

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: June 16, 2010
FROM: Chris Shaheen
ADDRESS: 425 - 7th Street, NW
APPLICATION: Unenclosed Sidewalk Cafe

Site Information

Zone: DD/C-4
Historic District: Downtown Historic District
CFA: N/A
Neighborhood Character: Central Business District

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on May 10, 2010. The proposed café has been reviewed and approved by historic preservation office staff. The application was heard by the Public Space Committee at the February 2010 hearing, but the application was withdrawn at the request of the applicant. This café is for the adjacent restaurant Carmines.

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 sidewalk where the sidewalk café is proposed is 17 feet wide; the adjacent business has no shop window projection. The proposed seating area includes 6 tables and 12 seats in an area that is 194 square feet. The seating area is surrounded by a decorative railing. There are an additional 3 tables and 6 seats located on private property.

The property is located in the Penn Quarter neighborhood on 7th Street, NW, between D and E streets, NW. It is located in an area zoned DD/C-4. The area has a high level of pedestrian activity

during working hours and a high level of pedestrian activity at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as being in the central business district.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 194 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 13 seats; the application is for 12 seats.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 4 feet. This leaves 8 feet between the café and a tree box at its most narrow point in the adjacent sidewalk. 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.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial area. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. In this application, the clear adjacent sidewalk with is less than the 10' required. However, the addition of a sidewalk café to further enliven a part of the city that is identified as its entertainment district may justify reducing the clear sidewalk requirement from 10 feet to 8 feet.

The Office of Planning's recommends that the sidewalk café application be approved as submitted.