

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: August 20, 2010

FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner

ADDRESS: 3232 Georgia Avenue NW

APPLICATION: Curb cut, driveway, elevated walkway, bike racks and landscaping

Site Information

Zone: GA/C-2-A

Historic District: No

CFA: No

Neighborhood Character: Neighborhood commercial district

Background:

The Office of Planning received the public space application for review on August 19th, 2010. The mixed-use project for this site was reviewed and approved by the Zoning Commission as a Planned Unit Development in 2008.

Relevant Policies of Planning Initiatives

Policy HP-2.5.4: Landscaped Yards in Public Space

Preserve the continuous and open green quality of landscaped front and side yards in public space. Take special care at historic landmarks and in historic districts to protect this public environment from intrusions, whether from excess paving, vehicular access and parking, high walls and fencing, or undue disruption of the natural contours or bermed terraces.

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.

Policy UD-3.1.7: Improving the Street Environment

Create attractive and interesting commercial streetscapes by promoting ground level retail and desirable street activities, making walking more comfortable and convenient, ensuring that sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate pedestrian traffic, minimizing curb cuts and driveways, and avoiding windowless facades and gaps in the street wall.

Public Realm Design Handbook: Features of the Public Realm

Vaults shall be located on private property whenever possible. If, for some compelling reason, a vault cannot be located on private property a permit for placing a vault in public space may be granted if:

1. The vault is located adjacent to ground floor retail in a commercial building and has a solid cover that is flush with the surrounding surface and matches the adjacent paving material.
2. The vault is located in the public parking zone adjacent to a residential building and is concealed on all sides facing the right-of-way by a landscaped buffer.
3. The vault is located in an alley and complies with building code requirements.

KEY ISSUES

The proposal is for a new driveway and curb cut for a mixed-use residential and retail building on Lamont Street, NW, at the corner of Georgia Avenue. The area of the new driveway is 300 square feet in public space. The width of the proposed driveway is 20 feet.

The block currently has a 15' alley. However, the applicant has proposed to close off a majority of the existing alley and provide a new alley adjacent to the new proposed building. The proposed width of the new curb cut to the relocated alley is 20'.

There is also a proposed 4' landscaped area at the curb along Lamont Street and Georgia Avenue. In addition, 10 bike racks are proposed with 4 on Lamont Street and 6 on Georgia Avenue. The bike racks are proposed to be placed on permeable pavers. Also a PEPCO vault is located on Georgia Avenue in Public Space that does not comply with District guidelines. According with regulations the vault should be located in the new alley, in public space and surrounded with landscaping, or in the sidewalk with a solid cover. In this instance, the sidewalk is not wide enough to allow the grated vault to be surrounded by landscaping, and the options for bringing the vault into compliance with District guidelines is to cover it with a solid top or relocate it to the alley..

An elevated walkway is also proposed along Lamont Street. It is 7' in width and 77' in length. Part of the elevated walkway is on private property, but over 3' is located in public space. The area of the elevated walkway in public space is 308 square feet. The elevated walkway in public space should be removed. It provides a sidewalk obstruction, and creates a privatization of Public Space. In addition, the walkway is a projection and not permitted in a commercial zone, and the PUD application that was reviewed and approved by the Zoning Commission did not include an elevated walkway as proposed in the Public Space application.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The new proposed curb cut and alley are appropriate for this site. Also proposed are landscaping, 10 bike racks and an elevated walkway. The elevated walkway should be removed as it causes an obstruction and is not in compliance with regulations. The proposed PEPCO vaults treatment in public space is also not consistent with District guidelines and should either be covered with a solid cover or relocated to the adjacent alley.

The Office of Planning recommends that curb cut in this application be approved, but that the elevated walkway and grated PEPCO vault in the sidewalk be denied.