

ANC 6A Economic Development & Zoning Committee
Wednesday January 20, 2010, 7-9:00 PM
Sherwood Recreation Center (640 10th St, NE)
2nd Floor Community Room

Committee Members: Drew Ronneberg, Chair; Jeff Fletcher; Dan Golden; Arkan Haile; Cody Rice;
Commissioners present: David Holmes (6A03), Kelvin Robinson (6A08)

7:00 pm Call to order

Community Comments

Drew Ronneberg announced that he was running for 6A02 Commissioner. The special election will be held at the Feb 11th ANC meeting.

Ongoing Status Reports:

- 1) H Street Connection Redevelopment: Drew Ronneberg informed the committee that the Transportation and Public Space Committee had made recommendations to the full ANC regarding the project.
- 2) Dan Golden reported the Ruben Pemberton, the director of the Vacant Property Taskforce, would be presenting to the ED&Z committee about recent changes in the taxing of vacant properties in DC.

New Business

ZA 03-02A: Gallaudet University (Denison House)

Mr. Chris Collins of Holland and Knight and representatives from Gallaudet University presented plans to convert the Denison House, which is located on the Gallaudet campus from administrative to residential use. Gallaudet University is located in ANC 5B but because ANC 6A is within 200 feet of the campus, it receives party status at zoning hearings.

Gallaudet is somewhat unusual in that it has its own historic district, of which the Denison House is a contributing building. The 7000 sq. ft. building was built circa 1875 as a residence for faculty and students. It was later converted to administrative use and renovated in the 1990s.

The University is not proposing any modifications to the building that would affect its external appearance. They are interested in developing the building as a "College House" student resident hall, where 10-12 honor students and a faculty advisor implement a cross-disciplinary academic or community service program.

Gallaudet requires special exception zoning relief because it is proposing to modify an approved campus plan. The committee felt that the applicant met the conditions of the special exception and recommends that ANC 6A support the requested zoning relief.

Recommendation: ANC 6A support Gallaudet University's zoning application to amend its approved campus plan to allow the conversion of Denison House from administrative to residential use.

HPA 10-109: 324 & 326 12th St NE

Mr. Kenric Walwyn and Mr. John Casey presented plans to develop 324 & 326 12th St NE. Prior HPA cases regarding this property had heard by the ED&Z committee in 2003 and 2005. The current plans are very similar to the 2005 plans where there are two flats (4 units total). The plans show a façade with a bay window and articulated cornice on each flat.

The committee asked about the parking in the rear of the buildings. Zoning regulations requires 1 off-street parking spot for each flat, while the plans showed two parking spots on the southern lot and an inaccessible parking spot on the northern lot. The developer said that the parking requirements could be accommodated with an easement.

The abutting neighbors were in the audience and expressed support for the project.

Recommendation: ANC 6A write a letter of support to HPRB for the design of 324 and 326 12th St NE.

2010 ED&Z Goals

Draft 2010 ED&Z Goals were presented to the committee and accepted without changes.

Recommendation: ANC 6A accept the ED&Z proposed 2010 Goals.

Vacant Properties

Mr. Reuben Pemberton, director of the Vacant Property Taskforce at DCRA spoke to the committee about recent changes to the Vacant Property tax rates and upcoming legislation being considered by the city council. Under the recent changes to the law, vacant commercial properties are assessed at the same rate as occupied commercial properties, but vacant residential properties are assessed at the rate of commercial properties. It appears that Jack Evans will introduce a bill to remove the higher assessment for vacant residential properties so that only “blighted” properties will be assessed at a higher rate.

Mr. Pemberton said that while the 10% tax rate on vacant properties was effective in getting properties sold or reoccupied it was a difficult law to administer. He said that the exemption process, by which a property owner could receive an exemption for having the property for sale, obtaining a building permit or for other reasons, was very time consuming for his staff and an inefficient process. In addition, Mr. Pemberton said that he is a “softie” for granting hardship exemptions (basically a catch-all exemption for items not covered in the law).

Mr. Pemberton advocated a vacant property system where there were no exemptions and vacant properties were required to pay a standard modest fee that would increase over time. He claimed that the city could recoup some of the lost revenue through fines for not complying with the requirements for securing and maintaining vacant properties.

Many committee members were skeptical of the idea of not assessing vacant properties at a higher rate, which was an effective strategy for countering land speculation. For example, it would almost completely remove the financial incentive for owners of vacant properties on H Street to reoccupy or sell their places. The committee agreed to discuss the issue in greater detail at the next ED&Z meeting.

NEXT MEETING

ANC 6A Economic Development & Zoning Committee

Wednesday February 17, 2010, 7-9:00 PM

Sherwood Recreation Center (640 10th St, NE)

2nd Floor Community Room