

Docket Item # 9
BAR CASE #2006-080

BAR Meeting
May 3, 2006

ISSUE: Replacement roof
APPLICANT: Downtown Baptist Church
LOCATION: 212 South Washington Street
ZONE: CD/Commercial Downtown

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for replacement of the roof cladding on the northern steeple of the Downtown Baptist Church. The existing slate roof material is proposed to be replaced with new copper roofing.

II. HISTORY:

The Downtown Baptist Church was constructed in 1858-1859 from design by Thomas Tefft, a Rhode Island architect. The applicant has provided extensive information on Teffet and his design for the church from the 1988 Brown University and National Building Museum exhibit and accompanying catalogue, *Thomas Alexander Tefft: American Architecture in Transition, 1845-1860*. The applicant has presented a persuasive case that Tefft's original design for the church turret like steeples (one on the southwest and one on the northwest) of what is now the main sanctuary structure were modified at the time of construction by the builder S.T.G. Morsell. Morsell acquired the title "Practical Architect" and changed Tefft's original symmetrical metal roofed corner turrets at the north and south corners fronting on Washington Street with a tall slate clad steeple at the northwest corner and left in place Tefft's original conception on the south. This is the current configuration, one that has existed for essentially 150 years.

In 2000, the Board denied new replacement vinyl windows for the church's educational building at 216 South Washington Street (BAR Case #2000-0244, 12/6/00). That decision was appealed to City Council which overturned the Board's decision on 2/24/01.

III. ANALYSIS:

Proposed recladding of roof complies with zoning ordinance requirements.

Based upon historical use of roofing materials, staff believes that either replacement slate or new copper roofing is historically appropriate and can be justified. According to the applicant, the primary reason for the proposed change in roofing material is for safety reasons. However, in the instance of a building of the importance and prominence of the Downtown Baptist Church on South Washington Street staff believes that a great deal of weight should be afforded to the retention of the originally installed building materials. Further, the slate clad appearance of the steeple has become the visual expectation of generations of Alexandrians as they have traveled up and down South Washington Street. For example, views along Washington Street from the 1932 celebrations accompanying the bicentennial of George Washington's birth show the same steeple then is in evidence today. Altering the current cladding material of the roof will strike many as a discordant note on the 200 block of South Washington Street. The slate roofing is a familiar and stable sight. Staff believes that maintaining the original building materials on historic buildings is one of the touchstones of any historic district and provides the sense of continuity, stability and rootedness that historic districts are meant to embody. In the opinion of staff a change in roofing materials for this steeple should be approached with the utmost caution by the Board and deserves careful consideration. Staff believes that based upon community

appearance grounds alone that the existing slate roofing is appropriate and should not be replaced with new copper roofing.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 A construction permit is required for the proposed project.

Office of Historic Alexandria:

Although the applicant has made a strong case for replacing the steeple's slate with copper, slate is the original material used for construction of the steeple so the preference would be to repair/replace the deteriorated slate.