

Docket Item #4
BAR Case #2003-0200

BAR Meeting
October 1, 2003

ISSUE: Sign
APPLICANT: Solar Planet
LOCATION: 901 N Washington Street
ZONE: CD/Commercial

BOARD ACTION, SEPTEMBER 17, 2003: The Chairman called the question on the Staff recommendation which was: deferral of the application for restudy. The vote on the motion was 6-0.

REASON: The Board agreed with the Staff analysis that a more restrained sign design was needed on the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

SPEAKERS: Dan Counselman, Service Neon Signs, designer, spoke in support
Scott Shortnaey, owner, Solar Planet, spoke in support

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the illumination be no greater than 2 footcandles at 10 ft; and
2. That the sign be turned off no later than 1 hour after closing.

DISCUSSION:

Applicant s Description of the Undertaking:

Install one 4' x 6' internally illuminated double face cabinet sign to replace illuminated double face Time & Temp sign.

Update:

At the September 17, 2003 hearing the Board deferred the application for restudy of a sign more compatible with the George Washington Memorial Parkway. In response, the applicant has reduced the size of the sign and decreased the number of colors.

Issue:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for a sign for Solar Planet Tanning at 901 North Washington Street. The double faced hanging sign measures 3'6" by 5' and will replace the existing time/temperature sign on the southwest corner of the building. The internally illuminated sign has vinyl faces with an aluminum frame. The proposed sign includes black lettering and a yellow sun logo on a beige background.

According to the applicant, the sign is slightly different than that shown on the drawings. The word Solar will be plain text to match the rest of the lettering, and the sign will be located lower than the existing time/temperature sign, with the base of the sign at least 8' above the sidewalk.

History and Analysis:

The seven story curtain wall building at 901 North Washington Street was constructed in 1964, according to tax records, in a developer modern idiom. Although it is a fine example of that somewhat questionable style, the building is not architecturally compatible with the George Washington Memorial Parkway or the Old and Historic Alexandria District.

In 1993, the Board approved the installation of a 10' diameter satellite dish on the south side of the mechanical penthouse on the roof at 901 North Washington Street (BAR Case #93-50, 4/21/93).

The Board is particularly concerned with the maintenance of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Therefore, signs on Washington Street must be compatible with the memorial nature of the parkway. In addition, signs on Washington Street must comply with the Washington Street Standards in the zoning ordinance.

The Washington Street Standards requires that signs and other building features reflect in texture, tone and color, the historic setting in the district. While the building at 901 North

Washington is not a historic building, it and its modern neighbors act as background along Washington Street against which the historic buildings stand out.

While Staff supports the revised design of the sign, Staff is still concerned by the level of illumination. The Design Guidelines state that internally illuminated signs are discouraged (Signs - Page 5). However, the Board has recently approved other internally illuminated signs for modern buildings along Washington Street. Staff believes that cool light rather than the proposed high output fluorescent lamps are more appropriate in the historic district.

Staff believes the redesigned sign, with reduced lighting levels, meets The Memory Test for building on the George Washington Memorial Parkway that was adopted by the Board in April 1999 in its policy set forth in *Working Toward a Definition of the Memorial Character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway in the City of Alexandria, Virginia*. That policy states:

The principal overriding design objective for new construction on Washington Street is to create buildings which are not overt visual intrusions into the established cityscape. Such buildings must be predominately background buildings that do not seek to make a strong impact on the Washington Street vista. Put another way, it is the goal that buildings fronting the Parkway in Alexandria are not visually jarring in scale, massing or materials or color. An organizing idea is that by the time one traverses the Parkway and enters Mount Vernon, the principal memory of buildings in Alexandria will be of the surviving historic buildings associated with Washington.

Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the application with the conditions that the lighting levels are reduced and that the illumination be turned off no later than one hour after closing.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement

C-1 Projecting, hanging signs must comply with USBC 2911.0 for type of materials, maximum projection, vertical clearance below all parts of the sign, and additional loads.

C-2 A construction permit is required for the proposed project.

Historic Alexandria

This just does not seem appropriate at the entrance to the City & on GW Memorial Parkway.