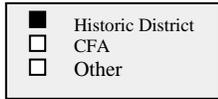


GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: February 21, 2010
TO: Public Space Committee
FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner
SUBJECT: 425-7th Street, NW – Sidewalk Cafe

APPLICATION-IN-BRIEF

- Applicant:** Alicart Restaurant Group (Jeffrey S. Owens, Authorized Agent)
- Location:** The property is located in a commercial area zoned DD/C-4, on the east side of the 400 block of 7th between D and E streets, NW. It is located along a prominent commercial corridor connecting the National Mall to the Chinatown entertainment district. The proposed seating is in an area along 7th Street, NW. The site is located within the Downtown Historic District and within the boundaries of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site. Drawings submitted with the application show the sidewalk width along this block of 7th Street is 15' and includes tree boxes that are roughly 4 x 8'.
- Proposal:** The applicant is requesting an unenclosed sidewalk café area with 9 tables, 18 seats, four planters, enclosure fence, and retractable awning. The proposed seating area is 55' long and extends 7' into public space, taking up a total of 395 sq'. At two locations the total clear passage for pedestrians in the sidewalk is narrowed to 4'.

BACKGROUND

The application was submitted to the DDOT public space permitting office on December 20th 2009. The Office of Planning received this public space application on January 22, 2010. The application indicates that the proposed sidewalk café has not been reviewed by the Historic Preservation Office.

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 several policies in the Comprehensive Plan and other District regulations as part of completing this report:

Policy UD-3.1.2: Management of Sidewalk Space

Preserve the characteristically wide sidewalks of Washington's commercial districts. Sidewalk space should be managed in a way that promotes pedestrian safety, efficiency, comfort, and provides

adequate space for tree boxes. Sidewalks should enhance the visual character of streets, with landscaping and buffer planting used to reduce the impacts of vehicle traffic.

Policy UD-3.1.7: Improving the Street Environment

Create attractive and interesting commercial streetscapes by promoting ground level retail and desirable street activities, making walking more comfortable and convenient, ensuring that sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate pedestrian traffic, minimizing curb cuts and driveways, and avoiding windowless facades and gaps in the street wall.

KEY ISSUES

The proposed site for this café is located within a C-4 zoning district, one of the highest zoning classifications in the city. It is specific to the downtown and intended to create a built environment comprising the retail and office center for the District of Columbia and the metropolitan area. The area is one of the most dense in the region and includes a mix of high-density office and residential buildings. 7th Street is also a significant pedestrian and transportation corridor that is used to connect the National Mall to Chinatown/Gallery Place, the District's premier entertainment area. There are very high levels of pedestrian activity along 7th Street.

There are several sidewalk width guidelines that need to be considered for this application:

- The District's *Public Realm Design Handbook* calls for a minimum sidewalk width of 10' in commercial areas;
- The District's public space regulations specify that sidewalk width adjacent to sidewalk cafes should be 10'; and,
- *Downtown Streetscape Regulations* call for a minimum sidewalk width of 16'.

With an existing sidewalk width of 15', the sidewalk is already less than what is required in the *Downtown Streetscape Regulations*. The 4' tree box and furnishing area at the curb further limits the width of the sidewalk in some areas to 11', just over the 10' sidewalk width called for in the *Public Realm Design Handbook* and public space regulations. The Public Space Committee has the authority to narrow the sidewalk adjacent to a sidewalk café to 6', but the high amount of pedestrian traffic along 7th Street make a clear sidewalk passage less than 10' difficult to justify. (The current proposal includes two locations where the sidewalk narrows down to an unacceptable 4'.)

However, sidewalk cafes and outdoor dining areas are a welcome addition to the District's public space. They are one of the few tools available to activating city streets and creating a lively public realm. OP encourages the applicant to consider locating sidewalk seating at the curb, a strategy that has been used for sidewalk cafes on nearby E and F Street where there are also narrow sidewalks. This placement of tables and chairs - located between tree boxes - can result in a more efficient use of public space that maintains a wider clear pedestrian passage.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The narrow condition of the sidewalk at this site and high level of pedestrian activity along 7th Street, NW, make it difficult to justify approving a sidewalk café in public space that narrows the clear pedestrian passageway to less than 10'.

OP recommends that this application be denied and encourages the applicant to consider a more creative layout with fewer tables and chairs that could result in maintaining a 10' clear pedestrian passage in the sidewalk.