

Docket Item #6
BAR CASE #2006-0014

BAR Meeting
March 15, 2006

ISSUE: After-the-fact signage
APPLICANT: Flores, Inc. by Duncan Blair
LOCATION: 1300 King Street
ZONE: KR/King Street Urban Retail

BOARD ACTION, FEBRUARY 15, 2006: Deferred at the request of the applicant.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted with the condition that the new signage be installed within three months of the approval.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting a Certificate of Appropriateness for new sign panels to be inserted in the three existing sign fixtures. The existing red and yellow sign panels were installed by the current applicant in the long extant sign fixtures without BAR approval. These panels will be removed.

The sign fixtures 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 fixture 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 proposed replacement sign panels are green and cream. The sign panels in the projecting fixture will read "Italiano Restaurant" in green on a cream background across the top and down the center while the bottom section will read "Pines of Florence" in cream lettering on a green background. The wall sign panels will read, "Pines of Florence," in cream lettering on a green background. The sign panels will be acrylic with applied and overlaid translucent vinyl graphics. The sign fixtures are internally illuminated with fluorescent lights.

The applicant has provided a color sample which will be made available at the public hearing.

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 19th century construction date. However, Staff recognizes that the current appearance of the building is compromised by the permastone cladding, altered windows and other mid-20th 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-20th century appearance of the building. Staff believes the proposed replacement sign panels are an improvement over the existing panels and meet the *Design Guidelines*, which call for “[h]igh quality signs that complement the historic building and help maintain the quality of the historic districts...” (Signs - Page 1) The proposed sign panels reflect an effort to present an attractive and harmonious design that is compatible with the appearance of the existing sign fixtures, the much altered building and the surrounding district. 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 approval of the proposed new sign panels. Staff is concerned that the existing unapproved sign panels be replaced as soon as is possible. Therefore, Staff recommends that the Board’s decision incorporate a condition to require that the replacement signage be installed within three months of the approval.

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-19th century building and surrounding district.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted with the condition that the new signage be installed within three months of the approval.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

“No Comments.”

Historic Alexandria:

“No comments.”