

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT



Application No. 14904 of the Society of Mount Carmel, Inc., pursuant to 11 DCMR 3108.1, for a special exception under Sub-section 214.1 to allow an addition to the House of Studies in an R-1-B District at premises 1600 Webster Street, N.E., (Square 4170, Parcel 147/188).

HEARING DATE: October 12, 1988  
DECISION DATE: November 2, 1988

FINDINGS OF FACT:

1. The property is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of 17th and Webster Streets and is known as premises 1600 Webster Street, N.E. It is zoned R-1-B.

2. The property is rectangular in shape and contains approximately 12,382.69 square feet of lot area. The west side of the property borders the Benedictine Abbey and School and is heavily wooded. To the north, east, and south of the site are single family dwellings typical of the R-1-B District.

3. The site is currently improved with a three-story brick structure containing approximately 30,000 square feet of floor area. The building was constructed in approximately 1940 for use as a residence and school for men studying for priesthood in the Carmelite Order of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1968, the Carmelites joined the Washington Theological Union and relocated the education functions of the facility to Silver Spring, Maryland. The subject structure has been used exclusively as a religious group residence since that time.

4. The existing structure contains seventy-eight bedrooms, as well as several common areas including a chapel, dining room/kitchen, living room, library and meeting rooms.

5. The applicant is seeking special exception relief in order to renovate the existing building and construct a one-story addition containing approximately 10,000 square feet of floor area.

6. The proposed renovation and addition will permit the enlargement of the existing bedrooms, some of which are as small as seven feet by eleven feet, and the relocation and

enlargement of existing communal spaces, most of which are currently located in the basement of the building.

7. The proposed renovation and addition will result in a reduction in the current number of bedrooms from seventy-eight to forty-three. No increase in the use of the building or the number of occupants is proposed.

8. The applicant is currently providing eighteen on-site parking spaces at the rear of the building which are accessed via an existing service drive from Webster Street. The applicant proposes to provide a new driveway entered from 17th Street to the proposed new formal entrance. The new parking lot will contain eighteen parking spaces.

9. The applicant testified that the proposed driveway location would reinforce the new formal entrance located in the proposed addition. Currently, the majority of people access the building from the service entrance near the parking lot at the rear of the building, rather than the existing formal entrance which is not as easily accessible from the parking area.

10. The applicant testified that the proposed driveway location would have minimal impacts on the immediate area in that no increased traffic on 17th Street would occur because the residents currently use 17th Street enroute to the Washington Theological Union in Silver Spring and the removal of two or three trees would not have an adverse visual impact because of the other existing trees, the narrow width and oblique angle of the driveway, and the fact that the view would be of the front rather than the rear of the structure.

11. The applicant's traffic consultant testified that the proposed driveway location was the safest and most appropriate compared with the existing driveway entrance on Webster Street and the alternative entrance at the 17th and Allison Street intersection. The traffic consultant testified that the location of the current driveway merely twenty-five feet from the 17th Street intersection represented a minimally acceptable distance in terms of safety. The potential for traffic accidents on Webster Street, with cars turning left out of the driveway and turning right from 17th Street is still very high. This danger is significantly reduced at the proposed location on 17th Street, since the driveway would be 200 feet from the intersection of Webster Street and 150 feet from the intersection of Allison Street. Furthermore, the proposed location is safer since 17th Street has only 16 percent of the traffic volume of Webster Street. Webster Street links two major arterials in north-east Washington, Michigan Avenue and South Dakota Avenue, whereas 17th Street is only two blocks long and links two residential streets. The traffic consultant also evaluated the alternative driveway location at the intersection of

17th and Allison Streets. A driveway there would create a four-way intersection with 24 potential points of conflict, as opposed to only 6 at a T-intersection which would be created at the proposed driveway location.

12. The applicant's architect testified that, of the three driveway locations studied, the proposed 17th Street location was superior for both aesthetic and practical reasons. The proposed 17th Street location of the driveway would serve to reinforce the new formal entrance to the building as it is on axis with the proposed entrance and would resolve the problem of entering the building through the service door as has been the case for many years. To bring the driveway in from the existing entrance on Webster Street would perpetuate the undesirable condition of approaching the building via the service driveway. It would mean that the entire parking lot would have to be traversed before getting a glimpse of where the building should be entered. To bring the driveway in from the Allison Street intersection, while not traversing a parking lot, would involve a series of awkward left - and right-hand turns. It would also put the driveway entrance in the direct line of vision from the chapel. Either driveway entrance, other than in the proposed location, would involve much additional paving -- which would be parallel to and redundant with 17th Street. With respect to the houses across the street from the proposed driveway location, the architect testified that car headlights could not shine into the house windows since the window sills were calculated to be at least five feet above grade. The architect pointed out that the condition that would be created on 17th Street, with a driveway across from someone's house, has existed for forty years without complaint on Webster Street. The architect explained that the impact of the 20 foot gap in the treeline on 17th Street, necessitated by the proposed driveway, would be minimal since the opening would generally be viewed obliquely. In conclusion, the architect pointed out that the issues of drainage and rush-hour traffic were completely independent of the location of a driveway entering the Carmelite property.

13. The Office of Planning (OP) by memorandum dated October 4, 1988 recommended approval of the application with the condition that the driveway entrance be relocated to the intersection of 17th and Allison Streets, N.E. The Office of Planning was of the opinion that the proposed one-story rear addition to the subject structure, along with the parking lot, will not have a negative impact on the neighborhood and will generally be in harmony with the purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and Map. Relative to the proposed location of the driveway accessing the parking lot, however, the Office of Planning was of the opinion that the new driveway would be better located at Allison Street for safety reasons, since turning movements already exist at the intersection, and because trees and

parking spaces would be saved on 17th Street directly across from the houses between Webster and Allison Streets.

14. Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 5A did not submit written issues and concerns into the record as required by 11 DCMR 3307 and is therefore not entitled to "great weight".

15. At the public hearing, a representative of Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) 5A, the Queens Chapel Civic Association, and several nearby residents testified in opposition to the location of the proposed driveway on 17th Street. The opposition did not relate to the proposed addition in general but related exclusively to the adverse impacts created by the proposed 17th Street location of the driveway as follows:

- a. The proposed driveway on 17th Street would eliminate existing on-street parking spaces and trees on the west side of the street.
- b. The paving associated with the location of the proposed driveway at either proposed new location would exacerbate existing storm drainage problems in the area.

The concensus of the opposition was that the driveway should remain in its existing location on Webster Street.

16. In addressing the issues and concerns of the opposition, the Board finds that the proposed addition and continued use of the building as a residence for the Carmelite Order will not adversely affect neighboring property. However, the Board is persuaded by the testimony of the opposition that in order to avoid possible adverse impacts, the driveway should remain at its Webster Street location.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND OPINION:

Based on the foregoing findings of fact and the evidence of record, the Board concludes that the applicant is seeking a special exception, the granting of which requires that the applicant demonstrate substantial compliance with the criteria set forth in Sections 3108.1 and 214.1. The Board concludes that the applicant has met its burden of proof.

The Board concludes that, as hereinafter conditioned, the use of the premises as a religious residence shall not adversely affect the use of neighboring property and that the amount and arrangement of parking spaces are adequate. The facility has existed at this location for many years and no increase in residents or usage is proposed.

The Board further concludes that the application can be granted as in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Regulations and that the relief sought, as hereinafter conditioned, will not tend to adversely affect the use of neighboring property. Accordingly, it is ORDERED that the application is GRANTED SUBJECT to the CONDITION that the driveway remain in its Webster Street location.

VOTE: 4-0 (Charles R. Norris, William F. McIntosh, and Carrie L. Thornhill to grant; Lloyd Smith to grant by proxy; Paula L. Jewell not voting, not having heard the case).

BY ORDER OF THE D.C. BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT

ATTESTED BY:

  
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EDWARD L. CURRY  
Executive Director

FINAL DATE OF ORDER:

JAN 27 1989

UNDER 11 DCMR 3103.1, "NO DECISION OR ORDER OF THE BOARD SHALL TAKE EFFECT UNTIL TEN DAYS AFTER HAVING BECOME FINAL PURSUANT TO THE SUPPLEMENTAL RULES OF PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE BEFORE THE BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT."

THIS ORDER OF THE BOARD IS VALID FOR A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS AFTER THE EFFECTIVE DATE OF THIS ORDER, UNLESS WITHIN SUCH PERIOD AN APPLICATION FOR A BUILDING PERMIT OR CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY IS FILED WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS.

14904order/BHS2