



FROM	NAME & TITLE	Eric W. Tiso,  Director of Development Oversight and Project Support	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Department of Planning 8 th Floor, 417 East Fayette Street		
	SUBJECT	City Council Bill #26-0150 / Zoning – Conditional Use – Retail Goods Establishment (With Alcoholic Beverage Sales) – Variances – 600 West North Avenue		

TO

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 North Holliday Street

DATE: March 16, 2026

At its regular meeting of March 12, 2026, the Planning Commission considered City Council Bill #26-0150, for the purpose of permitting, subject to certain conditions, the establishment, maintenance, and operation of a retail goods establishment (with alcoholic beverage sales) on the property known as 600 West North Avenue (Block 3435, Lot 001), as outlined in red on the accompanying plat; granting variances from certain bulk and yard regulations and off-street parking maximums; and, providing for a special effective date.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Planning Commission reviewed the attached staff report, which recommended amendment and approval of City Council Bill #26-0150 and adopted the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission concurs with the recommendation of its departmental staff, adopts the findings and equity analysis outlined in the staff report, with consideration for testimony and facts presented in the meeting, and recommends that City Council Bill #26-0150 be **amended and approved** by the City Council.

The Planning Commission heard several concerns from the public related to the potential impacts to the surrounding neighborhood from patrons arriving by car, the amount of parking proposed, and multi-modal options for patrons. The Commission refers these concerns to the Department of Transportation for consideration in their report.

If you have any questions, please contact me at eric.tiso@baltimorecity.gov or by phone at 410-396-8358.

attachment

- cc: Ms. Nina Themelis, Mayor’s Office
 The Honorable John Bullock, Council Rep. to Planning Commission
 Mr. Justin Williams, BMZA
 Mr. Geoffrey Veale, Zoning Administrator
 Ms. Stephanie Murdock, DHCD
 Ms. Hilary Ruley, Law Dept.
 Mr. Francis Burnszynski, PABC
 Mr. Luciano Diaz, DOT
 Ms. Nancy Mead, Council Services
 Ms. Drew Tildon, Esq.



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Jon Laria, Chair; Eric Stephenson, Vice Chair

STAFF REPORT



Ren Southard
Acting Director

March 12, 2026

REQUEST: City Council Bill 26-0150 / Zoning – Conditional Use – Retail Goods Establishment (With Alcoholic Beverage Sales) – Variances – 600 West North Avenue

For the purpose of permitting, subject to certain conditions, the establishment, maintenance, and operation of a retail goods establishment (with alcoholic beverage sales) on a portion of the property known as 600 West North Avenue (Block 3435, Lot 001), as outlined on the accompanying site plan; granting variances from certain bulk and yard regulations and off-street parking maximums; and providing for a special effective date.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval with the following amendments:

1. Insert “A Portion of” immediately before “ 600 West North Avenue” in bill title;
2. Revise legislative purpose statement to read in part: “...on a portion of the property known as 600 West North Avenue, as shown in yellow on the accompanying site plans;...”
3. In Section 1, revise the 18th line to read in part: “...on a portion of the property known as 600 West North Avenue, as a separate tenant space within the multi-tenant retail building, as shown in yellow on the site plan accompanying this Ordinance,...”
4. Replace the Site Plan dated 1/13/2026 and used in lieu of the plat referred to in the bill with the site plan dated 3/12/2026 showing “Proposed Retail Goods Establishment (with alcoholic beverage sales), Designated Tenant Space within Multi-Tenant Retail Building”.

STAFF: Austin C. Davis

PETITIONER: Councilmember Torrence, at the request of MCB Blank Slate Madison Park LLC

OWNER: MCB Blank Slate Madison Park LLC

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: The property known as 600 West North Avenue (Block 3435, Lot 001) is located along the south side of West North Avenue between Park Avenue and Brookfield Avenue. The site is currently improved with a former day-care building that has been vacant for several years. The submitted site plan proposes redevelopment of the property with a grocery store building and a separate multi-tenant retail building, along with associated parking and site circulation improvements.

General Area: The surrounding area includes a mix of residential rowhouse neighborhoods and commercial uses along the North Avenue corridor. North Avenue is a major east-west commercial corridor and transit route serving nearby neighborhoods including Madison Park, Bolton Hill, and Reservoir Hill.

The property is also part of the broader Madison Park West redevelopment area, which has seen substantial reinvestment in recent years including new residential and mixed-use development

HISTORY

While the subject property was historically used as a day-care facility but has remained vacant for several years, planning and redevelopment efforts for the West North Avenue corridor have evolved over several years as part of broader efforts to address long-standing disinvestment and vacancy in central and west Baltimore. During the mid-2010s, the site known as Madison Park North, located on the 800 block of West North Avenue, was identified for large-scale mixed-use redevelopment. Early planning for the area envisioned a phased redevelopment including new housing, improved public spaces, and eventual neighborhood-serving commercial uses along North Avenue.

By 2018, MCB Real Estate and development partners had assembled approximately 8 acres of property along West North Avenue and began planning a multi-phase redevelopment project now commonly referred to as Madison Park North or Reservoir Square. Initial phases of redevelopment focused on residential development, new streets, and infrastructure improvements intended to support future mixed-use development along the corridor. In 2021, the Maryland General Assembly established the West North Avenue Development Authority (WNADA) to support long-term revitalization of the West North Avenue corridor and surrounding neighborhoods. The authority was created to coordinate redevelopment efforts and administer state funding to support housing, economic development, transportation, and public realm improvements within a defined corridor area.

In August 2022, Phase 1 of the Madison Park North redevelopment broke ground, introducing approximately 120 new townhomes, new internal streets, and public realm improvements along North Avenue. Later phases of redevelopment were envisioned to include a grocery store, additional retail space, residential development, and office uses. State support for the corridor continued to expand in 2023, when additional funding was allocated to WNADA to support revitalization initiatives along a 2.4-mile segment of West North Avenue. These investments are intended to facilitate long-term redevelopment, economic development, and improved neighborhood services along the corridor.

In 2025, MCB Real Estate and Blank Slate Development announced the acquisition of 600 West North Avenue, a site of approximately 1.5 acres located within the broader Madison Park redevelopment area. The development team announced plans to construct a neighborhood grocery store and associated retail space at the site. The proposed project includes a grocery store and a multi-tenant retail building intended to serve nearby residents and support continued revitalization along the North Avenue corridor.

On February 9, 2026, City Council Bill #26-0150 was introduced to authorize a conditional use for a retail goods establishment with alcoholic beverage sales on a portion of the property known as 600 West North Avenue, along with associated variances related to site development standards. The legislation supports the proposed redevelopment of the site consistent with the submitted site plan.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The 2024 Comprehensive Master Plan for the City of Baltimore was enacted by Ordinance #24-426, dated December 2, 2024. The subject property is designated within the Community Commercial category in the General Land Use Plan. The proposed development conforms to that designation, as the site is intended to support neighborhood-serving commercial activity along a major corridor. The proposed grocery store and retail uses support the Comprehensive Master Plan’s goals of strengthening neighborhood commercial corridors and improving access to essential goods and services for nearby residents.

ANALYSIS

Background: The petitioner proposes redevelopment of the property at 600 West North Avenue with a grocery store and a separate multi-tenant retail building. The grocery store is anticipated to operate as a Streets Market grocery store, providing fresh food and everyday household goods to nearby residents. The request for a Retail Goods Establishment (with Alcoholic Beverage Sales) applies only to a portion of the proposed multi-tenant retail building located at the corner of West North Avenue, and not to the grocery store building itself. The conditional use would allow alcoholic beverage sales within a single tenant space within that retail building.

The legislation also includes requests for variances related to the maximum front yard setback and the maximum number of permitted off-street parking spaces associated with the proposed development. Redevelopment of this long-vacant property will support the continued revitalization of the North Avenue corridor and provide neighborhood-serving retail in a location well-served by transit and nearby residential communities.

Additionally, the proposed development supports the goals of the Planning Department’s Healthy Food Environment Strategy, which seeks to improve equitable access to healthy and affordable food throughout Baltimore. Many neighborhoods in central and west Baltimore have historically experienced limited access to full-service grocery stores.

While the conditional use request applies to a separate tenant space within the multi-tenant retail building, the proposed retail uses are intended to support and complement the grocery store and broader neighborhood-serving commercial activity planned for the site. Together, these uses will help strengthen the North Avenue commercial corridor while advancing the City’s goal of improving access to healthy food and daily necessities in underserved areas.

Conditional Use Approval Standards:

§ 5-406. Approval standards.

(a) *Evaluation criteria.*

As a guide to its decision on the facts of each case, the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals or the City Council must consider the following, where appropriate:

- (1) the nature of the proposed site, including its size and shape and the proposed size, shape, and arrangement of structures;
- (2) the resulting traffic patterns and adequacy of proposed off-street parking and loading;
- (3) the nature of the surrounding area and the extent to which the proposed use might impair its present and future development;
- (4) the proximity of dwellings, churches, schools, public structures, and other places of public gathering;
- (5) accessibility of the premises for emergency vehicles;
- (6) accessibility of light and air to the premises and to the property in the vicinity;
- (7) the type and location of adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, and other necessary facilities that have been or will be provided;
- (8) the preservation of cultural and historic landmarks and structures;
- (9) the character of the neighborhood;
- (10) the provisions of the City's Comprehensive Master Plan;
- (11) the provisions of any applicable Urban Renewal Plan;
- (12) all applicable standards and requirements of this Code;
- (13) the intent and purpose of this Code; and
- (14) any other matters considered to be in the interest of the general welfare.

(b) *Limited criteria for denying.*

The Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals or the City Council, may not approve a conditional use or sign unless, after public notice and hearing and on consideration of the standards required by this subtitle, the Board or Council finds that:

- (1) the establishment, location, construction, maintenance, or operation of the conditional use or sign would not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, or welfare;
- (2) the use or sign would not be precluded by any other law, including an applicable Urban Renewal Plan;
- (3) the authorization would not be contrary to the public interest; and
- (4) the authorization would be in harmony with the purpose and intent of this Code.

As a guide to its decision, the City Council must consider the evaluation criteria listed in §5-406(a). Staff has reviewed the proposed conditional use against these criteria and finds the following:

1. The nature of the proposed site, including its size and shape and the arrangement of structures, is appropriate for the proposed use. The redevelopment plan includes a grocery store building and a separate multi-tenant retail building on a site located along a major commercial corridor. The requested conditional use would apply only to a single tenant space within the proposed corner retail building, representing a limited portion of the overall development.
2. The resulting traffic patterns and adequacy of off-street parking and loading are appropriate for the proposed use. The redevelopment plan includes on-site parking and internal circulation designed to serve the grocery store and retail uses. Staff is recommending to meter the on-street parking in an effort to encourage use of the free parking on the rear of the site. The need for additional on-site parking, along with metered spots, aligns with other North Ave commercial developments and also supports the Department's goal to promote healthy commercial corridors.
3. The nature of the surrounding area includes a mix of residential neighborhoods and commercial uses along the North Avenue corridor. The proposed retail tenant with alcoholic beverage sales would be located within a commercial development along this corridor and is not expected to impair the present or future development of the surrounding area.

4. The proximity of dwellings, churches, schools, public structures, and other places of public gathering has been considered. While residential neighborhoods exist nearby, the proposed use is located within a commercial corridor and within a planned mixed-use redevelopment area. The limited scale of the tenant space associated with the conditional use is not expected to negatively impact nearby community institutions.
5. The accessibility of the premises for emergency vehicles will be adequate. The proposed redevelopment includes internal drive aisles and site access points designed to accommodate emergency access consistent with applicable codes and regulations.
6. The accessibility of light and air to the premises and to nearby properties will not be adversely affected. The conditional use will occur within a tenant space in a newly constructed retail building and will not alter building massing or site layout in a way that would affect surrounding properties.
7. The type and location of utilities, access roads, drainage, and other necessary facilities will be provided as part of the overall redevelopment of the site. These improvements will support the proposed grocery store and retail uses and are adequate for the proposed tenant space associated with the conditional use.
8. The preservation of cultural and historic landmarks and structures will not be affected by the proposed use. The redevelopment of the site does not involve the alteration or demolition of any designated historic landmark.
9. The character of the neighborhood includes a mix of residential areas and commercial activity along North Avenue. The proposed retail use within the multi-tenant building is consistent with the commercial character of the corridor and the broader redevelopment of the Madison Park West area.
10. The proposal is also consistent with the provisions of the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, which encourages the revitalization of neighborhood commercial corridors and improved access to goods and services for nearby residents.
11. There is no applicable Urban Renewal Plan that would preclude the proposed conditional use.
12. The proposed use will comply with all applicable standards and requirements of the Zoning Code, including conditional use standards and applicable development review requirements.
13. The proposal is consistent with the intent and purpose of the Zoning Code, which seeks to encourage appropriate commercial development along major corridors while supporting neighborhood-serving retail uses.
14. Finally, the proposed development advances the general welfare by supporting the redevelopment of a long-vacant site and introducing neighborhood-serving retail uses, including a grocery store, that will improve access to goods and services for surrounding communities.

Variance Approval Standards:

§ 5-308. Approval standards.

(a) Required finding of practical difficulty.

To grant a variance, the Zoning Administrator, the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals, or the City Council, as the case may be, shall find that:

- (1) because of the conditions peculiar to the property, including particular physical surroundings, shape, or topographical conditions of the specific structure or land involved, a practical difficulty, as distinguished from a mere inconvenience, would result if the strict letter of the applicable requirement were carried out; or
- (2) because of exceptional circumstances related to the specific structure or land involved, a practical difficulty, as distinguished from a mere inconvenience, would result if the strict letter of the applicable requirement were carried out.

(b) Other required findings.

The Zoning Administrator, the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals, or the City Council, as the case may be, must also find that:

- (1) the practical difficulty is caused by this Code and has not been created by the intentional action or inaction of any person who has a present interest in the property;
- (2) the purpose of the variance is not based exclusively on a desire to increase the value or income potential of the property;
- (3) the variance will not:
 - (i) be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity; or
 - (ii) substantially diminish and impair property values in the neighborhood;
- (4) the variance is in harmony with the purpose and intent of this Code;
- (5) the variance is not precluded by and will not adversely affect:
 - (i) any Urban Renewal Plan;
 - (ii) the City's Comprehensive Master Plan; or
 - (iii) any Historical and Architectural Preservation District; and
- (6) the variance will not otherwise:
 - (i) be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, or welfare; or
 - (ii) be in any way contrary to the public interest.

Below is the staff's review of Article 32 – Zoning, §5-308 {"Approval standards"}:

Staff finds that practical difficulty would result from strict application of the Zoning Code requirements related to the maximum front yard setback and the maximum number of permitted off-street parking spaces.

The subject property occupies a highly visible and unique location along West North Avenue, immediately adjacent to the I-83 interchange and within the broader Madison Park North / Reservoir Square redevelopment area. Within the larger redevelopment area, the subject parcel represents one of the few undeveloped sites capable of accommodating a grocery store and associated retail uses. The grocery store is intended to serve nearby residential neighborhoods that currently have limited access to full-service grocery options, and the development is expected to attract customers from both the surrounding communities and from the broader corridor due to its proximity to a major transportation route.

Because of the location of the site along a major arterial corridor and adjacent to the interstate, the proposed grocery store is expected to generate higher levels of vehicular activity than a typical neighborhood retail use. Strict application of the Zoning Code's parking maximum would limit the ability of the site to provide adequate parking to accommodate anticipated customer demand associated with a grocery store and supporting retail uses. Staff therefore finds

that the requested parking variance reflects the operational needs of the proposed development and the unique transportation context of the site.

With regard to the front yard setback, the proposed building placement and site design incorporate additional space between the building and the street to allow for pedestrian circulation, landscaping, and potential outdoor dining associated with the proposed retail and restaurant uses within the multi-tenant building. This setback area will contribute to a more active and pedestrian-oriented frontage along North Avenue and provide space for outdoor seating that serves as a neighborhood amenity.

Staff finds that these circumstances represent practical difficulty rather than mere inconvenience, as strict adherence to the setback and parking requirements would limit the ability of the site to function effectively as a neighborhood-serving commercial development anchored by a grocery store.

Staff also finds that the practical difficulty is caused by the application of the Zoning Code and has not been created by the intentional action or inaction of the current property owner. The need for the requested variances arises from the configuration of the site, its location along a major corridor adjacent to interstate infrastructure, and the parking demands associated with the proposed grocery store use.

Staff further finds that the purpose of the requested variances is not based exclusively on a desire to increase the value or income potential of the property, but rather to facilitate the redevelopment of a long-vacant property with neighborhood-serving retail uses that improve access to food and services for nearby residents.

The requested variances will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity and will not substantially diminish or impair property values in the neighborhood. The site is located within a commercial corridor and is part of a broader redevelopment effort intended to introduce new housing, retail, and public realm improvements along West North Avenue.

Staff finds that the requested variances are in harmony with the purpose and intent of the Zoning Code, which encourages appropriate commercial development along major corridors while supporting neighborhood-serving retail uses.

The variances are not precluded by and will not adversely affect any Urban Renewal Plan, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, or any Historical and Architectural Preservation District.

Finally, staff finds that the requested variances will not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, or welfare and will not be contrary to the public interest. The redevelopment of the site will replace a long-vacant structure with active commercial uses and will support ongoing revitalization along the West North Avenue corridor.

Equity:

- **Impact:**

In the short term, the project will introduce a full-service grocery store and supporting retail uses to an area that has historically experienced limited access to fresh food and neighborhood-serving commercial amenities. The addition of these uses will improve access to groceries, household goods, and other daily necessities for nearby residents while activating a long-vacant property along the North Avenue corridor. The project will also bring increased activity and vibrancy to the site and surrounding area through new retail destinations, pedestrian activity, and outdoor dining opportunities associated with the proposed retail spaces.

In the longer term, the development may provide employment opportunities for residents in nearby neighborhoods through grocery and retail jobs, while supporting the continued revitalization of the North Avenue corridor. By reintroducing neighborhood-serving commercial uses and improving access to fresh food, the project has the potential to help address long-standing patterns of disinvestment and limited food access that have affected many communities in central and west Baltimore.

- **Engagement:**

The broader redevelopment of the West North Avenue corridor and the Madison Park North / Reservoir Square area has involved extensive community engagement over several years. Residents, neighborhood organizations, and other stakeholders have participated in discussions related to redevelopment planning, housing, transportation, and economic development along the corridor.

Planning staff have also participated in community meetings related to the broader redevelopment effort and the proposed grocery and retail development at this site. Through these discussions, community members have expressed strong interest in the introduction of neighborhood-serving retail uses, particularly a grocery store, along the North Avenue corridor.

- **Internal Operations:**

The proposed legislation does not create significant operational impacts for the Department of Planning. Staff review of the proposal has occurred as part of the standard development and legislative review process.

Recommendation: Approval with Amendments

Notification: The Historic Mt. Royal Terrace Association (HMRTA), Reservoir Hill Association (RHA), the Reservoir Hill Improvement Council (RHIC), and the Bolton Hill Community Organization (BHCA) have been notified of this action. Staff sent notice of this action to approximately 17,000 subscribers via GovDelivery.



Ren Southard
Acting Director