

Docket Item # 16  
BAR CASE #2006-0014

BAR Meeting  
February 15, 2006

**ISSUE:** After-the-fact signage

**APPLICANT:** Flores, Inc. by Duncan Blair

**LOCATION:** 1300 King Street

**ZONE:** KR/King Street Urban Retail

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## STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy to redesign the sign panel inserts and that the applicant return to the Board within one month.

### I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness for three signs. The signs include a double sided projecting sign located at the corner above the entrance to the restaurant. The sign is 9.5' tall and 3' wide. A wall sign is located on the eastern facade and on the northern facade adjacent to the front corner of the building. The wall signs are 10' long, 2' high and project 10" from the facades. The wall and projecting sign frames are metal and have been painted a dark teal green matching the trim on the building. The sign panels are red with yellow block letters reading "Pines of Florence Italian Restaurant," however, the top portion of the projecting sign reverses the color scheme and has "Pines of" in red lettering on a yellow background. The signs are internally illuminated with fluorescent lights.

The wall and projecting sign fixtures were installed many years ago for a previous business and were re-used by the present applicant who inserted new plastic sign panels or "lenses" in the boxes.

### II. HISTORY:

The gable roofed brick building at the southwest corner of King and Payne Streets was constructed between March 1813 and October 1814 by Benjamin Baden, according to Ethelyn Cox in Historic Alexandria, Virginia: Street by Street (page 74). Historically, the front portion of 1300 King Street was used for a variety of commercial purposes; including a grocery store, drug store and confectionary store, while the rear portion was used as a dwelling. The restaurant use appears to date back to at least 1957. A building permit of that year describes extensive renovations, including the application of "Bondstone" on the exterior brick (Building Permit #13096, January 17, 1957). For several decades, starting at least at 1969, the building housed Geno's Restaurant. The existing projecting sign fixture and two wall sign boxes were used by Geno's and may have been installed for that business.

The building at 1300 King Street was not located in the Old and Historic Alexandria District until 1984 when the boundaries were extended to the west on King Street. The Pines of Florence appears to have replaced Geno's Restaurant in 2003. The only exterior alteration resulting from the change in ownership was the insertion of new sign panels in the existing fixtures.

On May 19, 2003, the owner was notified by letter that the signs required the approval of the Board of Architectural Review. Subsequent letters and citations for zoning violation followed. In the winter of 2005, the City Attorney filed an injunction with the business owner to bring the signs into compliance with the zoning ordinance.

### III. ANALYSIS:

The two wall signs and one projecting corner sign comply with the zoning ordinance requirements.

Staff would prefer to see this significant and prominently located corner building returned to its historic appearance with signage appropriate to its early 19<sup>th</sup> century construction date. However, Staff recognizes that the current appearance of the building is compromised by the permastone cladding, altered windows and other mid-20<sup>th</sup> century features and that there are no immediate plans to restore the building. Therefore, Staff is willing to accept the retention of the existing sign fixtures, which are compatible with the current mid-20<sup>th</sup> century appearance of the building. However, Staff recommends that the existing sign panels be redesigned. The *Design Guidelines* call for “[h]igh quality signs that complement the historic building and help maintain the quality of the historic districts...” The block lettering and highly contrasting color scheme of the sign panels does not relate to any particular period or style; instead, it reflects a lack of design intent and disregard for the “overall visual quality of the historic districts” (Signs - Page 1). The sign panels should be redesigned to utilize a more interesting and attractive type face and colors that relate better to the building and its surroundings. Staff notes that generally only one sign is appropriate per business (Signs - Page 3). However, the Board does allow more signage in some circumstances, particularly when the building is located on a corner as the subject building is.

Therefore, Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy to redesign the sign panel inserts. The applicant is encouraged to meet with Staff to review alternative designs prior to returning to the Board. Given the length of time that has elapsed in bringing the after-the-fact signage to the Board for Review, Staff recommends that the applicant be required to return to the Board with a new design for the sign panels within one month.

Lastly, Staff recommends that, if the Board should agree to the reuse of the existing sign fixtures, that approval should be limited to the current case only. It is hoped that any future change of business at this location would result in a significant improvement to the appearance of the building, including signage that is more compatible with the early-19<sup>th</sup> century building and surrounding district.

#### **IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy to redesign the sign panel inserts and that the applicant return to the Board within one month.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

“No Comments.”

Historic Alexandria:

“No comments.”