DATE: February 23, 2006


Applicant:
Arlington Cinema ‘N’ Drafthouse

By:
Gregory Godbout, President
Arlington Cinema
2903 Columbia Pike
Arlington, Virginia 22204

C.M. RECOMMENDATION:

Approve, subject to the conditions of the staff report with a review by the County Board in one (1) year (March 2007).

ISSUES: None.

SUMMARY: This is a use permit for live entertainment in an existing theater and restaurant (Arlington Cinema ‘N’ Drafthouse) located on Columbia Pike. Currently the applicant specializes in top box office movies, televised events and private events. The movies will continue to be the primary source of entertainment; however, in addition, the applicant plans to host a wide variety of social/cultural live entertainment events Monday through Sunday between the hours of 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. The owner of the property has provided a letter of consent supporting the applicant's request. The proposed live entertainment is consistent with the vision of the Columbia Pike Initiative – A Revitalization Plan – Update and complies with the County's Zoning Ordinance. Staff supports the applicant's proposed request for live entertainment. The applicant has agreed to conditions aimed at mitigating impacts and providing for the health and safety of the general public. Therefore, it is recommended that this use permit be approved subject to the conditions of the staff report with a review by the County Board in one (1) year (March 2007).
BACKGROUND: The theater is located on the corner of Columbia Pike and Walter Reed Drive. For over 20 years, the theater has been offering full restaurant fare, tableside service, and entertainment to patrons of both Arlington and the surrounding DC Metro area. The theater currently specializes in top box office movies, televised events and private events.

Site: The site is located at 2903 Columbia Pike – the northwest corner of the intersection of Columbia Pike and Walter Reed Drive. The site is generally surrounded by commercial and retail uses.

Zoning: The site is zoned “C-2” Service Commercial-Community Business Districts.

Land Use: The site is designated on the General Land Use Plan as “Service Commercial” (Personal and business services. Generally one to four stories. Maximum 1.5 FAR with special provisions within the Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District). The site is also located within the Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District as designated on the General Land Use Plan.

Neighborhood: The site is within the Arlington Heights Civic Association but in proximity to the Columbia Heights and Douglas Park Civic Associations and the Penrose Neighborhood Association. The Arlington Heights and Douglas Park Civic Associations and the Penrose Neighborhood Association have expressed enthusiastic support of this use permit. To date, staff has not heard from the Columbia Heights Civic Association.

DISCUSSION: The site is located within the “Town Center” area of the Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District. The Town Center, as defined in the Columbia Pike Initiative – A Revitalization Plan – Update, “will serve as the heart of the “Main Street” and the greater community, creating a regional draw through its entertainment, cultural, restaurant and retail destinations.” The live entertainment, as proposed by the applicant, will further this vision of the Town Center.

The applicant proposes to have live entertainment events Monday through Sunday between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 a.m. The applicant has stated that live entertainment events on Sunday will not extend later than midnight unless the next day is a holiday. Top box office movies will continue as the primary form of entertainment; however, as a small theater venue, the applicant would like to maintain the flexibility to offer a wide variety of entertainment at all hours of operation. The number of live entertainment events will vary depending on the week. Typically, there will be one - four live entertainment events during the week. The applicant estimates that the average number of events will likely be two per week to avoid interrupting the existing movie schedules.

The applicant has proposed to host a variety of live entertainment events including:

Comedians / Magicians / Entertainers: Events for families would likely be positioned during the day (11 a.m. – 4 p.m.) or early evening hours (4 p.m. – 6 p.m.). Events for adults would be positioned during the prime evening (6 p.m. – 10 p.m.) or late evening
hours (10 p.m. – 2 a.m.). The average event length for this type of entertainment will likely be two hours.

**Bands:** Types of bands include Acoustic Bands, Rock Bands, Jazz Bands, Children’s Music Groups, Orchestra/Concert Bands, Marching Bands, and Swing Bands. Most band events will be held in the prime evening or late evening hours. However, there will be some events held during day for Children’s Music Groups or Teenage Band Events (as requested by Arlington’s Department of Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources Office for Teens). The average event length for this type of entertainment will likely be two – three hours.

**Live Theater:** These events would include professional theater groups, local community theater groups, local school theater clubs and interactive/murder mystery theater groups. Events for families would likely be positioned during the day or evening hours. Events for adults would be positioned during the prime evening or late evening hours. The average event length for this type of entertainment will likely be two – three hours.

**Karaoke / DJs:** These events would include individual disc jockeys or karaoke machines to entertain guest with pre-recorded music. Most events of this type will occur during early evening hours to entertain guests prior to the start of a scheduled movie. It is anticipated that the average length for this type of entertainment will be one – two hours long. However, the use of a karaoke machine or a DJ would also be used for more rare special events like providing background music for a New Year’s event or during major sporting or TV events.

**Amateur Artist / Open-Mic Events / Talent Shows:** These events would allow patrons to attend and provide entertainment for the audience. Events for families would likely be positioned during the day or early evening hours. Events for adults would be positioned during the prime evening or late evening hours. The average event length for this type of entertainment will likely be one – three hours.

The theater is a venue built for, experienced with and positioned for live entertainment. The theater was originally built in 1939 with a large stage and greenroom/backstage area, and during its history, the theater has hosted many live entertainment events as part of its private event offerings. The theater is already soundproofed and acoustically designed so that noise outside the theater is nearly eliminated so as to not disturb the many restaurants and stores physically located adjacent to the theater.

The applicant has stressed that it is not their intention to turn the theater into a nightclub. The theater provides an entertainment venue that offers full restaurant service – one event at a time. The applicant is excited and hopes to have the opportunity to serve the local Arlington community as well as the broader metropolitan area with a more diverse catalog of entertainment.
CONCLUSION: The applicant has agreed to the conditions of the staff report. The proposed use will further the vision of the Town Center as described in the Columbia Pike Initiative – A Revitalization Plan – Update in “creating a regional draw through its entertainment, cultural, restaurant and retail destinations.” Therefore, it is recommended that the use permit be approved subject to the conditions of the staff report with a review by the County Board in one (1) year (March 2007).

1. Live entertainment shall be permitted only between the hours of 11 a.m. to 2 a.m., seven days a week.

2. The windows and doors to outside of the building shall be closed during hours of live entertainment and the applicant shall ensure that the soundproofing shall comply with the Arlington County Noise Ordinance. No music shall be piped outside of the restaurant.

3. The applicant agrees that all requirements of County and State Ordinances, the Environmental Health Bureau, the Fire Marshal, the Police Department and the Alcohol Beverage Control Board shall be met.

4. The applicant shall provide the name, address, and phone number of an on-going community liaison to the Zoning Administrator and to the surrounding civic association presidents, including the Arlington Heights, Columbia Heights, Douglas Park and Penrose Civic Associations, in order to effectively address neighborhood concerns.
PREVIOUS COUNTY BOARD ACTIONS: There have been no previous County Board actions on this site.