

Docket Item # 9
BAR CASE #2005-0254

BAR Meeting
December 7, 2005

ISSUE: Awnings & signs
APPLICANT: Mercantile Potomac Bank
LOCATION: 325 South Washington Street
ZONE: CD/Commercial

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

I. ISSUE:

This application was deferred by the Board at the November 16, 2005 meeting in order for the applicant to look at options to reduce the size and lighting of the proposed sign. Since the November 16, 2005 meeting, the applicant met with Staff and agreed to revise the proposed signs by reducing the size and the lighting.

The applicant is seeking approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for new awnings and signs for Mercantile Potomac Bank at 325 South Washington Street. A total of four replacement awnings are proposed, three on South Washington Street and one on Wolfe Street. The awnings will match the previously approved curved shape awnings and will be covered in green Sunbrella Firesist fabric. There will be no signage on the awnings.

The applicant is also proposing two halo lit signs, with the size and lighting revised since the prior submittal. The aluminum signs include a 1'5 7/8" by 1' 10 3/4" logo and individual lettering reading "Mercantile Potomac Bank." The business logo is green and black on a white background. The lettering is separated into three rows of 8 1/2" tall black colored letters with the overall combined height of the lettering being 2' 4 1/2". One sign will be located at the southern corner of the South Washington Street elevation, and the other sign will be located at the eastern corner of the Wolfe Street elevation. From the prior submittal, the square footage of the signs has been reduced from 26 square feet to 23.4 square feet on South Washington Street (a 10% reduction) and 32.6 square feet to 23.4 square feet on Wolfe Street (a 29% reduction).

The signage lighting has been redesigned to give a "Halo" effect rather than a bright backlit effect, which has resulted in the lumen output to be reduced by 14%.

II. HISTORY:

325 South Washington Street was constructed in 1953 as the Nancye Fleming Dress Shop and was designed by Joseph Saunders. In 1971, the Board approved a sign for Nancye Fleming (4/21/71). At the public hearing of October 6, 1999, the Board approved demolition of portions of the buildings as well as alterations for conversion of the building to Wachovia Bank (BAR Case #99-0175). Also in 1999, the Board approved signs for Wachovia (BAR 99-0197, 11/17/99). In 2004, the Board approved signs for Riggs Bank which were never installed (BAR Case #2003-0306, 1/7/04). Most recently, the Board approved new awnings and signs for PNC Bank (BAR Case #2005-0069, 4/20/05) which were also not installed.

III. ANALYSIS:

Per Sanborn maps, the subject building width facing South Washington Street has 40 feet of building frontage and 75 feet of building frontage facing Wolfe Street. The maximum sign area allowed per street frontage is 40 square feet and 75 square feet. The proposed wall signs and awnings comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

The Boards are particularly concerned with the maintenance of the memorial character of the

George Washington Memorial Parkway which passes through Alexandria as Washington Street. Therefore, requests for certificates of appropriateness for signs on Washington Street must be compatible with the memorial nature of the Parkway.

The *Design Guidelines* recommend generally only one sign per business is appropriate (Signs - Page 3). In the case of corner buildings, the Board regularly approves one sign on each elevation. Staff has no objections to the two proposed signs for this corner building.

According to the *Design Guidelines*, halo or back lit signs are permitted, however, the appropriateness of the signs is considered on a case by case basis. In this case, Staff believes that the white colored back lit sign is acceptable for this mid twentieth century building. Staff notes that the Board has previously approved back lit signs on Washington Street; Commerce Bank at 119 South Washington Street (BAR Case #2004-0261, 3/2/05), and Redpeg Marketing at 727 North Washington Street (BAR Case #2005-0007, 3/16/05).

Staff believes that the smaller revised signs and reduced lighting meet the recommendations of the *Design Guidelines* and are appropriate.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the revised application as submitted.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 Wall letters / signs must comply with USBC [H103-H111].
- C-2 Awnings must comply with all applicable requirements of USBC 3105 and 3202. Fixed awnings must have a minimum 7 foot clearance from a sidewalk to the lowest part of the framework or any fixed portion of any retractable awning is required.
- C-3 Fixed awnings must be designed and constructed to withstand wind or other lateral loads and live loads required by the USBC. Structural members must be protected to prevent deterioration (USBC 3105.2).
- C-4 Construction permits are required for the proposed projects.

Historic Alexandria:

“No comment.”