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GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: February 19, 2010
TO: Public Space Committee
FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner
SUBJECT: 1622 East Capitol Street, NE

APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

Applicant: Amanda McCartney (Authorized Agent)

Location: The site of the proposed sign is located on East Capitol Street, NE, at the corner of 17th Street, NE. The site is located in a R-4 zoning district. At 160th, East Capitol Street is one of the widest avenues in the District and a prominent gateway that frames a view of the dome on the Capitol building to the west. The site is also across the street from Eastern High School, which has a generous front yard area on East Capitol Street that is a defining feature of its campus. There is an existing church bulletin on the site that is approximately 3' wide by 6' tall, and has a total square footage of 18'.

Proposal: The applicant is proposing to install two church bulletin signs in public space at the corner of 17th Street and East Capitol Street. The brick base of both bulletins is capped with limestone, and is 4' high and 7' 11" wide. The sign portion of the bulletin includes a small internally lit box sign above a LED color display. The total height of the sign from ground level is 6'. Total square footage for both bulletins is 87 sq'.

BACKGROUND

The Office of Planning received the public space application for review on December 14, 2009.

BASIS OF REPORT

The Office of Planning (OP) has reviewed the application, considered existing site conditions and completed research on the site to prepare this report. OP also referred to the Comprehensive Plan, building code, and DDOT's Design and Engineering Manual as part of completing this report:

Comprehensive Plan

HP-2.5 Historic Landscapes and Open Space

More than almost any other feature, the exceptional width and openness of Washington's parks and streets define the basic character of the city. These spaces include the major monumental greenswards of the Mall, riverfront and street valley parks, and the green space of estates,

cemeteries, and campuses. Tree-lined streets and landscaped front yards unite many historic neighborhoods, and there are small green oases scattered throughout the city. Some are public owned, and others are private. Many provide the setting for historic buildings, creating a balance between the natural and built environment that is a unifying feature of the city. Such settings should be protected and maintained as significant landscape in their own right or as contributing features of historic landmarks and districts.

Policy LU-2.2.1: Code Enforcement as a Tool for Neighborhood Conservation

Recognize the importance of consistent, effective, and comprehensive code enforcement to the protection of residential neighborhoods. Housing, building, and zoning regulations must be strictly applied and enforced in all neighborhood of the city to prevent deteriorated, unsafe, and unhealthy conditions; reduce illegal activities; maintain the general level of residential use, densities, and height, and ensure that health and safety hazards are promptly corrected.

DCMR Title 12: Building Code

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.

KEY ISSUES

The intent of the District's regulations that limit signage in public space are intended to provide a consistent appearance and treatment that maintains continuous views along city streets, decreasing hidden corners, and consequently improving pedestrian safety. They also reinforce the park-like character of the city that is defined in part by generous landscaped areas along city streets. The church is located on East Capitol Street, an important gateway that should maintain high design integrity. The surrounding neighborhood is primarily residential in character.

The total square footage of the proposed signs exceeds the maximum allowed by the building code. The total allowed square footage for each church bulletin is 20 square feet, and the total square footage for allowed for any one church sign is 40 square feet. The two proposed single-sided signs are each 6' high, 7'11" wide and 8" deep, a total of 87 sq'. This is in addition to an existing church sign in public space that is approximately 3x6' and a total of 18 sq'. This greatly exceeds that amount of signage allowed for a church bulletin.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The intent behind both the building code and public space regulations is to limit the type and size of signs in public space. They protect the park-like character of the District's public space. The proposed signs are out of scale with the surrounding residential context, and greatly exceed the maximum allowable size according to District regulations. OP encourages the applicant to resubmit a proposal that is consistent with District regulations.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be denied.