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GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: February 21, 2010
TO: Public Space Committee
FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner
SUBJECT: 3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW

APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

Applicant: Federal Government

Location: The site of the proposed sign is located on Massachusetts Avenue, NW, at the western entrance to the Department of Homeland Security complex. With a 160' right-of-way, Massachusetts Avenue is one of the widest streets in the District. The site also has one of the widest public parking areas (40') along a public street, and is predominantly a wooded area.

Proposal: The applicant is proposing to install a sign that is 42'' in height, 66.5'' in length, and 6'' in width. The new sign will replace an existing one, and will be located just over 21' from the back of the curb.

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 the Comprehensive Plan and building code as part of completing this report:

Comprehensive Plan

Policy UD-2.2.5: Creating Attractive Facades

Create visual interest through well-designed building facades, storefront windows, and attractive signage and lighting. Avoid monolithic or box-like building forms, or long blank walls which detract from the human quality of the street.

Policy UD 3.1.1: Improving Streetscape Design

Improve the appearance and identify of the District's streets through the design of street lights, paved surfaces, landscaped areas, bus shelters, street "furniture", and adjacent building facades.

DCMR Title 12: Building Code

3107.7.8 Signs on public space. No structure or standard used as a sign, bulletin, or advertisement of any sort shall be built, placed, erected, hung, maintained, or left in or upon any street, avenue, alley, highway, footway, sidewalk, parking or other public space in the District of Columbia, unless

specifically approved by the code official, including the use of directional signs as described in Section 3107.6.6, in accordance with provisions of this Section.

KEY ISSUES

The height of the sign is 36'' and the width is 6''. The height of the base is 6'' and the width is 4''. The material of the sign is fabricated aluminum. Text is only on one side of the sign.

The intent of the District's regulations that limit signage in public space are intended to provide a consistent appearance and treatment that maintain continuous views along city streets, decreasing hidden corners, and consequently improving pedestrian safety. However, in this instance specific site conditions make it difficult to locate the proposed sign on private property and still have it be visible from the street. There is considerable distance between the curb and the property line (55') and the public space is heavily wooded. In addition, there is an existing sign at the proposed location that will be replaced.

The location of the proposed sign is appropriate for the unusual site conditions. The sign also does not dominate the public space, but rather is located in a natural wooded setting.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

While District regulations discourage locating signs in public space, the unusual width of Massachusetts Avenue and wooded character of the site make it difficult to locate a sign on private property and have it be visible from the street. As proposed, the size of the sign is appropriate and should have minimal impact to public space.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved.