

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: June 16, 2008
FROM: Chris Shaheen
ADDRESS: 7750-16th Street, NW
APPLICATION: Church Sign

Site Information

Zone: R-1-A
Historic District: No
CFA: No
Neighborhood Character: Single Family Residential

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on May 7th, 2010.

Relevant Policies of Planning Initiatives

Comprehensive Plan

Policy HP-2.5.2: Historic Landscapes

Preserve the distinguishing qualities of the District's historic landscapes, both natural and designed. Protect public building and monument grounds, parks and parkway systems, government and institutional campuses, gardens, cemeteries, and other historic landscaped from deterioration and incompatible development.

Building Code

DCMR Title 12

3107.9.5.4 Church bulletins. Church bulletins shall not exceed 20 square feet (1.86 m²) in area for each church. When approved by the code official, church bulletins shall be allowed to be placed on public parking upon recommendation of the Public Space Committee.

3107.9.5.5 Non-profit organization. Signs for each school, college, hotel, philanthropic institution, non-profit organization, hospital, residential care facility or church, shall be limited to a total area not to exceed 40 square feet (3.73 m²).

KEY ISSUES

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, complement the green and park-like character of "public parking", decrease hidden corners, and consequently improve pedestrian safety.

The height of the sign is 2 feet and the width is 10 feet and 6 inches. The sign is mounted on two posts so that there is 1 foot and 2 inches of open space beneath the sign. The total height of the sign from the ground is 3 feet and 6 inches. The material of the sign is aluminum square tubes with an internally illuminated sign cabinet using LED illumination with routed out lettering on the face of

the sign. There is text on one side of the sign that reads, “Washington Ethical Society, A humanistic religious community, Join us on Sundays at 11:00 am, www.ethicalsociety.org, wonders child care center, fabrangen”. The total square footage of this sign is 21 square feet.

The public space where the sign is proposed to be located is on 16th Street, between Kalmia Road and Jonquil Street, and is 55 feet wide with 15 feet of sidewalk and 40 feet of “public parking”. 16th Street is a prominent gateway corridor into the District. Its dimensions and central median are part of a city plan developed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. The general character of public space in this area is residential with ample landscaping and front yards, and the surrounding neighborhood is characterized by large and substantial single-family homes.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning in general discourages signs in public space. However, where appropriate, signs should be located to minimize their appearance and be of high quality design. In this case, churches are permitted to have signs up to 20 square feet, a little less than the sign that is proposed. There is also a maximum of 40 square feet of signage for the institution, and it is not clear how much signage already exists for the facility and if the addition of this sign will exceed the maximum amount permitted under existing sign regulations.

The location of an internally lit box sign in a low-density residential neighborhood and along a prominent gateway to the nation’s capital raises some concern. An alternative lighting scheme that projects light onto the sign and not into adjacent residential homes should be considered.

The Office of Planning’s recommends that the sign be approved on the condition that the total amount of square footage for the facility does not exceed 40 square feet and that the lights for the sign do not shine out and onto adjacent residential homes.