

Docket Item # 6
SPECIAL USE PERMIT #2003-0106

Planning Commission Meeting
January 6, 2004

ISSUE: Consideration of a request for a special use permit to operate a private/fraternal club.

APPLICANT: Stepping Stones, Inc.
by Harry Hart, attorney

LOCATION: 2000 Jefferson Davis Highway

ZONE: CSL/Commercial Service Low

I. DISCUSSION

REQUEST

The applicant, Stepping Stones, Inc, represented by attorney Harry Hart, requests special use permit approval for the operation of a private club located at 2000 Jefferson Davis Highway.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject property is one lot of record with approximately 231 feet of frontage on Jefferson Davis Highway, 51 feet of depth along Howell Avenue and 77 feet along Windsor Avenue, and a total lot area of 15,160 square feet. The site is developed with a two story 11,270 square foot commercial/industrial building and a parking lot. The building is divided into four interior tenant spaces; the proposed use will occupy the second tenant space from the south.

SURROUNDING USES

Residential properties are located south and west of the subject site. A florist business is situated to the north and the Potomac Yard occupies the area east of Jefferson Davis Highway. The adjacent tenant space within the subject building is currently vacant but is proposed to be occupied by a dog care center. The two remaining tenant spaces to north are occupied with a printing company and a photography studio.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant requests approval to operate a private club called Stepping Stones, Inc. The applicant will occupy an approximately 2,400 square feet tenant space as shown on the attached plan. The subject property is currently vacant but was previously occupied by offices, a music studio and publishing company. The organization is looking for a new site because it lost its lease for its original and previous location, 2417 Mt. Vernon Avenue, when a new owner purchased that building in June 2002. Although City Council granted special use permit #2002-0081 on October 19, 2002, to operate the Stepping Stones club at 3400 Commonwealth Avenue, the permit was never implemented and is no longer active.

Business program: Stepping Stones, Inc. is a non-stock corporation, organized under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, that serves and supports individuals in their recovery from the disease of alcoholism and other substance abuse. It serves people living in Alexandria and surrounding communities. Stepping Stones was formed in 1993. It has operated continuously in Alexandria since that time.

Stepping Stones operations primarily include the provision of (a) a meeting space for 12-Step program meetings, (b) a space for meetings of the management of the corporation, (c) a site for occasional socials in support of the program's goals (e.g. pot-luck dinners in conjunction with a meeting and dances), (d) periodic yard sales in support of fund-raising activities, and (e) a forum for dissemination of information and knowledge about the disease of alcoholism and other substances.

Hours of operation: Stepping Stones will operate seven days a week during the following hours:

Monday through Friday	7:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M.
Saturday	8:15 A.M. to 10:00 P.M.
Sunday	10:15 A.M. to 10:00 P.M.

The range of hours is based upon schedules of established meetings that begin at 7:00 A.M., 12:00 noon, 5:30 P.M. and 8:30 P.M. every workday. On Saturdays, the first meeting starts at 8:30 A.M.; on Sundays, the first meeting starts at 10:30 A.M. All meetings last one hour and are scheduled to accommodate people in the work force and those attempting to get back into it.

Staff: The applicant states that between one and two volunteer managers will be on duty at any one time during the hours of operation.

Members: The applicant estimates that up to 100 people will visit Stepping Stones at 2000 Jefferson Davis Highway each day. Because the tenant space is equipped only with one exit, no more than 50 persons may be present at any one time. In the following breakdown, the applicant bases its meeting attendance information on over nine years' experience.

Mon.– Fri.	7:00 A.M. to 8:00 A.M.	15 to 20 people
	12:00 P.M. to 1:00 P.M.	15 to 25 people
	5:30 P.M. to 6:30 P.M.	40 to 50 people
	8:30 P.M. to 9:30 P.M.	10 to 15 people
Saturday	8:30 A.M. to 9:30 A.M.	15 to 20 people
	12:00 P.M. to 1:00 P.M.	15 to 25 people
	5:30 P.M. to 6:30 P.M.	40 to 50 people
	8:30 P.M. to 9:30 P.M.	10 to 15 people
Sunday	10:30 A.M. to 11:30 A.M.	15 to 20 people
	12:00 P.M. to 1:00 P.M.	15 to 25 people
	5:30 P.M. to 6:30 P.M.	40 to 50 people
	8:30 P.M. to 9:30 P.M.	10 to 15 people

Staff notes that the applicant can provide additional exits, subject to code enforcement's approval, to allow for up to 75 attendees at special events twice a month. Condition # 5 has been added to that effect.

Noise: According to the applicant, there are possible noise impacts from patrons congregating in front of the building to chat immediately before and after scheduled meetings. The applicant also added that the management monitors and controls such gatherings to minimize any adverse impact on immediate surroundings. Additionally, the location of the building's entrance towards Jefferson Davis Highway will minimize any potential nuisances to residential neighbors.

Trash: Garbage will be minimal and collected once a week by a private contractor. Litter will be monitored by the organization's management and staff volunteer manager on duty.

PARKING

Required Parking: Section 8-200(A)(7) of the zoning ordinance requires one parking space for each 200 square feet of floor area devoted to the private club/fraternal organization. Stepping Stones intends to occupy 2,400 square feet of the subject building and is required to provide 12 parking spaces. However, staff believes that this technical requirement does not necessarily provide enough parking spaces for meetings or special events with 40 to 50 attendees.

The applicant notes that based on previous inquiries among Stepping Stones members, approximately 30% used alternative transportation modes, such as public transportation or walking for their travels to meetings. In conversations between the applicant and staff, the applicant agreed to encourage its staff and members to use mass transit or to car pool when traveling to and from the club, by posting information regarding DASH and METRO routes, the location where fare passes for transit are sold, and the advertising of car pooling opportunities.

Based on the size of the meetings and the relatively high potential for transit use, staff has told the applicant to provide at least 22 parking spaces.

Provided Parking: In addition to the efforts to minimize parking demand, the applicant states that two on-site parking spaces are available to its staff and members at any one time. Two additional spaces for a total of four spaces are available if not occupied by the remaining tenants. A total of twelve on-site spaces can be provided during such times that the three remaining businesses are closed. In order to accommodate additional parking demand, the applicant proposes to provide 20 off-site parking spaces as shown on the attached map. The parking lot is situated within 300 feet, as permitted by code section 8-200 (C), at the Potomac Yard, which is located on the east side of Jefferson Davis Highway.

ZONING

The subject property is located in the CSL/Commercial service low zone. Section 4-303 (K) of the zoning ordinance allows a fraternal or private club in the CSL zone only with a special use permit.

MASTER PLAN

The subject property is governed in part by the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan, which designates the property for commercial low use.

II. STAFF ANALYSIS

Staff has no objection to the proposed Stepping Stones Club at 2000 Jefferson Davis Highway. The proposed use is compatible with the surrounding commercial and light industrial uses along Davis Jefferson Highway.

Staff believes that potential impacts on residential neighbors have been addressed. In its previous location on Mount Vernon Avenue, such impacts consisted mainly of members congregating outside the building before and after meetings. The proposed location at 2000 Jefferson Davis Highway will minimize such impacts due to the building's orientation towards Route 1. Furthermore, the applicant proposes to be proactive in addressing and accommodating any neighbors' concerns.

Staff's main concern regarding this application is parking. However, after careful consideration of available parking options, the number of members and the hours of operation, staff believes that the applicant has found an adequate parking solution through a combination of on-site and off-site spaces.

The proposed parking lot is permitted under zoning and is consistent with the Potomac Yard Concept Plan CDD #99-01, Condition #19, which allows interim uses as long as they do not preclude development consistent with the conceptual design plan. A walkway on the west side of Route 1 and a pedestrian signal at the intersection of East Howell Avenue and Route 1 connect the two properties. The applicant agrees to provide a parking lot with adequate surface, access and signs as required by the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services. Staff notes and the applicant is aware that the proposed parking lot is a temporary solution due to the likely future redevelopment of the Potomac Yard site. Stepping Stones understands that the validity of a granted special use permit will be subject to the club having exclusive use of such spaces. Staff has included a condition to that effect. In conclusion, with between 22 (2 on-site, 20 off-site) and 32 (12 on-site, 20 off-site) parking spaces the applicant appears to have sufficient parking for the use.

As to the subject site's parking lot at 2000 Jefferson Davis Highway, the owner of the property has been working with staff to accommodate the tenant's parking demand and to improve the condition of the site. He has agreed to stripe the parking lot pursuant to Condition # 14, and to plant landscaping as required by the Department of Parks and Recreation listed in Condition # 15.

Lastly, staff has included a condition requiring the applicant to encourage its staff and members to use mass transit or to car pool when traveling to and from the club, by posting information regarding DASH and METRO routes, the location where fare passes for transit are sold, and the advertising of car pooling opportunities.

With these conditions, staff recommends approval of the special use permit.

III. RECOMMENDED PERMIT CONDITIONS

1. The special use permit shall be granted to the applicant only or to any corporation in which the applicant has a controlling interest. (P&Z)
2. The hours of operation for meetings shall be limited to 7:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M., Monday through Friday, 8:15 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. on Saturday, and from 10:15 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. on Sunday. (P&Z)
3. The applicant shall post the hours of operation at the front entrance of the organization. (P&Z)
4. The maximum number of patrons permitted on-site at any time shall not exceed 50. (P&Z) (CE)
5. Social functions shall be allowed twice a month and shall end no later than 10:00 P.M. on the day the function is held. A total number of 75 persons shall be permitted for such events if the applicant has provided a sufficient number of exits, subject to approval by the Department of Code Enforcement. (P&Z) (CE)
6. A manager shall be present on-site at all times during approved hours of operation and the manager or liaison shall be responsible to the neighborhood for inquiries, comments and complaints. The phone number and address of the club manager or liaison shall be made available to the adjoining neighborhood associations and the adjoining neighbors. (P&Z)
7. Two designated parking spaces shall be provided on-site. Ten additional spaces shall be made available to Stepping Stones, Inc. during such times that the building's remaining businesses are closed. 20 additional off-site parking spaces shall be provided within 300 feet. (P&Z)
8. The applicant shall submit a plot plan for the construction of the parking lot, which must comply with city requirements for stormwater management in accordance with Article XIII of the zoning ordinance, Erosion and Sediment Control Code, and provide a surface treatment satisfactory to the Directors of T&ES and P&Z. (T&ES)
9. Provide documentation for the use of Potomac Yard property for off-site parking. (T&ES)
10. Install sign(s) at the entrance to the temporary parking area indicating that it is reserved for private use only. (T&ES)

11. The special use permit is only valid if and as long as the club has exclusive use of at least 22 parking spaces provided consistent with all applicable code requirements. (P&Z)
12. The applicant shall encourage its staff and members to use mass transit or to car pool when traveling to and from the club, by posting information regarding DASH and METRO routes, the location where fare passes for transit are sold, and the advertising of car pooling opportunities. (P&Z)
13. Provide a parking schematic for the area in front of the building with space locations, size and backup aisle satisfactory to the Directors of T&ES and P&Z. (T&ES)
14. The applicant shall stripe the on-site parking lot pursuant to the approved parking schematic, and designate those spaces allocated to Stepping Stones, Inc., with appropriate enforcement language with respect to towing and citing of vehicles for unlawful use. (P&Z)
15. The applicant shall (a) plant one street tree along Howell Avenue, (b) plant a row of 24"-36" height evergreen shrubs along the building in the existing planting bed at the corner of Howell Avenue and Jefferson Davis Highway, (c) provide turf grass for the remainder of the bed, and (d) keep turf grass maintained along the building at Howell Street and Windsor Avenue. Landscaping shall be maintained in perpetuity. (RPCA) (P&Z)
16. The applicant is to contact the Crime Prevention Unit of the Alexandria Police Department at 703-838-4520 regarding a security survey for the club. The survey is to be completed prior to the club opening. (Police)
17. Trash and garbage shall be placed in sealed containers which do not allow odors to escape and shall be stored inside or in a closed container which does not allow invasion by animals. No trash or debris shall be allowed to accumulate on-site outside of those containers. (P&Z)
18. Litter on the site and on public rights-of-way and spaces adjacent to or within 75 feet of the premises be picked up at least twice a day and at the close of business, and more often if necessary, to prevent an unsightly and unsanitary accumulation, on each day that the business is open to the public. (P&Z)
19. No speakers will be installed exterior to the building and no amplified sound shall be audible at the property line. (T&ES)

20. The applicant shall conduct staff training sessions on an ongoing basis, including as part of any employee orientation, to discuss all special use permit provisions and requirements. (P&Z)
21. The Director of Planning and Zoning shall review the special use permit one year after approval and shall docket the matter for consideration by the Planning Commission and City Council if (a) there have been documented violations of the permit conditions, (b) the director has received a request from any person to docket the permit for review as a result of a complaint that rises to the level of a violation, or (c) the director has determined that there are problems with the operation of the use and that new or revised conditions are needed. (P&Z)

Staff Note: In accordance with section 11-506(c) of the zoning ordinance, construction or operation shall be commenced and diligently and substantially pursued within 18 months of the date of granting of a special use permit by City Council or the special use permit shall become void.

STAFF: Eileen Fogarty, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning;
Barbara Ross, Deputy Director;
Bettina Irps, Urban Planner.

IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F - finding

Transportation & Environmental Services:

- F-1 The applicant is proposing to construct a temporary parking area on the Potomac Yard site on the east side of Route #1. Although the Howell Avenue intersection is signalized and has pedestrian controls T&ES still has concerns regarding client safety when crossing Route #1.
- F-2 T&ES has made no recommendation regarding site lighting for the temporary parking lot, a significant expense. This gives us additional concerns for client security. However, if the lot use is restricted by appropriate signage T&ES believes the off-site parking proposal is acceptable. T&ES also recommends that placement of the temporary parking lot take advantage of proximate street lighting.
- F-3 The availability of on street parking in the neighborhood of this facility is very limited.
- R-1 Applicant shall submit a plot plan for the construction of the parking lot. Plan must comply with city requirements for stormwater management in accordance with Article XIII of the zoning ordinance, Erosion and Sediment Control Code, and provide a surface treatment satisfactory to the Directors of T&ES and P&Z.
- R-2 Provide documentation for the use of Potomac Yard property for off-site parking.
- R-3 Install sign(s) at the entrance to the temporary parking area indicating that it is reserved for private use only.
- R-4 Provide a parking schematic for the area in front of the building with space locations, size and backup aisle satisfactory to the Directors of T&ES and P&Z.
- R-5 No speakers will be installed exterior to the building and no amplified sound shall be audible at the property line.
- C-1 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Noise Control Code, Title 11, Chapter 5, which sets the maximum permissible noise level as measured at the property line.

Code Enforcement:

- F-1 The proposed space is equipped with only one exit. Door dimensions and travel distances have not been provided. The USBC restricts the maximum number of occupants (employees and guests / clients) to a maximum of 50 persons. The actual number of persons may be further restricted based upon exit door width, travel distance, construction type and space configuration. The requested occupant load of 60 or more persons cannot be met under the existing conditions of the structure.
- F-2 The proposed use is A - Assembly. The approved use is B - Business. A change of use is required.
- C-1 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-2 A fire prevention code permit is required for the proposed operation. An egress plan showing fixture location, aisles and exit doors shall be submitted for review with the permit application.
- C-3 Alterations to the existing structure and/or installation and/or altering of equipment therein requires a building permit. Four sets of plans, bearing the signature and seal of a design professional registered in the Commonwealth of Virginia, must accompany the written application. The plans must include all dimensions, construction alterations details, kitchen equipment, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical layouts and schematics.
- C-4 When a change of use requires a greater degree of structural strength, fire protection, exit facilities or sanitary provisions, a construction permit is required.
- C-5 This structure contains mixed use groups and is subject to the mixed use and occupancy requirements of USBC.
- C-6 Required exits, parking, and accessibility for persons with disabilities must be provided to the building.
- C-7 The proposed use is a change in use group classification; a new Certificate of Occupancy is required (USBC [115.4]).

- C-8 A rodent control plan shall be submitted to this office for review and approval prior to occupancy. This plan shall consist of the following:
- (a) Measures to be taken to control the placement of litter on site and the trash storage and pickup schedule.
 - (b) How food stuffs will be stored on site.
 - (c) Rodent baiting plan.

Health Department:

- F-1 No comments

Police Department:

- R-1 The applicant is to contact the Crime Prevention Unit of the Alexandria Police Department at 703-838-4520 regarding a security survey for the club. The survey is to be completed prior to the club opening.

Human Services (Social Services):

- F-1 The Department of Human Services supports 12-step programs for recovering alcoholics. DHS has no comments.

Department of Recreation, Parks:

- R-1 Plant one street tree along Howell Ave. (R)
- R-2 Plant a row of 24"-36" height evergreen shrubs along the building in the existing planting bed at the corner of Howell Ave. and Jefferson Davis Hwy. The remainder of the bed shall be turf grass. (R)
- R-3 Keep turf grass maintained along the building at Howell St. and Windsor Ave. (R)