signage and pavement markings in the vicinity of the project, and has further agreed to conduct a study of the 16<sup>th</sup> and Belmont intersection, after the project is complete<sup>1</sup>, in order to determine if a traffic signal is required. If so, the applicant would pay for the signal (Ex. 52, p. 18).

The MOU also would also address noise at the site through the regulation of the hours that music can be played. Noise from loading should also be minimal, as that function would be internal to the building. Visually, the school expansion would result in an increase in height of the portion of the retaining wall along Belmont Street east of but adjacent to the White-Meyer House. The new retaining wall, however, would still be about 13 feet lower than the retaining wall and parapet directly to the rear of the White-Meyer House. See Sheet 44 of Exhibit 16A. The new retaining wall, therefore, would not be out of character with the existing streetscape of Belmont Street. Behind that retaining wall, some portions of the school structure may be visible from certain vantage points, but their visual impact should be minimal as they were designed to appear to be part of the plinth on which the White-Meyer House sits.

*104.3            The development standards for a private school shall be those of the zone in which the private school is located.*

With the requested shift in the zone boundary line, the proposed project would meet all development standards for the zone and would require no additional relief.

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<sup>1</sup> Page 18 of Exhibit 52 describes the Belmont and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets traffic study as “post-occupancy”. The draft MOU, however, describes the study as taking place “Prior to the commencement of construction of the Proposed Development”. See Exhibit 52A, page 6, item 6)d).

104.4 *In calculating density, the land area shall not include public streets and alleys, but may include interior private streets and alleys within the school boundaries.*

The calculated density only includes the area of the lot; There are no public or private streets within the site.

#### **SUBTITLE A § 207 ZONE BOUNDARY LINE CROSSING A LOT**

207.2 *If approved by the Board of Zoning Adjustment as a special exception under Subtitle X, the regulations applicable to that portion of a lot located in a lesser restrictive use zone that control the use, height, and bulk of structures and the use of land may be extended to that portion of the lot in a more restrictive use zone; provided:*

(a) *The extension shall be limited to that portion of the lot in the more restrictive use zone but not exceeding thirty-five feet (35 ft.);*

The applicant requests that the standards of the RA-4 zone be applied to the portion of the lot 35 feet west of the zone boundary.

(b) *In authorizing an extension, the Board of Zoning Adjustment shall require compliance with Subtitle A § 207.1(d);*

Not applicable, as the site is not located in an R or RF zone.

(c) *The extension shall have no adverse effect upon the present character and future development of the neighborhood; and*

The extension should not have an adverse effect on the character or future development of the neighborhood. Allowing RA-4 standards to apply to the first 35 feet of the RA-2 zone would not bring more overall density to the site. The proposed floor area for the combined old and new development on Lots 806 and 808 would be approximately 142,000 square feet, which is over 50,000 square feet less than that permitted with the zone boundary line shift, and over 40,000 square feet less than that permitted even without the zone boundary shift. The extension would, however, allow the concentration of building mass and a vertical expression along 16<sup>th</sup> Street, where historically the higher density development in the neighborhood was focused. The Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) sought to reduce height on the building arm along Crescent Place; The interior of the neighborhood is more typically characterized by moderate density apartment buildings, rowhouses, and the landmarked mansions. The final design of the building was found to be compatible with the landmarks on the property and with the Meridian Hill Historic District. For a comparison of the proposed multifamily building to its neighbors, please see, for example, the 16<sup>th</sup> Street elevation drawing at Sheet 39 of Exhibit 16A. The height of the building

would be within the limit of the RA-4 zone, but the massing was sculpted during the HPRB process to reduce the appearance of height. In addition, the maximum height of the building would not encroach into the “35 foot” area of the zone boundary shift. Rather, the 50 foot building height along Crescent Place would remain the maximum building height well into the RA-4 zoned portion of the property. Please refer to the illustration on Page 7 of Exhibit 52.

The retaining walls along Belmont Street adjacent to the new multifamily building would be slightly reduced in height, while the retaining walls along Crescent Place would be reduced significantly in size, and entrances to individual units would be accessible via private terraces. This design should result in an improved streetscape for Crescent Place. See Exhibit 16A, Sheets 43 and 45.

Because the development floor area proposed with the zone boundary line shift is significantly less than the development floor area that could be permitted as a matter of right, the traffic generated by the project, while greater than the existing condition, would not be the result of the zone boundary line shift. OP defers to DDOT’s evaluation of the traffic impacts of the project. The draft MOU developed by the neighbors and the applicant would govern loading, deliveries, move-ins, Uber, trash pickup, and general traffic concerns, in addition to items such as site cleanliness and use of the rooftop.

- (d) *The Board of Zoning Adjustment may impose requirements pertaining to design, appearance, screening, location of structures, lighting, or any other requirements it deems necessary to protect adjacent or nearby property.*

OP recommends no requirements, but supports the conditions contained in the MOUs developed jointly by the applicant and the community.

The most recent BZA approval for the Meridian International Center, case number 17070, from 2003, had four conditions of approval.

1. Condition 1 required maintenance of a brick wall at the former parking lot at 2200 Belmont Road as long as that lot was used as a surface parking lot. Because the site has been redeveloped, the condition is no longer applicable.
2. Condition 2 continued a previous requirement that 38 parking spaces be maintained at the 2200 Belmont Road site, but acknowledged that those spaces would now be located in an underground garage at the site.
3. Condition 3 required the lease of off-site parking spaces during construction of the 2200 Belmont site. Because construction is complete, this condition is no longer applicable.
4. Condition 4 dealt with parking and valet operations for events at the center. The new MOUs provide much more detail on this subject.

OP would now support the deletion of these conditions, as most are no longer applicable, and with the acknowledgement that the MOUs drafted by the community and the applicant provide much more specific guidance on the size and nature of events at the Center and the operations of the Center and the proposed multifamily dwelling.

## **V. HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

The project has received conceptual approval from the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB), and final approval is delegated to staff. The HPRB found that the project was compatible with the landmarks on the property and with the Meridian Hill Historic District.

## **VI. COMMENTS OF OTHER DISTRICT AGENCIES**

As of this writing the record contains no reports from other District agencies.

## **VII. COMMUNITY COMMENTS**

As of this writing there are no comments in the record from the community, but there is a request for party status in opposition (Exhibit 54). The applicant and community members have met on a regular basis over the past several months and arrived at draft MOUs governing the functioning of the site. Those draft MOUs are at Exhibits 52A, 52B and 52C of the record.