

Docket Item #6  
SPECIAL USE PERMIT #2004-0101

Planning Commission Meeting  
February 1, 2005

**ISSUE:** Consideration of a request for a special use permit for a parking reduction.

**APPLICANT:** 1219 Oronoco, L.L.C.  
by Duncan Blair, attorney

**LOCATION:** 1219 Oronoco Street

**ZONE:** RB/Townhouse

---

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends **approval** subject to compliance with all applicable codes and ordinances and the recommended conditions found in Section III of this report.

SUP #2004-0101  
1219 Oronoco Street

**SITE GRAPHIC**  
**AVAILABLE IN THE PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE**

## I. DISCUSSION

### REQUEST

The applicant, 1219 Oronoco, L.L.C., by John E. Cole, requests a special use permit for a parking reduction at 1219 Oronoco Street.

### SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject property is a single lot of record with approximately 107 feet of frontage on Oronoco Street, 69 feet of frontage on Payne Street, and a total lot area of 7,363 square feet. The site is developed with a three-story apartment building. The building contains 11 one-bedroom apartments and has been vacant for about one year. No parking is provided on the site. Surrounding uses are predominantly residential, with a mix of service and warehouse uses to the east.

### PROPOSAL DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes to renovate the existing building and bring it into conformance with the current Uniform Statewide Building Code. The applicant intends to renovate the existing eleven one-bedroom units. The cost of the improvements will exceed 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % of the value of the building. Under Section 8-200(F) of the Zoning Ordinance, this constitutes a “significant alteration,” and the development must therefore comply with current parking standards.



**Site Aerial**



**Oronoco Street Elevation**

The building was constructed in 1950 and was developed without on-site parking. The zoning ordinance currently requires 1.3 parking spaces per 1-bedroom unit, or a total of 15 parking spaces for the site. Therefore, the applicant is requesting a parking reduction from 15 parking spaces to zero.

The applicant is still finalizing plans for the renovation, but at a minimum the improvements will include total refurbishment of all of the units, including new windows, appliances, bathroom and kitchen fixtures, and floor and wall treatments; landscaping; cosmetic improvements to the exterior of the building; removal of the existing fence; and a new trash enclosure. The individual units will be sold as condominiums.

### ZONING

The subject property is located in the RB/Townhouse zone. This zone generally does not permit multiple-family dwellings. However, the zone does provide an exemption for properties which were zoned RB prior to February 27, 1973, and which contained a multiple-family dwelling prior to March 28, 1978. The existing building qualifies under this exemption since it was constructed in 1950.

### MASTER PLAN

The proposed use is consistent with the Braddock Road Metro Station Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan, which designates the property for preservation and as a residential use.

## **II. STAFF ANALYSIS**

Staff does not readily support parking reduction requests, particularly in neighborhoods where on-street parking availability is limited. However, this particular application has merit and a parking reduction is justified. The building was constructed without parking and the most likely development alternative, if the parking reduction is not granted, is that the scope of building improvements would be reduced but the building would still contain 11 units. Granting the parking reduction not only allows the developer to make all of the improvements necessary to bring the building up to current standards, but also allows the City to work with the applicant to provide further enhancements that might not be made under a simple building permit.

### DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

The property at present is vacant and boarded and detracts from the surrounding neighborhood. The applicant is proposing to upgrade the building, but the cost of needed repairs and renovations would exceed 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % of the market value of the property. As a result, the improvement triggers a requirement that the property must be brought into full compliance with parking requirements. The property has 11 one-bedroom units, requiring the provision of 15 parking spaces. Fifteen parking spaces is more than can be accommodated on the property. Five options exist for the property:

1. *Reduce Scope of Improvements.* The applicant could reduce the scope of the improvements such that the cost does not exceed 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % of the value of the property. This would allow the improvements without triggering the parking requirement. However, this would not be in the best interest of the applicant, the neighborhood, or the City, as it would leave the property in a less-than-optimal condition and would avoid providing parking only via technical means. Additionally, it would accomplish nothing, as the property would still be comprised of the same number of dwelling units and bedrooms, yet would provide no off-street parking.
2. *Bring the Existing Building into Conformance.* The applicant has the option of bringing the property into conformance with the parking requirements by constructing parking on-site and reducing the number of units in the building in accordance with the parking provided. However, due to the existing configuration of the property and the requirement that parking spaces not back into the street, the maximum number of conforming parking spaces that could be created on the site is three. This would allow only 2 one-bedroom units or 1 unit with two or more bedrooms. Neither option would be an economically viable conversion from 11 units, and the applicant would instead select Option 1 above.

3. *Redevelop the Property.* The applicant could demolish the existing building and redevelop the site in conformance with the standards of the RB zone. However, due to the shape of the lot and the required lot area, lot width, and setbacks, only two townhouse units could be constructed. It would not be economically viable for the applicant to undertake the cost of demolishing the existing building and constructing a new building while reducing the number of dwelling units from 11 to 2. Therefore, the applicant would not pursue this option and would instead select Option 1 above.
4. *Provide the Parking Off-Site.* The zoning ordinance allows required parking to be provided off-site. However, the ordinance also specifies that off-site parking for multiple-family dwellings must be located on an adjoining property, across a local street, or across an alley. All such lots are already developed, so constructing the parking off-site would require the demolition of existing buildings. Not only would this likely make the undertaking financially infeasible, but doing so to the west, south, or east would result in a parking lot on a corner lot, an aesthetically undesirable alternative. Additionally, providing the parking to the north, west, or south would mean the demolition of the end unit of a row of townhouses, thereby detracting from the neighborhood. This option is not only economically unviable, but is also undesirable for the neighborhood.
5. *Request a Parking Reduction.* The most viable option for the applicant is to complete all of the improvements that are needed on the site and to request a parking reduction. While reducing the parking requirement for the property is not ideal, none of the alternatives for providing the required parking is economically viable. Denial of the parking reduction would leave the applicant with a single option – to limit building improvements to those which can be completed without exceeding 33⅓% of the value of the property. This would result in a less desirable building for the applicant, the future tenants, and for the neighborhood, yet would have the same parking impact as a fully remodeled building. Approving a parking reduction is the most desirable of the economically viable alternatives.

#### PARKING ANALYSIS

The applicant commissioned a study of on-street parking availability in the area, which was performed by Gorove-Slade. This study evaluated the availability of parking within two blocks of the site, surveying the area from Thursday, December 2, 2004, through Sunday, December 5. The site was surveyed between 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, between 11:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, and between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on Sunday.

The study found that Thursday has an average of 133 vacant on-street parking spaces within two blocks of the site (47% of total on-street parking), Friday has an average of 119 vacant spaces (42%), Saturday an average of 102 (36%), and Sunday an average of 103 (37%). During the study period, the minimum number of vacant spaces at any given time was 76 (27%). However, parking was not quite as readily available close to the site - on Payne Street one count yielded no vacant spaces and two counts yielded only one vacant space, and counts on Oronoco Street yielded as few as 7 vacant spaces. The study concluded that adequate on-street parking exists within a two-block radius to accommodate vehicles from the building's 11 units, although there may be times when parking is

not available within one block of the building. Staff's observations of the area are consistent with the findings of the report - at times there may not be adequate parking available in the immediate vicinity of the site to accommodate an additional 11 units, but adequate parking does exist within easy walking distance.

The project's impact on on-street parking should be lessened by two factors – the small size of the units, and the site's proximity to public transit. The units range in size from approximately 490 to 530 square feet, a size which will likely be most attractive to one-person households. Additionally, the site is only 3 blocks from the Braddock Road Metro, with a “door to gate” distance of approximately 1,660 feet, or slightly less than a third of a mile. The site is also 8 blocks, or approximately 3,000 feet, from the new entry that is slated to be constructed at the west end of the King Street Metro platform. The site has even easier access to the bus system, with Dash 4 and Metro 10A,B,C,D,&E one block away on Pendleton Street, and Dash 3 one block away on West Street. Washington Street is 6 blocks, or approximately 1,800 feet, from the site and offers Dash 8 and Metro 9A,E, 29K,N, 11Y,P, and 107.

In order to encourage residents of the development to use alternative modes of transportation, staff recommends the following conditions:

1. *Transit fare subsidies.* Staff recommends a series of conditions requiring a transportation management plan approach for this small residential development. Specifically, staff recommends that the applicant establish a transit fund that provides at least 50% of one monthly Metrorail fare pass every month for each unit, that each unit in the building be given a 50% subsidy on a monthly transit fare pass if they request it, and that any remaining monies in the fund be granted to the City to be used to promote transit generally. The conditions will be subject to enforcement and annual reporting as with a TMP. Finally, the language regarding the availability of the subsidies is required to be included in all lease or condominium documents.
2. *Bike racks.* Staff recommends that the applicant install a bike rack on the site, providing incentive and opportunity for an alternative means of travel.

#### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Staff contacted the president of the Inner City Civic Association, as well as other neighborhood activists, to inform them of the parking reduction request. Additionally, a community meeting was held on January 19, 2005 to solicit community input regarding the request. Generally, the neighbors are supportive of the proposed building renovations. However, one neighbor did note that the neighborhood presently has parking and traffic problems, and expressed a concern that the renovations and conversion to condominiums would result in an increase in car ownership among the building's occupants. Many residents also mentioned past problems with criminal activity on the site, and it was suggested that site lighting be improved to help address this issue.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the parking reduction subject to the suggested conditions. Included in the recommendation is a condition that site lighting be provided to address security concerns that have been expressed by neighboring residents.

**III. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS**

Staff recommends **approval** subject to compliance with all applicable codes and ordinances and the following conditions:

1. The special use permit shall be granted only to the applicant, to any business or entity in which the applicant has a controlling interest, or to the owners of the units once individual units are sold. (P&Z)
2. The maximum number of residential units shall be limited to eleven. (P&Z)
3. The applicant shall contact the Crime Prevention Unit of Alexandria Police Department regarding a security survey for the building. This is to be completed prior to the renovations commencing. (Police)
4. The applicant shall submit a site lighting plan to address site security issues, to the satisfaction of the Director of Planning and Zoning. (P&Z)
5. The applicant shall establish a transit fund to be administered by the condominium association. The transit fund shall offer each dwelling unit a monthly transit fare subsidy equal to at least 50% of one monthly Metrorail fare pass. Discounted transit fare media shall be provided to residents of the project on request on a monthly basis. The availability of this fare media discount will be prominently advertised.

The applicant shall establish an initial transit fund of \$600 per dwelling unit, payable with the issuance of the initial Certificate of Occupancy. Payment thereafter (to commence one year after the initial CO is issued) shall be \$50.00 per unit per month. Annually, to begin one year after the initial CO is issued, the rate shall increase by an amount equal to the rate of inflation for the previous year, unless a waiver is obtained by the Director of Transportation and Environmental Services. Payment shall be the responsibility of the developer until such time as this responsibility is transferred by lease or other legal arrangement to the owners of the condominiums. The transit account shall be used exclusively for approved activities; modifications to approved transit account activities shall be permitted upon approval by the Director of Planning and Zoning, provided that any changes are consistent with the goals of the transit account. Approved transit account activities are as follows:

- a. Discounting the cost of bus and transit fare media for residents. The availability of this fare media will be prominently advertised. At a minimum, the initial discount will be 50%.
- b. Marketing activities, including advertising, promotional events, etc.
- c. Membership and application fees for carshare vehicles.

The transit account shall also be subject to the following:

- d. The transit account program shall provide that subsidies shall be available to all residents, including both owner-occupants and tenants of rental units.
  - e. Information about all transit account activities shall be distributed and displayed to residents, including transit schedules, parking information, etc. This information shall be kept current. Displays of these brochures and applications shall be provided in a prominent location within the building. (T&ES) (P&Z)
6. The applicant will provide annual transit account reports to the Office of Transit Services and Programs. These reports will provide a summary of the discounts on fare media issued to residents. The first report will be due one year following the issuance of the first certificate of occupancy. The Director of T&ES shall determine whether any unencumbered funds remaining in the transit account at the end of each reporting year should be reprogrammed for transit activities during the ensuing year or should be paid to the City for use in transit support activities which benefit the site. (T&ES) (P&Z)
  7. The applicant shall prepare, as part of its leasing and/or sales agreements, appropriate language to inform tenants/owners that the transit account requires the owner or owners of the property to provide transit fare subsidies for each apartment unit. Such language shall be reviewed and approved by the City Attorney's office prior to its use in any lease/purchase agreements. (T&ES) (P&Z)
  8. The applicant shall provide a screened enclosure to the north of the building for all outdoor refuse and recycling containers, to the satisfaction of the Directors of P&Z and T&ES. (P&Z)
  9. The applicant shall fund the purchase and installation of one bike rack to be located on-site, to the satisfaction of the Directors of Planning and Zoning. (P&Z)
  10. It is recommended that the existing overhead utilities be placed underground. (T&ES)
  11. The applicant shall repair, to the satisfaction of T&ES, the concrete apron that leads into the alley immediately east of the building. (T&ES)



12. The Director of Planning and Zoning shall review the special use permit after it has been operational for one year, 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 which were not corrected immediately, constitute repeat violations or which create a direct and immediate adverse zoning impact on the surrounding community; (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 of the permit conditions; 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: Eileen Fogarty, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning;  
Richard Josephson, Deputy Director;  
David Sundland, Urban Planner III.

---

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.

#### IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

##### Transportation & Environmental Services:

- F-1 T&ES recommends that the applicant submit a Parking Impact Assessment that provides information on the availability of on and off street parking for the proposed use.
- F-2 Although T&ES has concerns regarding the optimistic parking assessment produced by Gorove/Slade Associates, staff believes that the neighborhood streets have the ability to absorb the additional parking demand, and have no objection to the request for a parking reduction for the proposed rehab of the residential building.
- R-1 It is recommended that the existing overhead utilities be placed underground.
- R-2 The applicant shall repair, to the satisfaction of T&ES, the concrete apron that leads into the alley immediately east of the building.
- C-1 Change in point of attachment or removal of existing overhead utility service, will require undergrounding or variance.

##### Code Enforcement:

- F-1 The number of dwelling units within the structure fall below the number required for handicap accessibility. However, should additional buildings fall under the same ownership, the aggregate total of all dwelling units may cause the applicant to conform to the provisions of Chapter 11 of the USBC concerning handicap accessibility.

Based upon the preliminary information provided, the percent of work / dwelling units involving the renovation of the structure does not appear to require the building to comply with the provisions of Chapter 11 of the USBC concerning handicap accessibility. As such, neither a handicap parking space nor other handicap requirements of the USBC shall be required.

##### Health Department:

No comments.

##### Police Department:

No comments.

**REPORT ATTACHMENTS  
AVAILABLE IN THE PLANNING AND ZONING OFFICE**