

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: June 14, 2010
FROM: Chris Shaheen
ADDRESS: 653 Pennsylvania Avenue SE
APPLICATION: Unenclosed Sidewalk Cafe

Site Information

Zone: CHC/C-2-A
Historic District: Capital Hill Historic District
CFA: No
Neighborhood Character: Neighborhood Commercial

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on April 22, 2010. There is no record of this proposed café being reviewed and approved by historic preservation office staff. In October 2008, the Public Space Committee approved a sidewalk café at 633 Pennsylvania and required an adjacent sidewalk width of 10 feet. This café is for a business with a Certificate of Occupancy for a restaurant or grocery store.

Relevant Policies of Planning Initiatives

Policy T-2.4.4: Sidewalk Obstructions

Locate sidewalk cafes and other intrusions into the sidewalk so that they do not present impediments to safe and efficient pedestrian passage. Maintain sidewalk surfaces and elevations so that disabled or elderly pedestrians can safely use them. 410.8

Policy UD-3.1.8: Neighborhood Public Space

Provide urban squares, public plazas, and similar areas that stimulate vibrant pedestrian street life and provide a focus for community activities. Encourage the “activation” of such spaces through the design of adjacent structures; for example, through the location of shop entrances, window displays, awnings, and outdoor dining areas.

Policy UD-3.10: Sidewalk Cafes

Discourage the enclosure of sidewalk cafes in manner that effectively transforms them into indoor floor space. The design of sidewalk cafes should be compatible with the architectural qualities of the adjoining buildings, should complement the street environment, and should not impede pedestrian movement.

KEY ISSUES

The sidewalk where the sidewalk café is proposed is 15 feet wide; the adjacent business has a shop window projection that extends 3 feet into public space. The proposed seating area includes 8 tables and 16 seats in an area that is 119 square feet.

The property is located in the Capital Hill neighborhood on Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, between 6th and 7th Streets, SE. It is located in an area zoned CHC/C-2-A. There is a moderate level of

pedestrian activity during working hours and moderate level of pedestrian activity at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as residential with neighborhood serving commercial areas.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 119 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 8 seats; the application is for 16 seats.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 9 feet. This leaves 2 ½ feet between the café and a tree box at its most narrow point. District regulations require a 10' clear pedestrian path adjacent to a sidewalk café, although the Public Space Committee has the authority to approve an adjacent clear pedestrian path of 6 feet.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. However, the application is located in the Capital Hill Historic District and there is no record of this being reviewed and approved by the historic preservation staff. The clear adjacent sidewalk width of 2 ½ feet is significantly less than the 6 feet minimum required. At the most, the seating area for this café can extend 3 feet into public space. This would allow for a seating area of approximately 38 feet and a total number of 2 seats. However, based on existing site conditions, the site could accommodate two tables and 4 seats.

The Office of Planning's recommends the application be approved with the condition that the seating area be reduced to maintain an adjacent clear sidewalk of 6 feet, that the number of tables be reduced to 2, and the number of seats be reduced to 4.