

Docket Item #s 4 & 5
BAR CASE #2003-0312 &
BAR CASE #2003-0313

BAR Meeting
January 21, 2004

ISSUE: Request for approval of HVAC alterations &
Waiver of rooftop HVAC screening at the Lyles-Crouch School

APPLICANT: BMK, P.C.

LOCATION: 530 South St. Asaph Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for HVAC alterations and approval of the Waiver of Rooftop Screening.

DISCUSSION:

Applicant's Description of the Undertaking:

“The owner requests a waiver of rooftop screening for new and replacement HVAC rooftop units.”

Issue:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of 15 new self-contained HVAC units on the roof of the 1957 portion of the building as part of a building-wide renovation of the air conditioning system.. These 15 units will replace the existing rooftop equipment which consists of 6 HVAC units and 10 condensor units. Several smaller pieces of equipment, including fans and ventilators, will be removed as well. There will be no change to the equipment on the new addition and no new units will be located on the ground. According to the applicant, the new equipment is located as close to the centerline of the roof as possible. The new units will be no closer to the edge than the existing. The new units will be grey in color and approximately 5' high and 6' or 7' on a side.

History and Analysis:

Lyles-Crouch School was constructed in 1957 in a modernist design vocabulary. The building was designed by local architect Joseph Saunders and was approved by the Board on July 11, 1956.

From the late 1940s through into the early 1980s, Joseph Saunders and Associates (later Saunders and Pearson) was a prolific and prestigious architectural firm in Alexandria and their work included motels, churches, office buildings, schools and residential structures.

On March 20, 1991, the Board approved HVAC renovations involving the installation of several new rooftop units and one at-grade unit at Lyles-Crouch School (BAR Case #91-42). On February 17, 1993, the Board approved replacement windows at Lyles-Crouch School. (BAR Case #93-22). More recently, on December 6, 2000 and January 3, 2001, the Board approved the media center addition on the north side of the building. The addition was designed by BMK Architects and was completed in 2002.

The proposed HVAC alterations and waiver of screening meet the zoning ordinance requirements. Section 6-403(B)(1) of the zoning ordinance requires all rooftop HVAC units to be screened with similar architectural materials or features of the same quality used on the exterior of the main building. However, section 6-403(B)(3) of the zoning ordinance permits BAR to waive or modify the screening requirement if the Board finds such requirement to be inappropriate.

In the opinion of Staff the proposed HVAC alterations are acceptable. Currently several pieces of existing rooftop equipment are visible in views from the north along South St. Asaph, South Pitt and Wilkes Streets and from the school ground. The view from the south is considerably more restricted. According to the applicant, the proposed replacement will not result in any significant difference in appearance. The project actually reduces the number of pieces of major rooftop equipment by one. On the other hand, the new units generally are somewhat larger than the existing. Staff has been assured by the applicant that the units are located as far from the roof edge as possible and notes that the units are visible only at a distance from the building.

In the opinion of Staff, rooftop screening of the equipment would not be beneficial in this case. Metal mechanical screen walls could be added around each of the visible units. However, the screen walls would have to be set off from the equipment by approximately 3' to allow access for maintenance. Staff believes the bulky screens would only increase the appearance of mass on the rooftop and serve to draw more attention to the rooftop intrusions. Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the request for Waiver of Rooftop Screening.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 Construction permits are required for this project. Plans shall accompany the permit application that fully detail the construction as well as layouts and schematics of the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.

- C-2 Structural calculations are required to verify the ability of the existing roof to support the additional weight of the HVAC units (USBC).

Historic Alexandria:

No comment.