

Docket Item #8
BAR Case #2004-0018

BAR Meeting
April 7, 2004

ISSUE: After-the-fact sign
APPLICANT: Kanjana Houseman
LOCATION: 901 N Washington Street
ZONE: CD/Commercial

BOARD ACTION, MARCH 3, 2004: On a motion by Mr. Keleher, seconded by Ms. Neihardt, the Board deferred the application for restudy. The vote on the motion was 3-2 (Ms. Quill and Acting Chairman Smeallie were opposed).

REASON: The Board agreed with the Staff analysis that the sign should be simplified and that it should not be illuminated. The Board cited the example of the Solar Planet sign on the same building which had been approved without illumination.

SPEAKER: Kanjana Houseman, applicant, spoke in support

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that the internal illumination is eliminated.

Update:

At the March 3, 2004 hearing, the Board deferred the application for restudy citing concerns about the internal illumination and the amount of wording. No revisions have been made to the application.

DISCUSSION:

Applicant's Description of the Undertaking:

"We installed a 7' x 3.5' sign in a previous sign box. The sign is directly above our entrance."

Issue:

The applicant is requesting after-the-fact approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for an internally illuminated sign for "Computer Helpers, Inc." at 901 North Washington Street. The 3.5' by 7' sign reads, "Computers, Laptops, Networks, Computer Helpers, Inc.TM Est. 1997, IBM Thinkpad Authorized, Service, Web Hosting, Rentals." The sign has a white background with black lettering. The sign is located above the business entrance on the south side of the building facing Montgomery Street.

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.

Recently the Board approved a hanging sign for Solar Planet (BAR Case #2003-0200, 10/1/03). 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 proposed sign complies with zoning ordinance requirements.

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 require 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.

The *Design Guidelines* state that internally illuminated signs are discouraged (Signs - Page 5). In

the case of the recently approved Solar Planet sign, the Board approved the application with the condition that the sign not be internally illuminated and instead be illuminated by an exterior spotlight.

Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that the internal illumination is eliminated.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement

C-1 Construction permits are required for the proposed project.

C-2 Projecting, hanging signs must comply with USBC [H103-H107, H112] for type of materials, maximum projection, vertical clearance below all parts of the sign, and additional loads.

Historic Alexandria

“I cannot tell where the sign was placed. It does seem large.”