

Docket Item # 6
BAR CASE #2010-0229

BAR Meeting
September 1, 2010

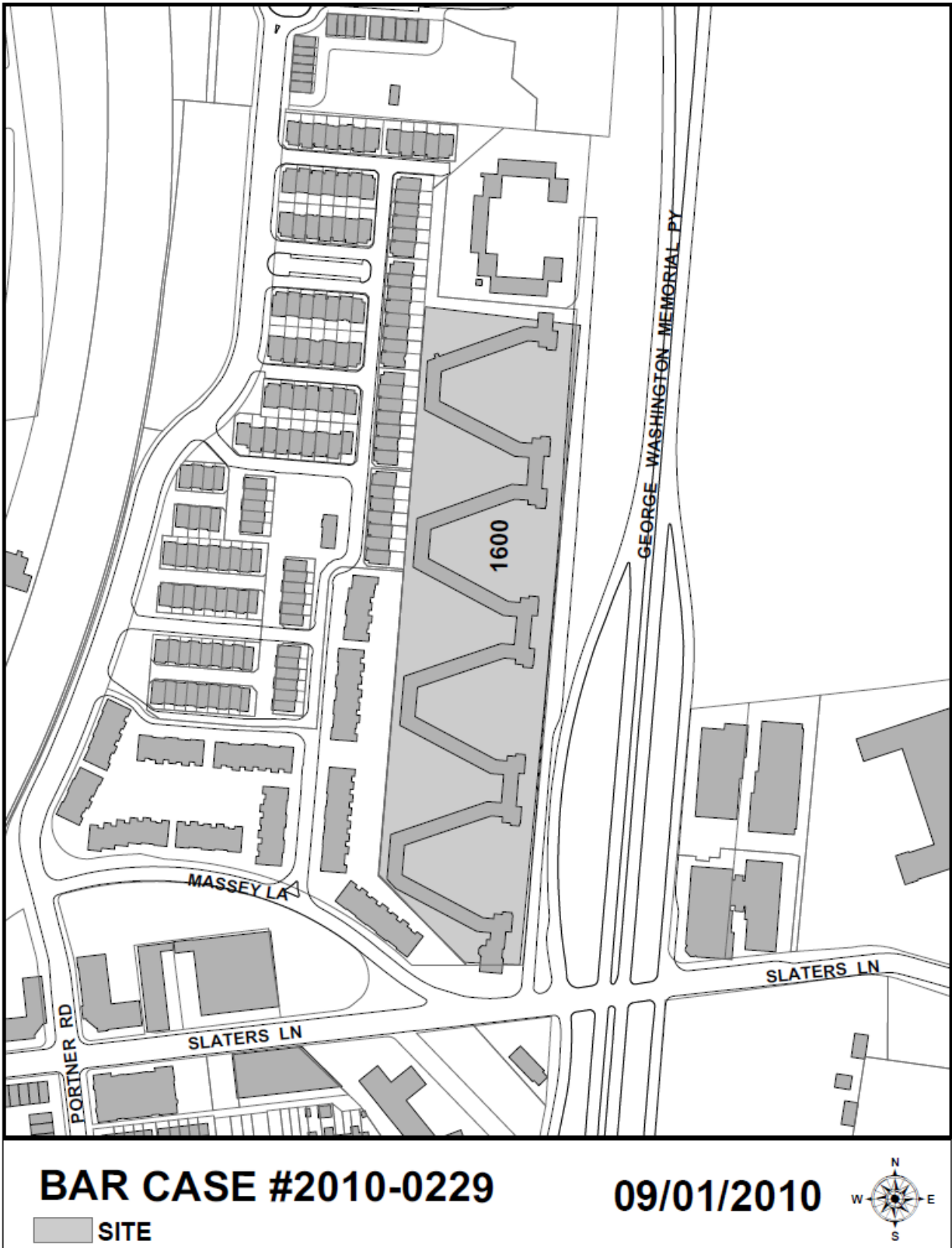
ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Potowmack Crossing Condominium
LOCATION: 1600 West Abingdon Drive
ZONE: RC / Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the comprehensive application for replacement windows at Potowmack Crossing with the following conditions:

1. That the applicant use full frame replacement windows rather than insert or pocket replacements;
2. That the windows and doors may be double glazed, simulated divided light with fixed interior and exterior muntins and dark spacer bars;
3. That the glazing on the glass be tint free;
4. That the applicant submit full specifications (shop drawings) for each of the four window types prior to BAR Staff sign-off of any individual unit;
5. That the original bulls-eye and octagonal windows be retained;
6. That the Condominium Association/Property Management Company install the approved replacement windows for common areas (including stairwells) within three years of approval;
7. That condominium owners submit an application and fee for administrative approval and receive approval from the Condominium Association and BAR Staff prior to installation at individual condo units or of each construction phase; and
8. This approval is contingent upon Staff conducting a field inspection after the first unit's installation to make a determination that it meets the Board's standards for a high-quality window and installation.

****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 issuance 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, 703-838-4360 for further information.



I. ISSUE

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for a blanket approval of replacement windows at the Potowmack Crossing condominium complex. The applicant is requesting removal of the existing aluminum windows and to replace them with casement windows that more closely match the appearance of the original steel casement windows. The proposed replacement windows will be made of Fibrex, a synthetic material made of 40% reclaimed wood fiber combined with a thermoplastic polymer. According to the Andersen representative, Fibrex can be painted. Fibrex has a stiffness that is more stable and rigid than vinyl but less rigid than wood. This product can also have narrower sash and frames, due its composition, and thus more closely match the frame and muntin profile of the original steel sash windows. Staff notes that this application is for blanket approval but the windows will be replaced by individual unit owners over time. If approved, the proposed window will be the only type allowed for replacement at Potowmack Crossing in the future.

II. HISTORY

The apartment complex, originally known as the Abingdon Apartments, was constructed between 1942 and 1945. It was one of many garden apartment type complexes constructed in Alexandria beginning in 1939 and continuing through the war years as the city sought to accommodate the growing population resulting from the buildup in governmental and defense industry employment. The southern, and somewhat later, northern end of Washington Street became the focus of apartment complex development. The northern end of town where the Abingdon was constructed had been characterized by undeveloped land and miscellaneous industrial concerns, but rapidly developed into a locus of garden style apartment complexes, including Bashford Hall Apartments (402-418 Bashford Lane, 1942-1943), Harbor Terrace Apartments (1301-1417 East Abingdon Drive and 509-607 Bashford Lane, 1943-1944), Locharbor Gardens Apartments (500-614 Bashford Lane, 1939-1940) and Mason Hall Apartments (1420 West Abingdon Drive, 1949). Alexandria's garden apartments were almost always designed in the Colonial Revival style and many took the names of historic sites in the area. Thus Abingdon, with its red brick, Colonial style door surrounds and cupolas was named for the Abingdon, the 18th century Alexander-Custis Plantation located along the George Washington Memorial Parkway on the grounds of the Reagan National Airport.

The complex was converted from apartments to condominiums in the mid-1980s, at which time it assumed the name Potowmack Crossing. The Board approved a series of alterations in 1985, including site improvements, signage, installation of new windows, new entry doors and exterior light fixtures (BAR Case #s 85-155, 8/14/1985; 85-54, 5/1/85; 85-139, 7/10/1985). In 1999, the Board approved the current freestanding sign at the south end of the complex (BAR Case #98-00041, 4/16/1999). In 2007, the Board approved an application to replace all existing doors and door surrounds, sills, exterior light fixtures and intercom panels (BAR 2007-0094, 6/6/2007).

III. ANALYSIS

The proposed alterations comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

The property manager and BAR Staff have received many inquiries from individual condo owners about replacement windows at this property because the existing aluminum windows are failing. Staff has met with the property manager, acting on behalf of the Potowmack Crossing Condominium

Association, to determine an appropriate window replacement. It was determined that a blanket approval for a new window plan for the entire complex was most appropriate.

The applicant has provided historic photograph documentation showing the steel sash casement windows that were installed when the building was originally constructed. As the photographs illustrate, the original windows were a combination of multi-light casement and fixed steel sash, with a multi-light transom. The complex had four window types: two of differing sizes that featured two paired casements with two fixed windows, a pair of French casements and a single casement. The black and white photographs show that the original windows were light or off-white in color.



Figure 1. Historic photograph, circa 1942.

Steel windows became available in the 1890s but were used primarily for commercial applications until after WWI, when the thin frames suited the visual design objectives of the Art Deco, Streamline Moderne and International Style buildings. Ease of production and shipping made these windows popular for residential uses, and especially multifamily buildings, through WWII, when cheaper, non-corroding aluminum windows became more popular. (Park, Sharon. NPS Preservation Brief #13, 1984) In Alexandria, steel sash windows were used in some of the rowhouses of the

Fagleson Addition in northwest Old Town and in numerous vernacular International Style apartment

buildings in Parker-Gray and along the GW Parkway. The use of these industrial character, mass produced windows with no frame or visible lintel in an otherwise Colonial Revival style building is an odd mixture of International and Colonial style features which was used only during this brief period between the world wars. While still available and aesthetically desirable, steel sash are, unfortunately, extremely expensive today and they are among the least energy efficient windows available.

By 1985, the steel sash windows in Potomack Crossing had deteriorated significantly and the Board approved the wholesale replacement of windows at this complex. The 1985 replacement windows were white, six-over-six, double-hung, aluminum windows with sandwich muntins. The replacement windows significantly altered the architectural character of the complex.

The *Design Guidelines* recommend that: "...replacement windows should be appropriate to the historic period of the architectural style of the building". The *Guidelines* note that "...metal casement windows are only appropriate for buildings dating from the late 1940s or early-1950s."

Generally, Staff is reluctant to recommend approval of a synthetic or composite material on a building unless it is new construction. Further, in the circumstances where a synthetic or composite material is acceptable and has been approved, the Board has always required that the synthetic material be of highest quality. However, as more and more synthetic/composite materials are introduced and refined, Staff finds it necessary to evaluate each one on a case-by-case basis, noting that the Board has found the use of synthetic/composite materials appropriate in some circumstances.

In this particular example, Staff notes that the proposed replacement windows, while introducing a new composite material, will more closely resemble the visual and operating characteristics of the original sash and light configuration. The use of a composite material such as Fibrex, in this case, will allow for a narrower muntin profile which will more closely approximate the width of the original steel sash frame and muntins. Although the window is not proposed to be an exact replication, as there will be no transom feature, the proposed window will visually be much more in keeping with the architectural character. Further, Staff notes that other replacement window materials which are frequently approved as replacement for steel sash, such as aluminum-clad wood, are no more appropriate in this circumstance than a composite material. In fact, the use of a composite material permits a narrower profile and the ability to reconstruct a more historically accurate appearance. While this particular composite material has only been commercially available since 1991, the Andersen Window Company has been in business throughout the United States since 1903. Staff is, therefore, comfortable that the proposed windows meet the Board's general criteria for use of durable, high quality products in the historic district. However, recognizing that this product has not been used in the district before, Staff recommends that after the first windows are installed, that BAR Staff conduct an inspection in the field to make a determination that the new windows do in fact meet the Board's high standards. If Staff finds that once installed, these replacement windows are not appropriate, then the applicant will be required to return to the Board for a more appropriate replacement window.

While the proximity to the George Washington Memorial Parkway demands a high standard, Staff notes that these buildings are set sufficiently back from the Parkway, the majority of the buildings are sited at an angle so that few windows are rarely seen in full elevation, and a significant tree canopy obscures the complex throughout much of the year. Therefore, Staff supports the use of Fibrex replacement windows in this case.

Anticipating that wholesale window replacement in this complex may take several years, Staff recommends that as each condominium owner elects to replace the windows in an individual unit, the owner must submit an application and fee for administrative approval to BAR Staff. The administrative application process will follow standard BAR administrative approval procedures. The owner will be required to submit specification of the proposed replacement windows. In addition, the applicant will be required to submit a form indicating the Condominium Association or property manager's approval, standard for any BAR application. Although the building will have several different window types for a period of years, Staff strongly supports the present efforts of the condominium owners to remove the inappropriate double hung aluminum windows and install windows which are much closer to the original style and design intent.

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 Enforcement:

F- Per the Deputy Building Official, the new windows will not be required to meet the egress requirements of the current building code because neither the original windows, nor the 1985 replacement windows met these requirements.

Historic Alexandria:

No comments received.

VI. IMAGES



Figure 4. Historic Photograph, circa 1942.



Figure 5. Historic photograph, circa 1942.



Figure 6. Detail of historic photograph, circa 1942



Figure 7. Existing conditions.



Figure 8. Proposed replacement windows.



Figure 9. Existing conditions.



Figure 10. Proposed replacement windows.