

Docket Item #4  
SPECIAL USE PERMIT #2006-0025

Planning Commission Meeting  
June 6, 2006

**ISSUE:** Consideration of a request for a special use permit to operate a wellness and massage facility.

**APPLICANT:** Maryellen Thorp

**LOCATION:** 3160 Commonwealth Avenue (20A)

**ZONE:** CL/Commercial Low

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

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

## I. DISCUSSION

### REQUEST

The applicant, Maryellen Thorp, requests special use permit approval for the operation of a massage establishment located at 3160 Commonwealth Avenue.

### SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject property is one lot of record with 175 feet of frontage on Mt. Vernon Avenue, 275 feet of frontage on Herbert Street, 114 feet of frontage on Commonwealth Avenue, and a total lot area of 1.7 acres. The site is developed with four office condominium buildings. The subject tenant space is located in the southern-most building that fronts on Commonwealth Avenue. The applicant proposes to occupy 1,900 square feet of space on the north side of the first floor of the building.



The surrounding area is occupied by a mix of residential and commercial uses. To the east is Auburn Village residential community. To the west across Mt. Vernon Avenue are the Calvert apartments and associated commercial uses. To the north are residential townhomes. To the south is a vacant building on a property that, consolidated with others to the south, is the subject of a development special use permit application for a medium density mixed residential and commercial development (DSUP#2005-0041).

### PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to operate a wellness center. The center will provide two massage rooms, one acupuncture room, and one psychotherapy room. The proposed operation is an extension of the applicant's existing massage operation "The Healing Tree," located at 2101 Mt. Vernon Avenue (SUP#2002-0055). Specific aspects of the operation as described by the applicant are as follows:

- Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday; closed on Sunday.
- Noise: The applicant does not anticipate any noise impacts from the business.
- Trash/Litter: Trash is expected to be minimal, with one small bag each day. The condominium association manages property maintenance issues.

PARKING

According to Section 8-200 (A)(17) of the Zoning Ordinance, a personal service use requires one parking space for every 400 square feet. A massage establishment with 1,900 square feet will be required to provide five off-street parking spaces.

Parking for these office condominiums was approved in Site Plan #85-036. The requirement for the offices was 1.1 spaces for every 400 net square feet of floor area. A total of 37,454 net square feet was approved. The subject tenant space has 1,900 square feet, which would have required five spaces. Therefore, the applicant complies with the parking requirement. As a practical matter, there are 15 parking spaces that staff observed to be unoccupied at various times throughout the day, located immediately in front of the subject building.

ZONING/MASTER PLAN DESIGNATION

The subject property is located in the CL zone. Section 4-103 (G.1) of the Zoning Ordinance allows a massage establishment in the CL zone only with a special use permit.

The proposed use is consistent with the Potomac West Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan which designates the property for uses consistent with the CL zone.

**II. STAFF ANALYSIS**

Staff does not object to the proposed health and wellness center located at 3160 Commonwealth Avenue. The proposed use is compatible with existing businesses in the area. It is a small business, and staff anticipates it will have little if any adverse impact on the area. While parking demand at the building was raised as a concern in a recent case for a commercial school, the parking demand for the proposed use is small, and the subject space fronts on to a parking lot that is currently underutilized. Staff recommends a condition requiring employees, and encouraging customers to park in this parking lot that faces Commonwealth Avenue. Staff also recommends the standard condition that the applicant encourage its employees and customers to use public transit.

Staff recommends approval of the request for special use permit subject to recommended conditions.

### 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 to the applicant only or to any corporation in which the applicant has a controlling interest. (P&Z)
2. The hours of operation of the massage establishment shall be limited to 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. daily. The applicant shall post the hours of operation at the entrance of the business. (P&Z)
3. Only City licensed therapists may provide massage services at the facility. (P&Z)
4. The applicant is to contact the Community Relations Unit of the Alexandria Police Department at 703-838-4520 regarding a security survey for the business and a robbery readiness program for all employees. (Police)
5. The applicant shall encourage its employees and clients to use mass transit or to carpool when traveling to and from the business, by posting information regarding DASH and METRO routes, the location where fare passes for transit are sold, and advertising of carpooling opportunities. (P&Z)
6. The applicant shall require employees who drive to work to park in the on-site parking lot facing Commonwealth Avenue. The applicant shall encourage customers who drive to also park in this lot by posting at the business the location of the lot. (P&Z)
7. The applicant shall conduct employee training sessions on an ongoing basis, including as part of any employee orientation, to discuss all SUP provisions and requirements. (P&Z)
8. All loudspeakers shall be prohibited from the exterior of the building and no amplified sound shall be audible at the property line. (T&ES)
9. The applicant is advised to obtain all required permits to operate this type of facility in conformance with the City of Alexandria's requirements. (T&ES)

10. 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 the result of a complaint that rises to the level of a violation of the permit conditions, (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;  
Valerie Peterson, Urban Planner.

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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:

- R-1 All loudspeakers shall be prohibited from the exterior of the building and no amplified sound shall be audible at the property line.
- R-2 The applicant is advised to obtain all required permits to operate this type of facility in conformance with the City of Alexandria's requirements.
- 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.
- F-1 T&ES has no objection to the proposed use.

##### Code Enforcement:

- C-1 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-2 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-3 Alterations to the existing structure and/or installation and/or altering of equipment therein requires a building permit. Five 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.

##### Health Department:

- C-1 An Alexandria Health Department Permit is require for all regulated facilities. Permits are non-transferable

- C-2 This facility must meet current Alexandria City Code requirements for massage establishments.
- C-3 Permits must be obtained prior to operation.
- C-4 Five sets of plans must be submitted to and approved by this department prior to construction. Plan must comply with the Alexandria City Code, Title 11, Chapter 4.2 Massage Regulations.
- C-5 All massage therapist must possess a current massage therapist certification issued by the Commonwealth of Virginia in accordance with the Code of Virginia Chapter 599,§ 54.1-3029 and must possess a current massage therapist permit issued in accordance with Alexandria City Code Title 11, Chapter 4.2 prior to engaging in any massage activity.

Police Department:

- R-1 The applicant is to contact the Community Relations Unit of the Alexandria Police Department at 703-838-4520 regarding a security survey for the business.
- R-2 The applicant is to contact the Community Relations Unit of the Alexandria Police Department at 703-838-4520 regarding a robbery readiness program for all employees.



SUP#2006-0025  
3160 Commonwealth Avenue(20A)

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