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GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: March 12, 2010
TO: Public Space Committee
FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner
SUBJECT: 2800 13th Street, NW

APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

Applicant: Janice Marut (Authorized Agent)
Location: The property is located on a corner lot on the west side of 13th Street NW between Girard Street NW and Harvard Street NW. It is located in a R-4 zoning district.
Proposal: The applicant is requesting to install a 6' high steel rail fence in public space at the northwest corner of Girard and 13th Street. The length of the fence is 24'.

BACKGROUND

The Office of Planning received the public space application for review on February 1, 2010. A request for an over-height fence at this site was previously heard at the September 2009 Public Space Committee Meeting. As a compromise solution, an over-height fence was approved within the confines of the Girard Street right-of-way, but that no over-height fence would be permitted within the right-of-way on 13th Street. Applicant was also required to have three feet (3') of landscaped area between the Girard Street sidewalk and fence.

BASIS OF REPORT

The Office of Planning (OP) has reviewed the application, considered existing site conditions, visited the site, and completed research on the site to prepare this report. OP also referred to several policies in the Comprehensive Plan as part of completing this report:

UD-3.2.4: Security Through Streetscape Design

Develop and apply attractive, context-sensitive security measures in the design of streets, plazas, and public spaces. These measures should use an appropriate mix of bollards, planters, landscaped walls, vegetation, and street furniture rather than barriers and other approaches that detract from aesthetic quality.

Policy UD-2.2.1 Neighborhood Character and Identity

Strengthen the defining visual qualities of Washington's neighborhoods. This should be achieved in part by relating the scale of infill development, alterations, renovations and additions to existing neighborhood context.

KEY ISSUES

While mindful of the need of property owners for secure outside play/social areas, OP is concerned about the extent of public space that would be contained within the proposed fence. Public space is a defining feature of the city of Washington, and the proposed location of the fence would result in the privatization of the space as well as mar the open feel of the streetscape along this stretch of 13th Street.

13th Street is a highly trafficked street through the Columbia Heights neighborhood with a strong residential character. The proposed over-height fence is inconsistent with this character.

This application has also previously come before the Public Space Committee in September 2009. At that meeting, the PSC worked out a compromise solution with the applicant where a portion of the public space surrounding this property would be enclosed with an over-height fence. The application seeks to enclose additional public space.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The proposal for an over height fence in this neighborhood context is inappropriate. The fence should be limited to a maximum height of 42'' in accordance with public space regulations.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be denied. The applicant's proposed fence should be limited to a maximum height of 42''.

