


FROM	NAME & TITLE	CHRIS RYER, DIRECTOR	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING 8 TH FLOOR, 417 EAST FAYETTE STREET		
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL #25-0092/ ZONING – CONDITIONAL USE CONVERSION TO A BANQUET HALL IN THE C-2 ZONING DISTRICT – VARIANCE – 1123 WEST BALTIMORE STREET		

TO

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

DATE: September 19, 2025

At its regular meeting of September 18, 2025, the Planning Commission considered City Council Bill #25-0092, for the purpose of permitting, subject to certain conditions, the establishment, maintenance, and operation of a banquet hall on the property known as 1123 West Baltimore Street (Block 0217, Lot 012) in the C-2 Zoning District, as outlined in red on the accompanying plat; granting a variance regarding off-street parking requirements; and providing for a special effective date.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Planning Commission reviewed the attached staff report which recommended approval of City Council Bill #25-0092, and adopted the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission finds, in accordance with §5-406 of the Zoning Code of Baltimore City, that the proposed use provided in this bill:

- would not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, or welfare;
- would not be precluded by any other law, including an applicable Urban Renewal Plan;
- would not be contrary to the public interest; and
- meets all criteria for approval specified in §5-406(b) of the Zoning Code of Baltimore City, as described in the Departmental staff report; and further

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission concurs with the recommendation of its Departmental staff, and therefore recommends that City Council Bill #25-0092 be **approved** by the City Council.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Eric Tiso, Division Chief, Land Use and Urban Design Division at 410-396-8358.

CR/ewt

attachment

cc: Ms. Nina Themelis, Mayor's Office
The Honorable John Bullock, Council Rep. to Planning Commission
Ms. Rebecca Witt, BMZA
Mr. Geoffrey Veale, Zoning Administration
Ms. Stephanie Murdock, DHCD
Ms. Hilary Ruley, Law Dept.
Mr. Francis Burnszynski, PABC
Mr. Luciano Diaz, DOT
Ms. Nancy Mead, Council Services
Mr. Shawn Scott, Applicant



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Jon Laria, Chair; Eric Stephenson, Vice Chair

STAFF REPORT



Chris Ryer
Director

September 18, 2025

REQUEST: City Council Bill #25-0092/ Zoning – Conditional Use Conversion to a Banquet Hall in the C-2 Zoning District – Variance – 1123 West Baltimore Street

For the purpose of permitting, subject to certain conditions, the establishment, maintenance, and operation of a banquet hall on the property known as 1123 West Baltimore Street (Block 0217, Lot 012) in the C-2 Zoning District, as outlined in red on the accompanying plat; granting a variance regarding off-street parking requirements; and providing for a special effective date.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt findings and approve

STAFF: Justin Walker

PETITIONER: Shawn Scott

OWNER: Cecil Clarke

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: 1123 West Baltimore Street is located on the southwest corner of the intersection with South Carlton Street. The property measures approximately 32 by 67 feet and is currently improved with a two-story building that occupies the entire lot. The site is zoned C-2 and lies within the Southwest Partnership Vision Plan area and the Union Square CHAP District. The structure is situated at the end of a row of commercial buildings, where one building carries a vacant building notice and two others were recently demolished. The buildings across the alley to the east were demolished in late 2020. The subject building is presently unoccupied and was previously authorized for use as a place of worship in 2013, and its last authorized use was for a retail goods establishment (screen printing business) in 2022. Staff notes that the owners are working through corrections of exterior modification violations with CHAP staff.

General Area: The subject property is located within the Hollins Market Neighborhood Statistical Area along the West Baltimore Street corridor, which is predominantly zoned C-1 and C-2 to accommodate neighborhood- and community-serving commercial uses. The blockface is largely commercial, with only one dwelling unit recorded by DHCD data, and there are no schools located within a block of the site. The University of Maryland BioPark is located approximately a quarter mile to the east. Overall, the area context supports the proposed banquet hall use with limited residential or institutional uses in close proximity to the site.

HISTORY

There are no previous legislative or Planning Commission actions regarding this site.

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 in the Mixed Use: Predominantly Pedestrian-Oriented Commercial group in the General Land Use Plan. This proposed development conforms to that designation.

ANALYSIS

Background: Lil Ms Butterfly Inc. proposes to operate an event venue at 1123 West Baltimore Street, per the Zoning Code this is a banquet hall, as defined below. The use will be located on the first floor of the property. The venue will host weddings, baby showers, birthday celebrations, nonprofit functions, corporate events, and community gatherings. In addition to hall rental, the business will provide event planning and décor services to their clients.

The proposed hours of operation are Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., with Saturday and Sunday hours available by appointment to conclude by 12:00, midnight. The clientele will include local residents, nonprofit organizations, and individuals or companies seeking space for private or corporate events.

Definition: The proposed use of the property meets the definition of a banquet hall in Article 32 – *Zoning* (hereinafter *Zoning* or Zoning Code).

§ 1-303. "Bail bond establishment" to "Child day-care home".

...

(c) *Banquet hall*.

(1) *In general*.

"Banquet hall" means an establishment:

- (i) for which all events are directly managed by the owner of the facility or by a person regularly employed by the owner and responsible to the owner for the on-site management of all events held in that facility and for event arrangements;
- (ii) that is used regularly for serving food or beverage provided by the owner or by caterers and suppliers approved in advance by the owner;
- (iii) that serves designated groups that, before the day of the event, have reserved the facility for banquets or meetings and provided all insurance certificates, security contracts, off-street parking contracts required by the facility's owner;
- (iv) to which the general public is not admitted;
- (v) for which no admission fee is charged at the door; and
- (vi) in which no third party promoter is involved or stands to profit.

(2) *Supplemental definition*.

In paragraph (1)(vi) of this subsection, "promoter" means a person whose primary business is to organize, schedule, and operate one-time events in various leased venues through wide-scale promotions and advance sales of general admission tickets advertised primarily by flyers, websites, e-blasts, and social media and customarily selling general admission tickets at the door.

(3) *Inclusions*.

"Banquet hall" includes an establishment that provides live entertainment as an accessory to the use described in paragraph (1) of this subsection.

(4) *Exclusions*.

"Banquet hall" does not include any restaurant or tavern.

Conditional Use: In the C-2 zoning district, a banquet hall use is a conditional use that must be approved by ordinance of the Mayor and City Council (*Zoning*, Table 9-301). Conditional Uses are generally presumed to be allowable in a given zoning district, provided that certain required

findings can be met, as outlined in *Zoning* § 5-406, below. The proposed use would occupy the first floor of the structure.

§ 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 on the facts of each case, the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals or the City Council must consider the following, where appropriate:

The nature of the proposed site, including its size and shape and the proposed size, shape, and arrangement of structures; Staff does not find anything about the property's configuration that would render it unsuitable for the proposed banquet hall use. The building's first floor is one contiguous level, and is located in a commercial zone where there should be little negative impact to any nearby residential uses.

The resulting traffic patterns and adequacy of proposed off-street parking and loading; This is a relatively small building in a commercial area, and so staff does not expect that the proposed use will generate enough intensity of use that would present an unreasonable impact to traffic patterns in the immediate area. Loading could either be accomplished through the front door, as is typical for many small business uses in C-2 zones throughout the City, or could be through the rear of the building from the adjacent alleys.

The nature of the surrounding area and the extent to which the proposed use might impair its present and future development; This use is generally appropriate for commercial zones,

and should not create any negatively impacts beyond a typical business. Staff does not believe that the redevelopment of the nearby vacant properties will be negatively impacted in any way.

The proximity of dwellings, churches, schools, public structures, and other places of public gathering; Staff notes that there is one Place of Worship in the same block, at the opposite corner to the west. We do not expect there to be any negative impacts on that Place of Worship, given that the typical hours of operation will not conflict between the two, and given the relatively small size of the proposed banquet hall. The nearest school is three blocks distant, and should not be impacted by this proposed use.

Accessibility of the premises for emergency vehicles; This property is easily accessible to Police, Fire and EMS services.

Accessibility of light and air to the premises and to the property in the vicinity; The building is not proposed to be changed, and so there are no concerns for access to light and air.

The type and location of adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, and other necessary facilities that have been or will be provided; This building is located within the existing City street grid, is adequately served by City infrastructure, and no new construction is proposed. This use should not present any greater impact to City services than prior uses that have occupied the site.

The preservation of cultural and historic landmarks and structures; This site is located within the Union Square CHAP district. As there are no exterior changes proposed, there is no impact presented here. Should any future exterior changes be desired, review by the CHAP Commission will be required.

The character of the neighborhood; This site is located in the northwestern corner of the Hollins Market neighborhood, along the commercial corridor of West Baltimore Street. Hollins House, a ten-story residential Senior Community for Adults (62+ years) is located a block to the east, on the north side of the street. To the south of this site is a commercial node with C-1 zoning for a block and a half before reaching the next residential area.

The provisions of the City's Comprehensive Master Plan; The General Land Use Plan has designated this block as Mixed Use: Predominantly Pedestrian-Oriented Commercial, for which the existing C-1 and C-2 zones are appropriate. The proposed banquet hall therefore does not conflict with the anticipated use mix for this area.

The provisions of any applicable Urban Renewal Plan; This site is not located within an Urban Renewal Plan (URP) area.

All applicable standards and requirements of this Code; The proposed use will need to meet the general requirements of the Building, Fire, and Related Codes, as well as any business licensing that may be required.

The intent and purpose of this Code; and Any other matters considered to be in the interest of the general welfare. Staff finds that this use is appropriate for the C-2 zone, the commercial corridor as outlined in the General Land Use Plan, and does not present any likely impacts greater than any other allowable business. Staff therefore finds no reason why the establishment, location, maintenance, or operation of this use would be detrimental to public health, safety, or welfare beyond what can ordinarily be anticipated from the operation of a business of this type.

We therefore recommend that the Planning Commission should adopt these findings and recommend the bill favorably.

Off-Street Parking: In addition to conditional use approval, the Zoning Code requires banquet halls to provide off-street parking at a rate of one space per ten persons of fire-rated capacity (Zoning, Table 16-406). The site is entirely occupied by the structure; therefore, no off-street parking can be provided on-site.

Given that this building is over 50 years old, it is eligible for an exemption of parking per Zoning § 16-601:

§ 16-601. Exemptions and reductions from requirements.

...

(f) *Structures over 50 years old, etc.*

(1) *In general.*

Structures over 50 years old or structures that have received an historic tax credit are exempt from the parking requirements, subject to review and approval by the Director of Planning, if they have not historically provided parking and they lack sufficient space on the lot to accommodate parking.

There have been several different commercial and residential uses approved for this building stretching back to the late 90s in City records, but staff can't locate any prior variances for parking. That leads us to believe that the building has never provided off-street parking, as it was built in 1915, and so dates prior to the adoption of the 1971 Zoning Code when off-street parking was first required. We also note that a commercial parking lot has existed to the immediate south of this site dating back to at least 1981, and that was likely where some of the parking demand for this portion of the commercial corridor was met. We note that the parking lot is now City-owned, and available for public parking.

Under §16-601 of the Zoning Code, the Director of Planning granted a parking exemption on the application dated September 17, 2025. Based on the findings above, staff concludes that the exemption requirements were met. Accordingly, the property is exempt from the parking requirements of Zoning Code Table 16-406, and no variance is necessary for approval of the proposed use.

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.

After the drafting of CCB #25-0092, the applicant applied for and was granted a parking exemption under §16-601 of the Zoning Code. This provision authorizes the Director of Planning to exempt structures that are more than 50 years old and that historically have not provided parking from the parking requirements of Zoning Code Table 16-406. As the property is now exempt, an off-street parking variance is no longer required.

Equity: The proposed banquet hall will provide a community amenity by reducing vacancy and reactivating a commercial building along the West Baltimore Street corridor. The project will generate additional foot traffic, preserve the structure within the CHAP district, and contribute to the long-term vitality of the neighborhood. With residentially zoned lots located several blocks away, direct impacts are expected to be limited, and nearby paid parking lots and transit service provide accessibility to patrons, ensuring the use can operate without creating disproportionate burdens on surrounding properties.

Recommendation: Adopt findings and approve

Notification: The Hollins Roundhouse Neighborhood Association was notified of this action and provided a letter of support. In addition to the required posting on the property, staff sent notice of this Planning Commission action via GovDelivery.



Chris Ryer
Director