



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Commission 2B

March 13, 2015

Gretchen Pfahler, Chair
Historic Preservation Review Board
Office of Planning
1100 4th Street, SW, Suite E650
Washington, DC 20024
historic.preservation@dc.gov

RE: HPA 14-530: 1772 Church Street, NW

Dear Chairwoman Pfahler:

At its regular meeting on March 11, 2015, the Dupont Circle Advisory Neighborhood Commission (“ANC 2B” or “Commission”) considered the above-referenced matter. With 9 of 9 Commissioners in attendance, a quorum at a duly-noticed public meeting, the Commission approved the following resolution by a vote of 7-0-2.

Whereas St. Thomas’ Parish Episcopal Church proposes to build a church at the intersection of 18th and Church Streets, NW, and developer CAS Riegler proposes to build a residential building facing Church Street at 1772 Church Street, NW;

Whereas, ANC 2B values the contributions St. Thomas’ Parish has made to the community;

Whereas, ANC 2B respects St. Thomas’ right to use the land at 1772 Church Street, NW for religious purposes without undue economic burden;

Whereas, 1772 Church Street, NW is included in the Dupont Circle Overlay District, the purpose of which is, among other things, to preserve and enhance the unique low scale, predominately residential and historic character, and independent small retail businesses of Dupont Circle, given the high-density development pressures caused by its proximity to the Central Employment Area and the Dupont Circle Metrorail Station;

Whereas, 1772 Church Street, NW is included in the Dupont Circle Historic District, and as such has protections to assure that alterations of existing structures are compatible with the character of the historic district, and to assure that new construction and subdivision of lots in an historic district are compatible with the character of the historic district;

Whereas the historic district and historic overlay designation supersedes the underlying zoning and may result in a development unable to maximize the height and density allowed by the underlying zoning;

Whereas at the HPRB hearing on October 2, 2014, HPRB members expressed concerns about both the church and residential components of the project as presented; and HPRB remanded the project with recommendations of changes needed to remedy deficiencies before submitting revised plans for its review;

Whereas ANC 2B believes changes made after the October 2, 2014 HPRB meeting do not adequately address concerns raised in the prior review by HPRB, including:

- HPRB's finding that the residential building's height, mass, and architectural character should be significantly redesigned to be more residential in character;
- HPRB's finding that significant further design work was needed to improve the church's relationship to the historic district;

Whereas the changes since previous concept design has pushed massing towards the public alley rather than re-conceptualizing the design;

Whereas the residential design as presented on March 4th, 2015 at the ANC 2B Zoning, Preservation, and Development Committee meeting would be supportable if the residential component in height or bulk were compatible with the historic character and texture of the Dupont Circle neighborhood and in particular with the 1700 block of Church Street, NW;

Whereas many residents of the Dupont Circle neighborhood have expressed opinions that the designs of the two structures do not relate as well to the street as other buildings in the historic district, lack pedestrian-scale detailing, interfere with sight lines and maintain a horizontal and "boxy" appearance;

Therefore, be it RESOLVED that ANC 2B recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board find the proposal compatible with the Dupont Circle Historic District if and only if the following is met:

Design and materials

- Alterations are made to the exterior design so that the corrugation of the Church Street buildings' facades and the rhythm of the Church Street buildings' roof lines are in scale with the surrounding buildings. In particular, design changes should be made to draw the eye more toward the church component of the project and to reduce the visual impact of the residential component;
- Alterations are made to make the church and residential exterior, materials and design more compatible with the historic character and scale of the neighborhood, representative of the remaining low density residential townhomes and buildings as intended by the

letter and the spirit of the Dupont Circle Overlay. ANC 2B finds that the buildings are too angular, too symmetrical and lack architectural character that would enable the buildings to blend into the neighborhood, particularly in relation to Church Street.

- While ANC 2B does believe that a more modern and varied design could be compatible in the neighborhood, the church and residential designs as they stand today need additional architectural features that echo the neighborhood's features, as illustrated by some of the buildings shown on page A-4 of the March 4, 2015 proposal. In particular, the articulation of the residential bays should be a more dramatic 4-5 feet offset to articulate the bays. The small, dark window panes throughout the residential component do not echo the rhythm of the street. With respect to the church, the horizontal terra cotta panels conflict with the vertical design elements and the campanile is strongly vertical, but is clad in short horizontal pieces, which is visually incongruent.

Massing and impact

- The residential building seen from adjacent at-grade vantage points including the entirety of Church Street, P Street, 18th Street, and the public alley between Church and P Streets be between 40 and 59 feet tall, including mechanicals, and maintain existing setbacks. This should be confirmed by a series of flag tests before substantial construction; ANC 2B understands this requirement may result in the reduction of total square footage of the residential component of the building and we encourage HPRB to limit the massing on the alley side;

- The project team considers a small setback, permanent easement, or other traffic circulation solution on the alley between the parking garage entrance and 18th Street to enhance mobility of alley users, more easily accommodate two-way traffic, and ameliorate congestion caused by the 33 new parking spaces, the purpose of which is to further enable the free circulation of vehicles and pedestrians through the public alley;

- The project team will prioritize green space on Church Street facade, and ANC2B recommends that any additional setbacks made are replaced with green space.

Future collaboration

- A committee led by ANC 2B—including neighbors, St. Thomas, the project team, and DCCA—continues to engage in proactively addressing zoning and quality-of-life related matters prior to a zoning hearing;

- The project team submits a study of the effects on traffic and congestion, both on the 1700 block of Church Street, NW and in the alley between that block and the 1700 block of P Street, NW, and develops strategies to ameliorate any negative impact prior to a zoning hearing;

- The project team hires a professional arborist and submits plans to the ANC and HPRB that include methods to protect and preserve existing trees to the extent possible and, where not possible, to replace them;

- The project team provides quarterly updates to the ANC on design, regulatory and project schedule changes until project completion.

Be it further RESOLVED that ANC 2B supports treating this project as including two separate structures, each of which is subject to the requirements of DC law and policy and each of which should comply with the letter and the spirit of historic preservation, zoning, and zoning overlay provisions.

Commissioners Justine Underhill (justine.underhill@anc.dc.gov), Daniel Warwick (daniel.warwick@anc.dc.gov), and Noah Smith (noah.smith@anc.dc.gov) are the Commission's representatives in this matter.

ON BEHALF OF THE COMMISSION.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Noah Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'N' and 'S'.

Noah Smith
Chairman

cc: steve.calcott@dc.gov; kim.elliott@dc.gov