

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: July 12, 2010

FROM: Joshua Ghaffari

ADDRESS: 1319 F Street NW

APPLICATION: Unenclosed sidewalk café for 9 tables and 18 seats

Site Information

Zone:DD/C-4

Historic District: Pennsylvania Avenue

CFA: No

Neighborhood Character: Downtown commercial district

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on June 7, 2010. The proposed café has been reviewed and approved by historic preservation office staff. In November 2008, the Public Space Committee approved with conditions a sidewalk cafe at 927 F Street NW.

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 property is located Downtown on F Street, NW, between 13th and 14th Streets, NW. It is located in an area zoned DD/C-4. There is high level of pedestrian activity during working hours and at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as commercial.

The sidewalk where the café is proposed to be located is along F Street and is 20 feet wide. The adjacent business has no shop window projection. There is 4 feet at the curb set aside for tree boxes and other street furniture. This leaves 16 feet to accommodate pedestrians and café seating. The proposed seating area includes 9 tables and 18 seats in an area that is 342 square feet.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 306 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 23 seats; the application is for 18 seats.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 9 feet. This leaves 7 feet of unobstructed sidewalk between the café and the 4 foot furniture zone at the curb. District regulations require a 10' clear pedestrian path adjacent to a sidewalk cafe. In the central downtown area it is particularly important to maintain at least a 10' clear pedestrian path.

In addition, the application proposes planters along the perimeter of the café. The height of the planters is not clear from the submitted drawings.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial areas. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. The proposed café is a welcome addition to this neighborhood.

However, the sidewalk café square footage and number of seats needs to be reduced. The café needs to be reduced from extending 9 feet to only 6 feet into the sidewalk, which will provide an adjacent 10' clear pedestrian path. The reduced dimensions for the café would be 6 feet x 34 feet, resulting in a new square foot area of 204 for the café that will allow a maximum of 14 seats.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the conditions that the sidewalk café square footage be reduced to a maximum of 204, which allows for an adjacent 10' clear pedestrian path and a maximum of 14 seats.