

MEMORANDUM

TO: District of Columbia Board of Zoning Adjustment
FROM: Stephen Gyor AICP, Case Manager
 Joel Lawson, Associate Director Development Review
DATE: December 8, 2015

SUBJECT: BZA Case 19133 - variance relief to allow the construction of an addition for a church and a residential building at 1772 Church Road NW

I. OFFICE OF PLANNING RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Planning (OP) recommends **approval** of the following:

- § 532 Lot Occupancy (80% lot occupancy permitted; 86.7% lot occupancy proposed).

II. LOCATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Address	1772 Church Street NW (the “Subject Property”)
Applicant	J. River 1772 Church Street, LLC and St. Thomas Episcopal Parish (the “Applicant”)
Legal Description	Square 156, Lot 369
Ward	2
Lot Characteristics	The rectangular lot contains approximately 15,612 square feet of land area. The lot is bordered by Church Street to the north and 18 th Street to the west. A 12 foot public alley is located to the south.
Zoning	Dupont Circle Overlay, intended to, among other things, “Require a scale of development consistent with the nature and character of the Dupont Circle area in height and bulk; and to ensure a general compatibility in the scale of new buildings with older, low scale buildings by restricting the maximum permitted height and floor area ratio of new buildings to that of the underlying zone.” SP-1: Permits matter-of-right medium density development including all kinds of residential uses, and limited offices for non-profit organizations, trade associations and professionals if approved as a special exception by the Board of Zoning Adjustment.
Existing Development	The Subject Property is improved with the Parish Hall of St. Thomas’ Episcopal Parish. The Church has been at this location since 1894. The main church structure was lost to a fire in 1970. The remaining gable end wall, alter, and portions of side walls at the east end of the site were stabilized to serve as the backdrop to a small park owned by the Church and open to the public.

Historic District	Dupont Circle Historic District
Adjacent Properties	Immediately to the north are institutional offices and high-density apartment buildings. To the east along Church Street are row dwellings and flats. Directly west across 18th Street are chanceries and other institutional and/or office uses. One block further west toward Dupont Circle are institutional and retail uses and a high density office building. To the south across the alley are row dwellings, flats, and mid-size apartment buildings.
Surrounding Neighborhood Character	The surrounding area contains a mix of office buildings, chanceries, apartment buildings (moderate to high density), and row dwellings and flats. The Dupont Circle Metro station entrance is located approximately three blocks to the southwest.

III. APPLICATION IN BRIEF

The Applicant proposes to construct an addition to the existing St. Thomas Episcopal Church Parish Hall to create a new church facing 18th street and a residential building that incorporates the existing parish hall on Church Street. According to the Applicant, the existing Parish Hall is not an appropriate or adequate facility for church functions, and the residential portion of the project is necessary to finance church construction.

The church and the apartment buildings would function largely independently, but the Project would be connected and would be considered one building for zoning purposes. The building would include 56 units and a single level of underground parking with 36 spaces that would serve both the church building and the residential building.

At its July 30, 2015 meeting, the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) approved the project with the following conditions: 1) that the Applicant continues to work with staff in refining detailing on elevations to strengthen its pedestrian scale; 2) that the Applicants meet with staff and a member of the Board to review the revised 3-D views; 3) that the Applicants investigate taking further steps to insure that the height is minimized as much as possible along Church Street; and 4) that the Applicants work with staff to develop a landscape design along 18th Street to maximize the extent of vegetation.





IV. ZONING REQUIREMENTS and RELIEF REQUESTED

DC/SP-1 Zone	Regulation	Existing	Proposed	Relief
Height § 531	65 ft. max. (church) 70 ft. max. (residential)	35 ft.	65 ft. (church) 70 ft. (residential)	None required
Lot Width	NA	95 ft. x 165 ft.	95 ft. x 165 ft.	None required
Lot Area	NA	15,612 sf.	15,612 sf.	None required
Floor Area Ratio § 531	4.8 max.	11,650 gsf.	4.22	None required
Lot Occupancy § 532	80% max.	19%	86.7% on ground floor to 50.3% on top floor	Relief required
Rear Yard § 534	15 ft. min./ 2.5” per ft. ht.	None	Court in-lieu of yard	None required
Side Yard § 535	2” per ft. of height / 8 foot min.	6 ft. – 9 in. (existing – east)	6 ft. – 9 in. (existing) 7 ft. 4 in. (addition)	None required
Court § 536	15 ft. min. / 4” per ft.	3’-4’ (ex. @ Church St.)	See plans	None required

V. OFFICE OF PLANNING ANALYSIS

a. Variance Relief from § 532 (Lot Occupancy)

The Project would have a lot occupancy of 86.7%, which would exceed the permitted lot occupancy of 80%. However, the lot occupancy would be exceeded only at the lower floors of the Project (Floors 1-4), including those floors containing the proposed sanctuary and communal worship spaces. The proposed lot occupancy would be below the maximum permitted at residential levels 5-7 (see Exhibit G of the Applicant's September 1, 2015 submission).

i. Exceptional Situation Resulting in a Practical Difficulty

The Subject Property includes several characteristics which contribute to an exceptional situation:

- The property is improved with the existing Parish Hall located at one end of the property. The Parish Hall is a contributing building in the historic district, and must be retained as part of the Project.
- The design of the Project must be compatible with the Parish Hall and the historic district pursuant to HPRB review.
- The Church has a 120 year history at its present location.

These unique circumstances result in a practical difficulty for the Applicant:

- It would be practically difficult to create a historically compatible design that could accommodate all necessary first floor functions for the Church (including the sanctuary and communal worship spaces) while conforming to the lot occupancy limit.
- The historic Parish Hall and the proposed residential program would make it difficult to reduce the Project's lot occupancy on the lower floors. The Project would retain approximately 80% of the Parish Hall at the eastern end of the Property, including the building's façade, most of its side walls, and floor and roof assemblies.
- The lobby would need to be located in the new residential building because the building's core would need to extend vertically to the top of the building. Therefore, reducing the building's footprint on Floors 2-4 could result in an inefficient interior building circulation and layout.
- The Church and the residential program would need to be located in one building, an arrangement which would enable St. Thomas to construct a new church while remaining at its present location.

Maintaining a streetwall consistent with the adjacent buildings on Church Street and 18th Street, a requirement of HPRB, would leave the portion of the building adjacent to the alley to the south as the only potential area for a reduction in lot occupancy. However, the first floor of new construction for the residential building would need to accommodate both the residential program and the area for the parking ramp to the underground garage. In addition, the parking ramp would need to be located in the new building and adjacent to the alley, an area which would also include the trash room, bike room, and the loading platform. Therefore, it would be practically difficult for the Applicant to reduce the proposed building footprint in this area.

ii. No Substantial Detriment to the Public Good

The Applicant's proposal would not result in a substantial detriment to the public good. Overall, OP supports the proposed design, including the setbacks for the upper floors at the front, side, and rear. Significantly, the building would only exceed the permitted lot occupancy on the lower floors, and would have a proposed FAR less than would be permitted as a matter of right. The proposal includes multiple setbacks to minimize the appearance of the building as it rises above the Parish Hall and approaches the lower density rowhouses to the east. The two-story addition atop the main block of the Parish Hall has been designed with substantial setbacks to ensure that they would not be visible from street view.

The Office of Planning supports the HRPB's condition that the Applicants work to develop a landscape design along 18th Street to maximize the extent of vegetation.

iii. No Substantial Harm to the Zoning Regulations

The proposed Project's lot occupancy would not cause substantial harm to the Zoning Regulations and would be consistent with the general provisions of the SP District, which include the following:

500.2 The major purpose of the SP District shall be to act as a buffer between adjoining commercial and residential areas, and to ensure that new development is compatible in use, scale, and design with the transitional function of this zone district.

500.3 The SP District is designed to preserve and protect areas adjacent to Commercial Districts that contain a mix of row houses, apartments, offices, and institutions at a medium to high density, including buildings of historic and architectural merit.

The Project's restrained scale and setbacks from the residential areas should ensure that the Project would be an effective buffer and serve as a transition between the adjoining commercial and residential areas.

VI. COMMUNITY COMMENTS

As of this writing, comments from ANC 2B have not been submitted to the record.

Comments from several adjacent neighbors and community organizations in opposition to the proposed relief have been submitted to the record.