

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: July 14, 2010

FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner

ADDRESS: 485 K Street NW

APPLICATION: Unenclosed sidewalk café for 9 tables and 36 seats

Site Information

Zone: DD/C-2-C

Historic District: No

CFA: No

Neighborhood Character: Mixed use

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on May 24, 2010. This café is for the adjacent Taylor Gourmet sandwich shop. This is the first sidewalk café application to be reviewed within the Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood.

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 Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood on K Street, NW, between 4th and 5th Streets, NW. It is located in an area zoned DD/C-2-C. There is medium level of pedestrian activity during working hours and at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as mixed use. The District recently completed streetscape guidelines for the Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood, with specific emphasis on the 49’ wide sidewalk along K Street. The streetscape for the corridor was designed to accommodate outdoor seating like what is proposed as part of this application.

The sidewalk where the proposed café is located is along K Street. The adjacent business has no shop window projection. As designed, the street has a 22' landscaped area in the center of two sidewalks, one being 16' wide and the other 8' wide. The landscaped area has paved areas for café seating, and the 16' sidewalk at the building façade is also wide enough to accommodate some café seating and still maintain a 10' adjacent clear sidewalk. The proposal include two seating areas – one along the building façade and one in the landscaped area - with a total of 9 tables, 36 seats, and a café area that is 428 square feet.

The café area along the building extends into the sidewalk 6 feet. This leaves 10 feet of adjacent unobstructed sidewalk. There second seating area includes 3 benches in the landscaped area. While the area is not immediately adjacent to the restaurant, it makes good use of the space and this kind of café use in the streetscape correlates to the Mount Vernon Triangle Transportation and Public Realm Design Project.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 428 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 29 seats; the application is for 36 seats.

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, the proposed seating located immediately adjacent to the business has too many seats for the amount of square footage. The number of seats should be reduced from 12 to 10. The bench seating should have a maximum of 18 seats for a total of 28 seats for both seating areas.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the condition that the seating immediately adjacent to the business have a maximum of 10 and the bench seating have a maximum of 18.