

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: August 9, 2010
FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner
ADDRESS: 400 H Street NE
APPLICATION: Unenclosed sidewalk café for 31 tables and 62 seats

Site Information

Zone: HS/C-2-A
Historic District: No
CFA: No
Neighborhood Character: Neighborhood commercial district

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on August 3, 2010. This café is for the adjacent Tru Orleans restaurant. In July 2010, the Public Space Committee approved a sidewalk cafe at 401 H Street NE (the café seating area was on 4th Street, NE) and was approved with the conditions that it be reduced in size from 688 square feet to 396 square feet and that the café extend only 9'-6" from the bay projection and into public space.

A case for this site went to the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) on July 13, 2010 for a variance from the off-street parking requirements and a variance from the loading requirements to allow the renovation and addition to an existing one-story building at the site. The BZA case was approved.

Relevant Policies of Planning Initiatives

Policy T-2.4.4: Sidewalk Obstructions

Locate sidewalk cafes and other intrusions into the sidewalk so that they do not present impediments to safe and efficient pedestrian passage. Maintain sidewalk surfaces and elevations so that disabled or elderly pedestrians can safely use them. 410.8

Policy UD-3.1.8: Neighborhood Public Space

Provide urban squares, public plazas, and similar areas that stimulate vibrant pedestrian street life and provide a focus for community activities. Encourage the "activation" of such spaces through the design of adjacent structures; for example, through the location of shop entrances, window displays, awnings, and outdoor dining areas.

Policy UD-3.10: Sidewalk Cafes

Discourage the enclosure of sidewalk cafes in manner that effectively transforms them into indoor floor space. The design of sidewalk cafes should be compatible with the architectural qualities of the adjoining buildings, should complement the street environment, and should not impede pedestrian movement.

KEY ISSUES

The property is located in the H Street Corridor neighborhood on H Street, NE, between 4th and 5th Streets, NE. It is located in an area zoned HS/C-2-A. There is a medium level of pedestrian activity

during working hours and at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as mixed use residential and neighborhood serving commercial.

The sidewalk where the sidewalk café is proposed is located along 4th Street and is 25 feet wide. The adjacent business has no shop window projection. There are 6 feet at the curb set aside for tree boxes and other street furniture. This leaves 19 feet to accommodate for pedestrians and café seating. The proposed seating area includes 31 tables and 62 seats in an area that is 1083 square feet.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 11 feet. This leaves 8 feet of unobstructed sidewalk between the café and the 6 feet furniture zone at the curb. District regulations require a 10' clear pedestrian path adjacent to a sidewalk café, although the Public Space Committee has the authority to approve an adjacent clear pedestrian path of 6 feet. In addition, District regulations require that a café leave 10' clear sidewalk at street corners.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 1083 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 72 seats; the application is for 62 seats.

There is a 3' high metal fence proposed along the perimeter of the café. The fence must be at least fifty percent open and must be movable, so that it can be removed when the café is not in use.

After consultation with OP's Development Review staff, they indicated that there is an issue with parking of service and delivery vehicles. OP's Development Review staff recommended a couple of options. Either the applicant could provide a loading/service space next to the alley or have a 4th Street parking space designated as a loading zone during certain hours. The Public Space Committee should discuss this issue with the applicant.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial areas. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. However, District regulations require that there be a 10' clear pedestrian path at intersections, a standard that the Committee does not have flexibility to reduce. Providing a 10' clear pedestrian path at the corner will have a negligible reduction in square footage and will not cause a decrease in the number of seats allowed.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the conditions that a 10' clear pedestrian path is maintained at the corner of H and 4th Streets NE. In addition, that the proposed fence is no higher than 42", is fifty percent open and is movable.