

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 4, 2012

TO: CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE OHAD BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

FROM: AL COX, FAIA, HISTORIC PRESERVATION MANAGER

SUBJECT: 815½ KING STREET, BAR CASE #2011-00365

To be consistent with how revisions and updates to staff reports are handled throughout the Department of Planning & Zoning, and to promote clarity and brevity for the Board and the public, Staff is presenting the following new memo format for revisions to BAR cases. In this particular instance, a portion of the previous application was deferred for restudy by the Board. Instead of writing a new staff report incorporating previous information which is unchanged, any new information, including the applicant's revision and Staff's analysis, will now be contained within a cover memorandum. The previous report will then be attached in its entirety for reference.

At the January 18, 2012 hearing, the Board approved the demolition of the existing canopy and other minor alterations and deferred action on the proposed storefront. Since the Board last reviewed this application, the applicant has made the following revisions to the project:

- Renovate the building for potential use as a theater
- Retain the existing marquee that had been previously approved for demolition.
- Reface the existing marquee structure with a metal cornice and continuous light box comprised of LED tube lighting behind frosted Plexiglas
- Recreate the original transom windows in the first floor storefront, above the marquee
- Retain existing "OLD TOWN" letters but remove white face of the letters to create silhouette effect. Low intensity lighting behind the Old Town sign will be installed to uniformly wash the upper portion of the building façade.
- Remove the two existing theater menu board signs and replace with two 5' by 3.5' signs at marquee ends.
- Install a translucent film on second story windows to conceal existing framing and mechanical equipment. Fluorescent tubes will illuminate the second floor space behind the windows when the first floor lobby is occupied.
- Install decorative globe light fixtures above original recessed movie poster area where the terrazzo cladding was removed and original brick uncovered, on either side of the marquee.
- Install a new storefront system (black metal) with three pairs of double doors with

transoms above and repair and re-clad the existing ticket booth to match the storefront system.

ANALYSIS

The existing “OLD TOWN” sign letters, box office, and neon and internally illuminated plastic movie listing signs are existing noncomplying signs and can remain or be replaced in the same location at the same size or smaller. No new animated, flashing or changeable copy signs are permitted per Section 9-104 of the Zoning Ordinance. The proposed alterations must comply with the Storefront Guidelines of the King Street Retail Strategy, according to Section 6-705(F) of the Zoning Ordinance.

Although the Board had previously supported removal of the existing marquee and a return to the original theater design, the applicant has since reconsidered removal of the marquee based on comments made by prospective tenants and by both the Board and the public at the previous hearing. When the applicant came before the Board in January, they believed that the building’s use would convert from a theater to retail, although uses are not regulated by the Board and the proposed design is not dependent on a particular use. However, at this time it appears that the building may continue to operate as a theater. In this particular case, maintaining the building’s theater elements—a marquee with distinctive signage, lighting for posters and a ticket booth—are incorporated into the revised plans. In addition, the proposed tin ceiling on the underside of the marquee will be a significant improvement over the existing conditions.

While it had been noted in the previous Staff report that the existing marquee is not suited to the first period of the building’s appearance, Staff believes that the refaced and repaired marquee will result in an appearance that appropriately represents much of the building’s life and has gained historic importance in its own right. Although the size will not change, the marquee will have less overwhelming signage due to the changes proposed to the “OLD TOWN” lettering and the reduction in size of the two movie identification signs. This will allow more of the building’s metal storefront cornice and period appropriate marquee fascia to be visible from the street. Staff commends the applicant for removing the oversized menu board signs and notes that the smaller signs are more proportionate to the scale of the marquee.

While the details of the movie identification signs have not been submitted, Staff supports the proposed reduced sign area with some form of internal illumination and graphics/text that only changes when show times and movie offerings change each week. Staff notes that such a sign is only appropriate if the building is used for a theater and that any other type of retail or restaurant tenant would not be allowed to have such signage. The applicant has only submitted prototype signs for size and location on the building as part of a building signage master plan. The future tenant will return to the Board for approval of the actual signage.

The proposed illumination on the marquee and above the movie posters is appropriate for the style and period of this building. While the *Design Guidelines* generally discourage windows with obscure glass, Staff supports this application to make the second story windows translucent, as they are currently partially blocked by mechanical equipment and framing. Illuminating the

interior of the second story behind these windows will provide a soft glow to animate the upper level of the façade at night when the theater is in operation.

The proposed storefront system is similar to the existing, with multiple sets of double doors necessary for egress from a theater. The revised storefront reuses and re-faces the existing ticket booth and does not feature any type of show window, as previously proposed. The black metal system is understated and will coordinate with the black color of the refaced marquee and Old Town sign to provide a unified façade composition. Staff supports the proposal to reopen the transom just above the marquee, noting that the area proposed to be reopened was originally open as seen in the 1915 photograph, where the original entrance was recessed.

Staff finds the proposed scheme to be consistent with the King Street Retail Strategy *Storefront Design Guidelines* which advise “individual storefronts to follow the small-scale property pattern of King Street to add to the interest and richness of the pedestrian experience.” In addition, the *Storefront Guidelines* encourage “permanent marquee structures or canopies that project from the building...designed as an attractive and integral part of the overall façade design.”

STAFF RECOMMENDATION, APRIL 4, 2012: Staff recommends approval of the revised application with the following updated conditions:

1. That this application serves as a sign master plan but that the future tenant submit an application before the BAR for final sign details;
2. That Staff approve the mortar and brick color and texture for any area requiring infill;
3. That if replacement windows are necessary on the front or rear elevation, that they be in conformance with the Board’s adopted Window Policy; and
4. That the applicant recreates the three finials and bracket molding at the roof parapet, shown in the original photographs, as part of the façade restoration.

Images:



Figure 1. Proposed day view.



Figure 2. Proposed night view.

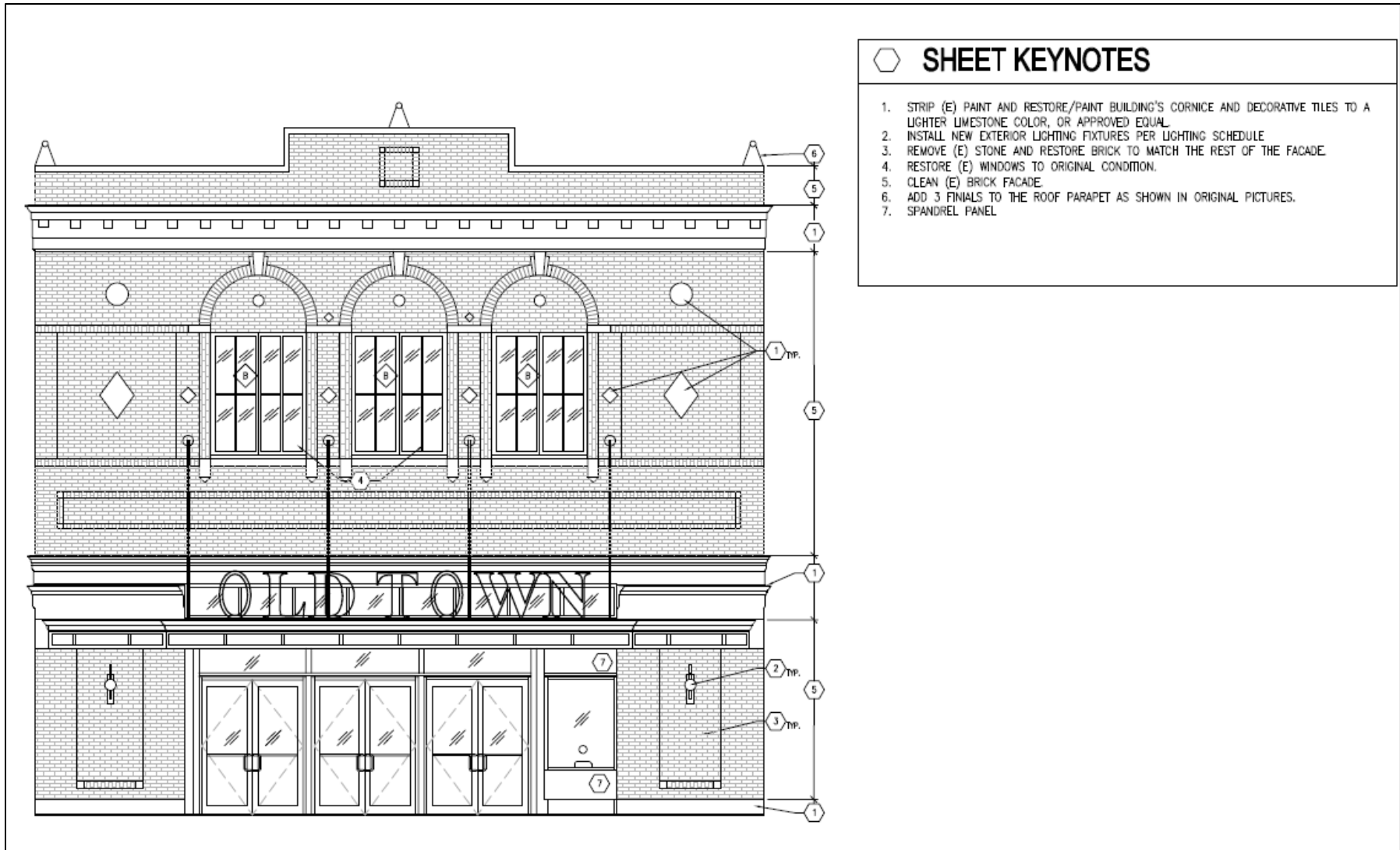


Figure 3. Proposed facade (south elevation).

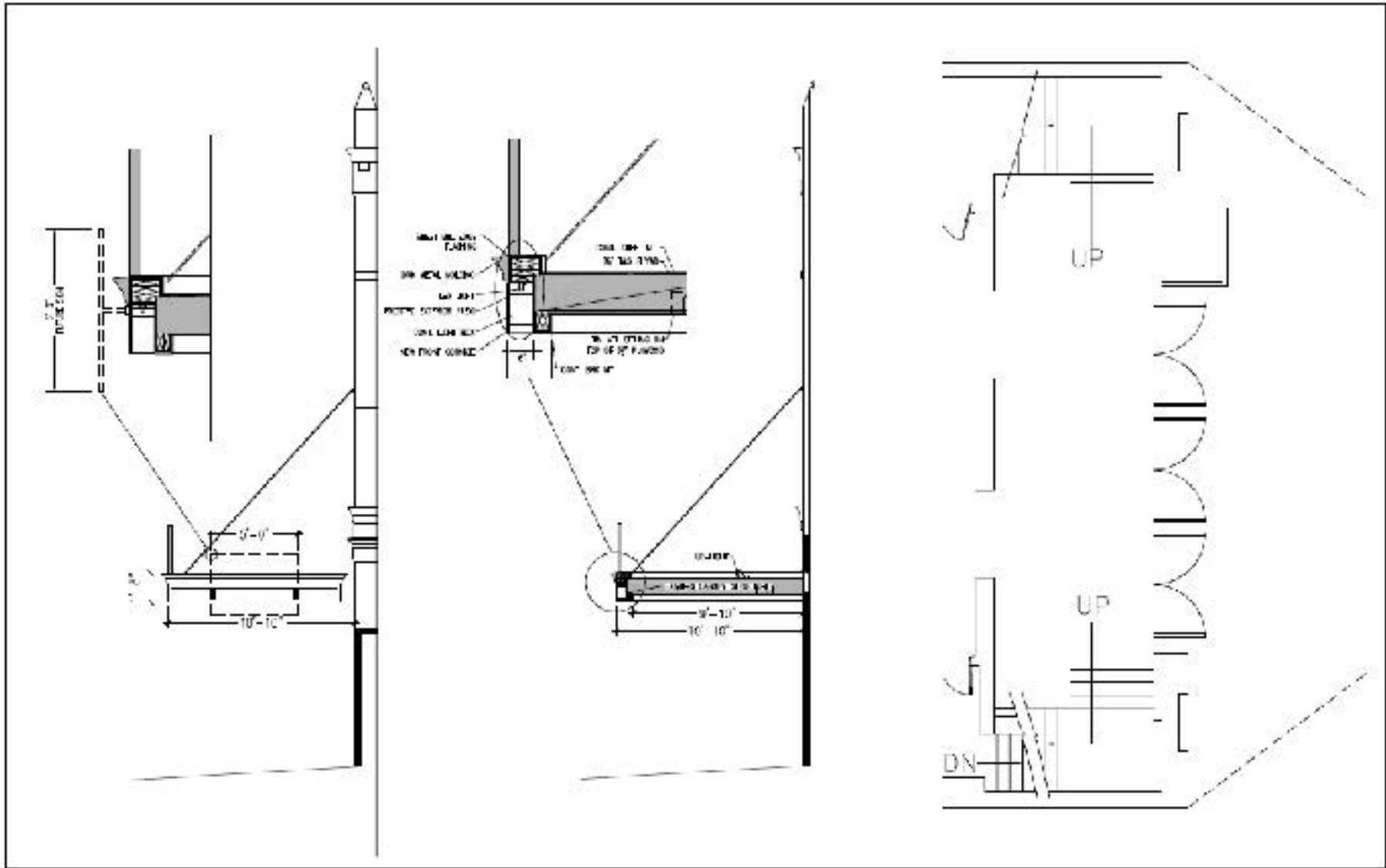


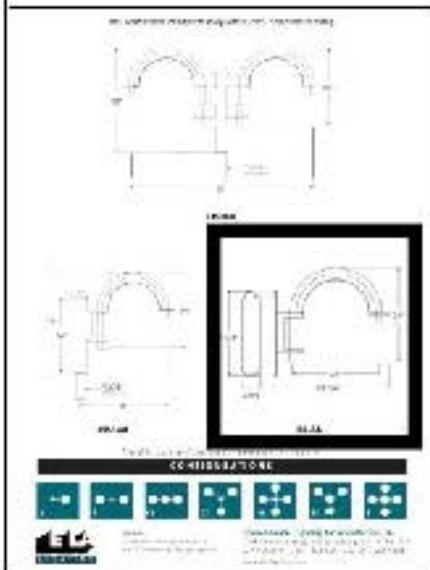
Figure 4. Proposed side elevation and entry plan.



ELA LIGHTING EXTERIOR DECORATIVE USE BR 14 BRACKET



PINNACLE/PEAK LINEAR EXTERIOR PARAPET WASH USE 11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR



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Model	Length	Power	Output	Beam Angle	Mounting	Finish
11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR	36"	11W	1000lm	120°	Bracket	White
11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR	36"	11W	1000lm	120°	Bracket	Black
11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR	36"	11W	1000lm	120°	Bracket	Brushed Aluminum
11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR	36"	11W	1000lm	120°	Bracket	Polished Aluminum
11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR	36"	11W	1000lm	120°	Bracket	White
11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR	36"	11W	1000lm	120°	Bracket	Black
11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR	36"	11W	1000lm	120°	Bracket	Brushed Aluminum
11W-118-36-WHS-LINV-10-BR	36"	11W	1000lm	120°	Bracket	Polished Aluminum

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Figure 5. Proposed lighting.

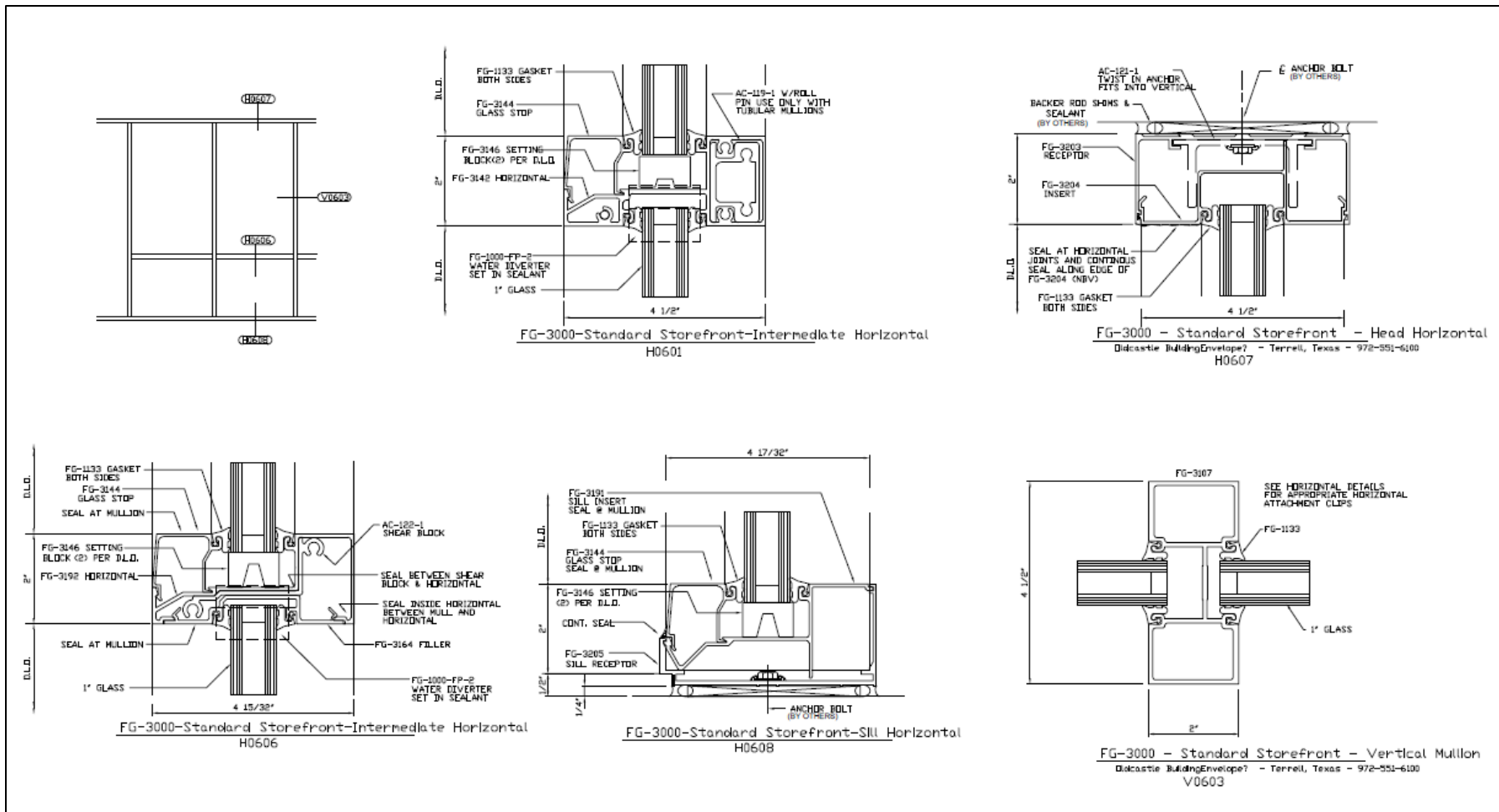


Figure 6. Details of proposed storefront system.

BAR Meeting
January 18, 2012

ISSUE: Partial Demolition/Encapsulation and Alterations
APPLICANT: 815 ½ King St LLC
LOCATION: 815 ½ King St
ZONE: KR / King Street urban retail

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the applicant coordinate demolition of the existing marquee and storefront system with Staff to determine if any original or historic building material remains and whether it can be salvaged and reused on site;
2. That Staff administratively approve the final location of doors within the proposed storefront framework;
3. That Staff approve the mortar and brick color and texture for any area requiring infill;
4. That Staff approve appropriate Beaux-Arts style light fixtures to match the two original lights on the front elevation;
5. That if replacement windows are necessary on the front or rear elevation, that they be in conformance with the Board's adopted Window Policy; and
6. That the applicant recreates the three finials and bracket molding at the roof parapet, shown in the original photographs, as part of the façade restoration.

****EXPIRATION OF APPROVALS NOTE:** In accordance with Sections 10-106(B) and 10-206(B) of the Zoning Ordinance, any official Board of Architectural Review approval will expire 12 months from the date of final approval if the work is not commenced and diligently and substantially pursued by the end of that 12-month period.

****BUILDING PERMIT NOTE:** Most projects approved by the Board of Architectural Review require the issuance of one or more construction permits by Building and Fire Code Administration (including signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Administration, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-746-4200 for further information.



**BAR CASE #2011-0364 &
BAR CASE #2011-0365**



I. ISSUE

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate and a Certificate of Appropriateness for the following at 815 ½ King Street:

- Demolish existing marquee;
- Restore front (south) elevation in keeping with historic photograph;
- Remove existing front entrance and ticket booth and replace with modern aluminum storefront system; and
- Uncover bricked-in window openings on rear (north) elevation and expose existing windows.

II. HISTORY

The Old Town Theater began as the Richmond Theater in **1914** and was the first permanent theater constructed in Alexandria.¹ The original Permit to Build, dated April 16, 1914, was for the purpose of "moving pictures, bowling alleys and billiards." The owners, Mr. Steele and Mr. Reed, hired a Mr. Atkinson as architect and R.G. Steele as contractor to construct the theater at a cost of \$7500. A circa 1929 photograph shows a metal marquee with illumination and a blade sign added at the second story. The owners reportedly operated a vaudeville theater on the first floor and a dance hall on the second floor until around 1932.² At that time, the theater closed for renovation, the dance hall was removed, and the balcony added. In 1980, the theater closed for renovations, the second screen was added, and the theater reopened as the Old Town Theater. The theater has a history of changes over the years that include renovations and reuse at times as a venue for both movies and live theater.

In 1956 the Board approved unspecified alterations (January 11, 1956). In 2001, the Board approved alterations for ADA compliant access to the theatre (BAR Case #s 2001-0101 and 0102, May 16, 2001). In 2007, the Board approved after-the-fact approval of a Permit to Demolish for the removal of a section of brick on the front façade and alterations to the underside of the marquee with conditions for repair (BAR Case #s 2007-0119 and 0120, July 18, 2007).

III. ANALYSIS

The new owner for this building met with City Staff several times to describe studies he had commissioned to investigate maintaining the building's use as a theater. Unfortunately, the studies determined that continued operation as a theater was not financially feasible, primarily due to its small size. Therefore, the applicant has now indicated that he is looking for one or possibly two retail tenants for the space. However, the proposed alterations are all in keeping with the original exterior appearance of the theater. As the Board is aware, the proposed use of the building is not before the Board and, as there is no confirmed tenant at this point, no signage has been proposed. Signage that is beyond what can be approved administratively will return to the Board for approval in the future; or, alternately, if there are two tenants, a master sign plan must be approved by the Board.

¹ History from cinematreasures.org/theaters/77

² History Section www.oldtowntheater.com

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Staff supports the overall application, noting that the applicant has provided photographic documentation of the original building to support the proposed alterations. It is evident that much of the existing first story storefront has little, if any, historic material in its current form. For this particular building, there are at least two historically appropriate options for restoration. One option could include a reconstruction of the historic marquee, as shown in the 1929 photograph. The option selected by the applicant is a return to the original design of the facade, as constructed circa 1914.

Permit to Demolish

In considering a Permit to Demolish, the Board must consider the following criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, §10-105(B):

- (1) Is the building or structure of such architectural or historical interest that its moving, removing, capsulating or razing would be to the detriment of the public interest?
- (2) Is the building or structure of such interest that it could be made into a historic house?
- (3) Is the building or structure of such old and unusual or uncommon design, texture and material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty?
- (4) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway?
- (5) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve and protect an historic place or area of historic interest in the city?
- (6) Would retention of the building or structure promote the general welfare by maintaining and increasing real estate values, generating business, creating new positions, attracting tourists, students, writers, historians, artists and artisans, attracting new residents, encouraging study and interest in American history, stimulating interest and study in architecture and design, educating citizens in American culture and heritage, and making the city a more attractive and desirable place in which to live?

In the opinion of Staff, none of the criteria for demolition and encapsulation are met and the Permit to Demolish should be granted. While a marquee is typical of historic theaters, Staff notes that, in this particular case, the applicant has provided a historic photograph showing the theater originally constructed without a marquee. A later historic photograph shows alterations that include a Beaux-Arts style metal marquee and a large illuminated blade sign, as well as a new storefront with a box office flanked by double doors. The existing Modern style marquee is clearly damaged and lacking in historic significance although it may have remnants of components (cable and steel structure) from the previous historic marquee installed possibly in 1929. Preliminary investigation by Staff indicates that none of the existing metal framing is from the 1929 period of construction but the chain support likely is.

Staff finds that the existing modern marquee is out of scale and detracts from the historic architectural style and original character defining features of this building. The existing storefront system with pairs of double doors and a box office, as well as the display areas with terrazzo tile, are a more recent alteration with no historic significance and therefore Staff has no objection to removal of the existing marquee or first-floor storefront but recommends that the

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applicant coordinate with Staff to determine whether any original or historic building material remains and whether it can be salvaged and reused on site.

It is evident that the original storefront metal cornice remains behind the marquee. As shown in the proposed alterations, this will be retained and repaired. This cornice is visually supported by the large restored brick piers on either side of the storefront and will become the dominant stylistic feature at the sidewalk level.

Alterations

The applicant proposes to install a modern aluminum storefront system in place of the existing box office and entry. The new storefront will be in the same opening as the existing and historic opening so that the substantial brick piers on the sides will be uncovered and will remain. The historic first-story metal cornice will be retained and repaired. The applicant proposes to use a black anodized aluminum system with satin nickel hardware for the doors and windows. Staff finds this type of storefront to be appropriate for this building because, although it is clearly modern, it references the 1914 photograph and early metal storefronts common during the first half of the 20th-century. In addition, the character-defining cornice above the storefront will again be visually prominent. The modern storefront system also allows for a certain degree of flexibility with respect to the number and location of doors. The photo simulation shows three equal-sized openings that can be interchanged to allow for two sets of doors and one large window or one set of doors and two large windows. Because the tenant has not yet been determined, the applicant requests the flexibility to work with Staff to determine the final window and door arrangement within the framework of the proposed storefront system.

The applicant's photo simulation also shows a lighter color for the building's cornice and decorative tiles, which were likely a limestone colored cast stone. Currently these architectural details are painted a brown color that is close in color to the brick and are visually lost. Carefully removing the existing brown paint or painting them a lighter stone color will allow the theater to more closely resemble its appearance when first constructed and provide additional architectural interest.

The applicant proposes to remove the mid-20th century composite stone material on either side of the storefront to the original brick. If the original brick has been too damaged to restore, Staff will work with the applicant to select a suitable matching brick for these two locations. The return of these brick display areas are also a significant visual improvement and will provide potential signage areas for future tenants.

The postcard image of the original façade also shows three finials and bracket molding at the roof parapet. In light of the applicant's efforts to restore the building to its period of original construction, Staff recommends that these small but visually important details also be recreated.

The proposed lights shown in the photo simulation are an industrial, gooseneck form fixture that is not appropriate to the Beaux-Arts style of the original construction period. Staff recommends that a more appropriate Beaux-Arts style light fixture be used.

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Staff has no objection to reopening the windows on the rear elevation that have been covered with plywood and vents. Should there be no windows remaining beneath the plywood, all replacement windows must be in conformance with the Board's adopted Window Policy.

STAFF

Catherine Miliaras, Historic Preservation Planner, Planning & Zoning
Al Cox, FAIA, Historic Preservation Manager, Planning & Zoning

IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F- finding

Code Administration:

- F-1 The review by Code Administration is a preliminary review only. Once the applicant has filed for a building permit, code requirements will be based upon the building permit plans. If there are any questions, the applicant may contact Ken Granata, Acting Plan Review Supervisor at ken.granata@alexandriava.gov or 703-746-4193. (Code)
- C-1 Building and trades permits are required for this project. Five sets of *construction documents* sealed by a *Registered Design Professional* that fully detail the construction as well as layout and schematics of any mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems that may change(s)
- C-2 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-3 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-4 Any proposed future alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-5 The architect shall provide window manufacturer specification, size of openings for each window as well as lintel size for both doors and windows if the openings in the existing structure need to be enlarged.
- C-6 Building Code Analysis: The following minimum building code data is required on the drawings: a) use group, b) number of stories, c) construction type and d) floor area.
- C-7 All exterior walls and openings shall comply with the 2009 Edition of the Virginia Construction Code.
- C-8 Provide 5 sets of site plan upon submission for building permit.

Transportation & Environmental Services:

FINDINGS:

- F1. The alley located at the rear of the building is a Public Alley. It is advised that if any work is to be performed from the alley that the applicant contact T&ES, Construction & Inspection at (703) 746-4035 to discuss any permits and accommodation requirements that will be required. (T&ES)

- F2. It appears that the existing Encroachment Permit for the canopy (ENC2004-0009) is no longer required; if it is no longer required, please include this information with the SUP Application. (T&ES)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The building permit must be approved and issued prior to the issuance of any permit for demolition. (T&ES)
- R3. Applicant shall be responsible for repairs to the adjacent city right-of-way if damaged during construction activity. (T&ES)
- R4. All improvements to the city right-of-way such as curbing, sidewalk, driveway aprons, etc. must be city standard design. (T&ES)
- R5. No permanent structure may be constructed over any existing private and/or public utility easements. It is the responsibility of the applicant to identify any and all existing easements on all plans. (T&ES)

CITY CODE REQUIREMENTS

- C-1 Any work within or performed from the right-of-way requires a separate permit from T&ES. (Sec. 5-2) (T&ES)
- C-2 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. (T&ES)
- C-3 All secondary utilities serving this site shall be placed underground. (Sec. 5-3-3) (T&ES)
- C-4 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Solid Waste Control, Title 5, Chapter 1, which sets forth the requirements for the recycling of materials (Sec. 5-1-99). (T&ES)
- C5. Roof, surface and sub-surface drains shall be connect to the public storm sewer system, if available, by continuous underground pipe. Where a storm sewer is not available, the applicant must provide a design to mitigate impact of stormwater drainage onto adjacent properties and to the satisfaction of the Director of Transportation & Environmental Services. (5-6-224) (T&ES)

V. IMAGES



Figure 1. Existing front (south) elevation.

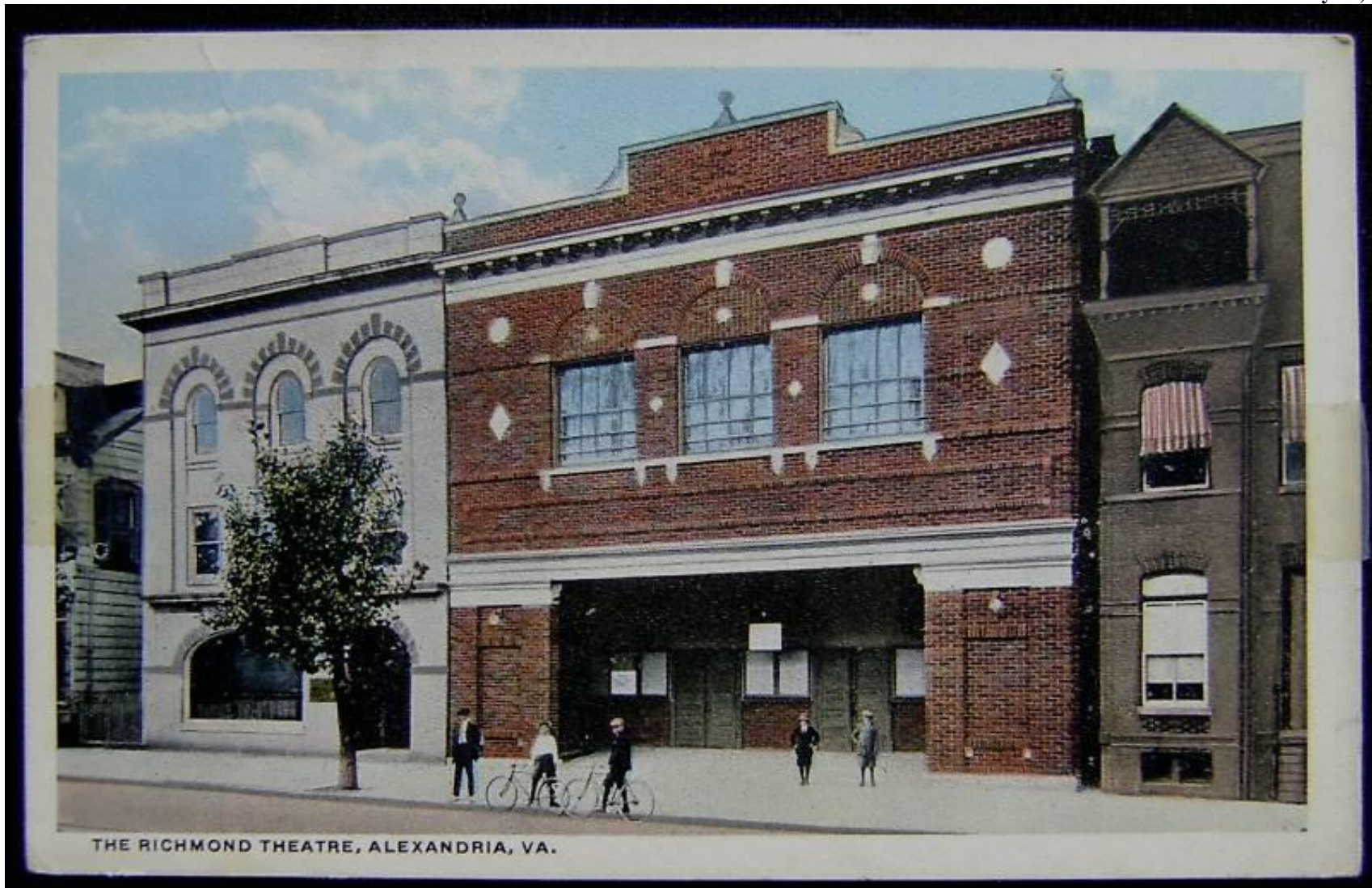


Figure 2. Historic photograph (circa 1915).



Figure 3. Historic photograph showing marquee and blade sign, circa 1929 (Courtesy Bob Collins).



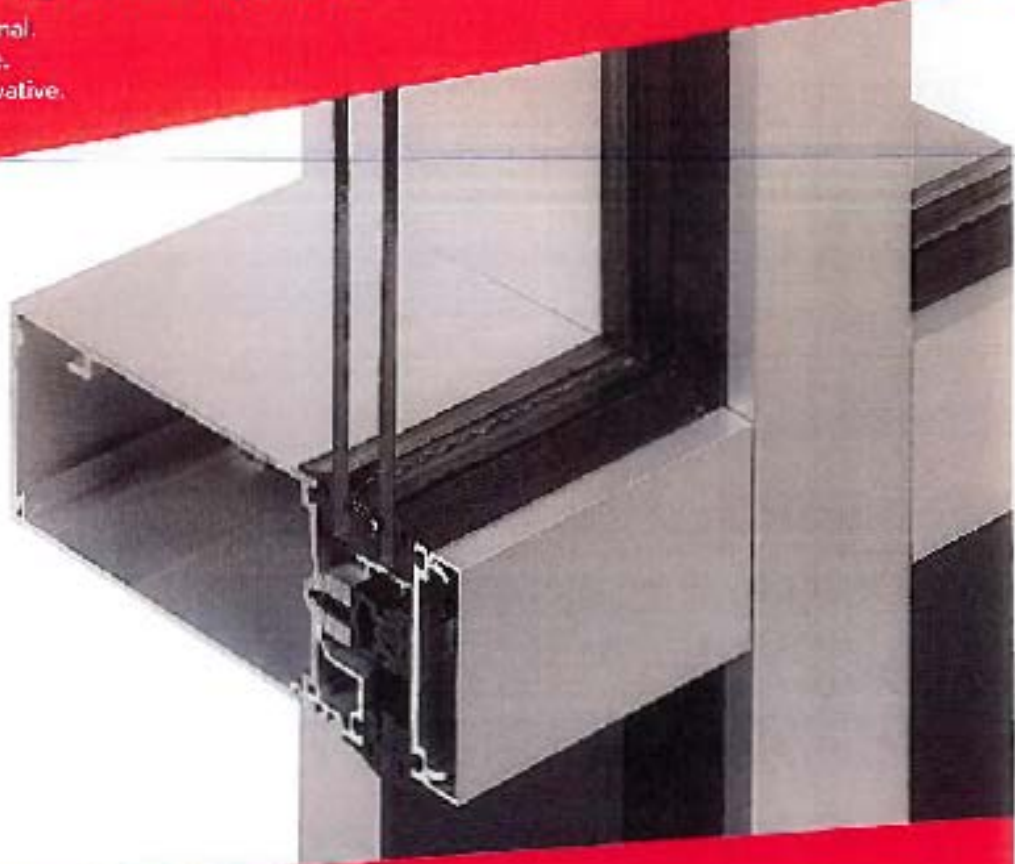
Figure 4. Proposed front (south) elevation alterations.



Figure 5. Existing rear (north) elevation.

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Ultra value.
Ultra innovative.



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Figure 6. Specifications for storefront system.