

November 22, 2000

MEMORANDUM

TO: Prince George's County Planning Board

VIA: Steve Adams, Urban Design Supervisor

FROM: Laxmi Srinivas, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Detailed Site Plan SP-00034
Variance - VD-00034A
Alternative Compliance - AC-00040
Saint James Episcopal Church

The Urban Design staff has reviewed the site development plans for the subject proposal and presents the following evaluation and findings leading to a recommendation of approval with conditions of SP-00034, VD-00034A and AC-00040.

EVALUATION

This Detailed Site Plan was reviewed and evaluated for compliance with the following criteria:

- a. The requirements of the following sections of the Zoning Ordinance:
 - Section 27-430 regarding the R-55 Zone (One-family Detached Residential)
 - Section 27-441 regarding uses permitted in the R-55 Zone
 - Section 27-568 regarding the required number of parking spaces
 - Section 27-582 regarding the required number of loading spaces
 - Section 27-442 regarding yard setbacks in the R-55 Zone
 - Section 27-230 regarding Variances
- b. The requirements of the *Landscape Manual*
- c. Referrals.

FINDINGS

Based upon the evaluation and analysis of the subject application, the Urban Design staff recommends the following findings:

1. The subject Detailed Site Plan application is for constructing a Sunday School and a parking lot for the existing Saint James Episcopal Church. A Variance application for the west and north side yard setbacks has also been filed. A small addition to the church is also proposed.
2. The subject property is a 1.05-acre rectangularly-shaped lot on the north side of Eight Street in the City of Bowie. There is an existing church on the western portion of the property. An existing one-story masonry building in the central portion of the site is proposed to be removed. A 3,893-sq. ft. Sunday School building is proposed in that area. A 100-sq. ft. vesting room will be added to the northern portion of the church behind the bell tower for the church. This vesting room will not be visible from the south (front) portion of the property or from Eight Street. A new parking lot is proposed in the eastern portion of the site. Extensive landscaping is proposed on the northern portion of the site which fronts on Seventh Street. A bioretention pond is proposed on the south side of the proposed Sunday School. Concrete sidewalks are proposed to provide access to the church, Sunday School and parking lot. The existing church has 124 seats and the proposed Sunday School will have 111 students.

The adjacent uses are as follows:

North - Seventh Street
South - Eighth Street
East - Community Center
West - Single-family Residential

3. According to Section 27-441, Uses Permitted, of the Zoning Ordinance, a church and accessory uses are permitted uses in the R-55 Zone if a 25-foot setback is maintained on all sides of the property. The proposal is consistent with all the requirements of Section 27-441 except the setback requirements. The west side setback for the existing church is 12 feet 8 inches and the north side setback is 17 feet. Although the church is existing, the addition of a new Sunday School requires that all the structures (existing and proposed) meet the new larger setback requirements. Since the proposal does not meet the setback requirements for the proposed use, the subject Detailed Site Plan will not be consistent with the Zoning Ordinance.

The applicant has submitted a Variance application (VD-00034A) for the west and north side yard setbacks. Finding 20 below addresses the Variance application. Finding 20 concluded that the findings for granting a Variance can be made.

4. The existing Saint James Episcopal Church was built in 1906 in the railroad town of Bowie. The existing one-story building (known as Cornelius Hall) that is to be removed was built in 1980. In April 2000, Saint James Episcopal Church was designated as Historic Site 71B-2-5. Its environmental setting was determined to be the 36,250-sq.ft. property on which it stands, and which also includes Cornelius Hall as a non-contributing element. A minor plat 5-00086 was recorded on June 29, 2000. The previous lots 77 and 78 were enlarged to form a single lot, Lot 77, comprising 1.054 acres. The applicant has applied for a Historic Area Work Permit. The Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the Historic Area Work

Permit application on October 17, 2000 and recommended approval of the Work Permit. The recommendations of the Historic Preservation Commission and the Historic Preservation Section are discussed in Finding # 16.

5. Section 27-441 (b), Uses Permitted, of the Zoning Ordinance requires a Detailed Site Plan to be filed for churches located on lots between one and two acres in size. The section also establishes the following parameters for churches located on lots between one and two acres in size in the R-55 Zone:

- *The minimum setback for all buildings shall be 25 feet from each lot line;*

The minimum setback for the proposed Sunday School is 25 feet. A Variance application has been filed for the west and north side setbacks for the existing church.

- *When possible there should be no parking or loading spaces located in the front yard;*

The applicant is proposing a parking lot in the front yard (eastern portion) of the site for the proposed use. The northern portion of the lot is too narrow to accommodate a parking lot and turning lanes for the cars. Therefore, it is more practical and economical to provide parking in the eastern portion of the lot because it provides easy accessibility to the church, the street and the Sunday School. Requiring the parking lot to be in the rear yard would have been justified if there was adequate space in the rear portion of the site. Also, if the parking was provided in the rear, some area of the environmental setting for the historic church would have been disturbed. Therefore, staff is of the opinion that in this case parking in the front yard should be allowed to remain because there is an existing parking lot in the front yard. The proposal is therefore consistent with the above requirement that provides the flexibility of allowing parking in the front yard based on the particular circumstances of this site.

- *The maximum allowable lot coverage for the zone in which the use is proposed shall not be increased.*

The maximum lot coverage allowed for churches in the R-55 Zone is 50%. The proposed lot coverage on the subject lot is approximately 20%.

6. The proposal is subject to the requirements of Section 4.2 (Commercial and Industrial Landscape Strip) and Section 4.7 (Buffering Incompatible Uses) of the *Landscape Manual*. There are several existing mature trees on the site. The applicant is retaining all the existing mature trees on the site and proposing additional required landscaping. However, the existing church does not comply with the building setback requirements of the *Landscape Manual*. The applicant has applied for Alternative Compliance (AC-00040). The Alternative Compliance Committee reviewed the proposal on September 11, 2000 and recommended that the Planning Director recommend approval of AC-00040. The recommendations of the Committee have been forwarded to the Planning Director and the final recommendations of the Director will be presented at the Hearing.

7. The existing Saint James Episcopal Church is an example of Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture. The proposed Sunday School building borrows several features of the historic church and parish hall (such as the ornamental shingle siding of the upper gables). The building also borrows some elements of a railroad signal tower reflecting the railroad history of the Bowie community. Therefore, the proposed building is compatible and complementary to the historic setting and the existing historic church.
8. Sections 27-568 and 27-582, Off-street Parking and Loading, of the Zoning Ordinance require the following:

REQUIRED PARKING SPACES		PROPOSED
Church (124 seats)	1 space per 4 seats (31)	32
Sunday School	not required if the Sunday School is not occupied at the same time as the main auditorium	0
TOTAL	31	32
REQUIRED LOADING SPACES		
None required for an institutional use less than 10,000 square feet	0	0

The proposed number of parking spaces complies with the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.

9. The Permits Review Section (Gallagher to Srinivas, September 12, 2000) has requested minor revisions to the drawings to insure conformance to Zoning Ordinance requirements.
10. The Community Planning Division (D'Ambrosi to Srinivas, September 13, 2000) has stated that there are no master plan issues regarding this proposal.
11. The Transportation Planning Section (Burton to Srinivas, October 19, 2000) has stated that the site plan is acceptable.
12. The Environmental Planning Section (Markovich to Srinivas, September 6, 2000) has stated that the site is exempt from the requirements of the Woodland Conservation Ordinance because there are no existing woodlands on the site.

13. The Department of Public Works and Transportation (Motazedi to Srinivas, September 8, 2000) has stated that coordination with the City of Bowie is required because Eighth Street is maintained by the City of Bowie.
14. The Subdivision Section (Chellis to Srinivas, September 25, 2000) has stated that the subject property known as Lot 77, Block 16, is exempt from the requirements of the filing a preliminary plat of subdivision. The final plat for this property was recorded without restrictions on total gross floor area.
15. The Department of Environmental Resources (Guzman to Srinivas, September 19, 2000) has stated that coordination with the City of Bowie is required because the subject lot is in the City of Bowie.
16. The Historic Preservation Section (Pearl to Srinivas, October 23, 2000) has stated that the applicant has applied for a Historic Area Work Permit because the subject site is designated as a historic site. The subject Detailed Site Plan is compatible and complementary to the goals of the *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*, and has been approved by the Historic Preservation Commission.

The memorandum from the Historic Preservation Section states the following:

■Background:

■This application is for a Detailed Site Plan for construction on the 1.054-acre lot of St. James Chapel (Historic Site #71B-2-5) in Bowie. The plan involves the construction of a new Sunday School building, a small addition to the church itself, provision of a 32-space parking lot, and landscaping of the grounds.

■St. James Chapel was built in 1906 in the railroad town of Bowie; it is a front-gabled wood frame Gothic Revival style church structure with a lateral three-story bell tower. White vinyl siding covers the original German wood siding, but the gables of the church and the second level of the bell tower are sided with clipped-corner rectangular ornamental shingles. The gothic-arch windows of the nave are filled with stained glass. A balancing parish hall was constructed (1923) parallel to it on the west, connected to the sanctuary by a one-story, one-bay hyphen; the parish hall is also sheathed in white vinyl siding with ornamental shingles in the gable. The church complex fronts on 8th Street, and includes a small paved parking lot between the church and a small concrete block auxiliary building (Cornelius Hall) built in 1980.

■St. James Chapel is a good example of Gothic Revival ecclesiastical architecture, and the parish hall reflects and complements the original chapel with its compatible design. Together, the complex presents a good example of early twentieth-century Gothic Revival church architecture, and reflects its history as a social/cultural center of a developing community. St. James Chapel is a visible and attractive landmark in the center of the railroad community of Bowie.

■ In April 2000, St. James Episcopal Chapel was designated as Historic Site 71B-2-5; its Environmental Setting was determined to be the 36,250 square-foot property on which it stands, and which also includes Cornelius Hall as a non-contributing element. In June 2000, this group of lots was resubdivided and slightly enlarged to form a single Lot 77, comprising 1.054 acres.

■ Findings:

■ 1. This Site Plan proposes:

- removal of the parking lot between the church and Cornelius Hall
- removal of Cornelius Hall
- construction of a new Sunday School building on the site of Cornelius Hall and the present parking lot
- creation of a new parking lot east of the proposed Sunday School building
- construction of a small (circa 10 by 10-foot, one-story) vesting room at the northeasterly corner of the church (in the corner formed by the bell tower and the chancel)
- landscaping of the remaining property, including provision for proper drainage of the land.

■ All of this work is within the 36,250 square-foot Environmental Setting originally determined for the Historic Site. Cornelius Hall is a non-contributing element in this Environmental Setting.

■ 2. The design of the proposed new Sunday School building borrows several features of the historic church and parish hall (such as the ornamental-shingle siding of the upper gables) without directly copying any of the existing elements. This serves to make the new building compatible and complementary to the historic structures. The design of the proposed new building also includes a vertical element to balance the bell tower of the church, but does not copy that tower; instead the vertical element of the proposed building suggests some of the elements of a railroad signal tower, thus appropriately reflecting the railroad history of the Bowie community.

■ 3. The proposed vesting room will not be visible from the street or from the front of the church, but will be hidden from public view by the three-story bell tower.

■ 4. Because the proposed work is to be within the Environmental Setting of an Historic Site, an Historic Area Work Permit application must be submitted for review by the Historic Preservation Commission. Staff of the Planning and Preservation Section has received an application for this permit, and has worked with the architect and engineers contracted to carry out the work.

■ Conclusions

■ 1. The Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the Historic Area Work Permit application at its regular meeting 17 October 2000. Commissioners approved the application

in concept, but requested a change in the materials of the door of the proposed Sunday School, to be worked out between staff and the architect. The architect has submitted, and staff approved, a revised entrance design, showing wood paneled doors with upper glazing and divided transom. A sketch of the revised and approved entrance detail is attached.

■2. The proposed changes and construction will enhance the use and therefore the preservation of St. James Chapel, and will be compatible and complementary to the historic building.

■Recommendation

■The proposals of this Site Plan are compatible and complementary to the goals of the *Historic Sites and Districts Plan*, and have been approved (with minor changes) by the Historic Preservation Commission and staff in the review of Historic Area Work Permit #26-00 for Historic Site #71B-2-5, St. James Chapel.●

17. The City of Bowie (Robinson to Hewlett, November 7, 2000) has recommended approval of the subject Detailed Site Plan with minor revisions to the drawings. A condition of approval has been added to require these revisions.
18. With the proposed conditions, the Detailed Site Plan SP-00034 is found to represent a reasonable alternative for satisfying the site design guidelines without requiring unreasonable costs and without detracting substantially from the utility of the proposed development for its intended use.

Variance

19. Section 27-441, Uses Permitted (Footnote 52), of the Zoning Ordinance requires the following in the R-55 Zone:

Setback for all buildings = 25 feet from each lot line

The applicant's proposal is inconsistent with this requirement in the following ways:

Existing north side setback for the church - 17 feet

Existing west side setback for the church - 12 feet 8 inches

20. Section 27-230 of the Zoning Ordinance requires the Planning Board to make the following findings prior to approving an application for a variance:

(1) *A specific parcel of land has exceptional narrowness, shallowness, or shape, exceptional topographic conditions, or other extraordinary situations or conditions;*

The subject property has been used as a church since 1906. The site has several mature trees along the south (front) and east (central) portion of the site. The rear

portion of the lot also contains some mature trees that are going to be retained. The significant amount of trees on the subject property enhance the visual quality and historic appearance of the site. The existing trees cannot be retained if the existing structures are relocated to meet the setback requirements. Also, the subject site and church building have been designated as a Prince George's County historic site. Relocating a historic structure to meet the present setback requirements would be detrimental to the historic character of the site. The site, therefore, has exceptional qualities that justify granting a variance from the setback requirements for the existing church.

- (2) *The strict application of this Subtitle will result in peculiar or unusual practical difficulties to, or exceptional or undue hardship upon the owner of the property; and*

The site is large enough to accommodate a church that meets the setback requirements. However, the existing church has to be retained in the present location to maintain its historic character. The proposed Sunday School building meets the setback requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. The unique historic character of the site creates space constraints on the site. The existing mature trees cannot be retained if the existing church is relocated to meet the setback requirements. These unique conditions of the site create practical difficulties for the applicant to meet the setback requirements. The preservation of the existing trees and the preservation of the historic character of the existing church are justifications for granting a variance from the setback requirements, and the strict application of this Subtitle would result in unusual practical difficulties for the owner of the property.

- (3) *The Variance will not substantially impair the intent, purpose or integrity of the General Plan or Master Plan.*

The 1991 Bowie-Collington-Mitchelville and Vicinity Master Plan recommends medium-suburban development for this neighborhood. A church use is in conformance with this recommendation as a small church such as this is a desirable amenity that complements a residential community. Also, the granting of the variance will help retain the historic character of the existing church. Therefore, the variance will not impair the intent, purpose or integrity of the Master Plan.

The staff recommends that the Planning Board find that the approval of the Variance application VD-00034A is justified based on the fulfillment of the criteria mentioned above.

RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the foregoing evaluation and analysis, the Urban Design staff recommends that the Planning Board adopt the findings of this report and approve SP-00034, VD-00034A and AC-00040 subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to certification of the Detailed Site Plan, the site/grading and landscape plans shall be revised to show the following:
 - a. lot coverage calculations
 - b. a note stating that the church and the Sunday School will not operate as concurrent uses
 - c. a note stating that handicapped parking shall be identified and painted blue in accordance with City of Bowie standards.