

Docket Item #17
BAR CASE #2006-0104

BAR Meeting
June 7, 2006

ISSUE: Awning & signage
APPLICANT: Fountains Day Spa
LOCATION: 422 South Columbus Street
ZONE: CD/Commercial

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends denial of the application.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for an awning with signage to be located over the front door. The shed style awning will be 5'6" wide, 2' high, and will project 3' from the face of the building. The signage will be located on the 10" high valance along the front face of the awning. It will read, "Fountains Day Spa" in white lettering. The awning will be crimson red and will be of the canvas-like, Firesist fabric by Sunbrella. A sample of the fabric will be available to the Board at the hearing.

The building is approximately 25' wide. It is set back from the sidewalk by approximately 5' and from the building to the south by approximately 3'. There is an existing wood hanging sign reading "Fountains Day Spa" and measuring 18" high by 24" wide installed on a free standing wood pole in front of the property.

II. HISTORY:

422 South Washington Street is a two story wood frame building dating from the mid 19th century. It is attached on the south side to the adjacent late 19th century building. The Board approved a rear addition for the building at 422 North Washington Street in 1985 (BAR Case #85-15, 2/6/1985). In 1995, the Board approved a hanging sign for Fountains Day Spa (BAR Case #95-107, 7/19/1995).

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed awning complies with zoning ordinance requirements.

Staff believes the proposed awning is inappropriate for the mid-19th century building. Staff notes the Design Guidelines for the historic district have the following to say about awnings:

Awnings should be appropriate and sympathetic to the historical style of the building to which they are attached.

Awnings should not overwhelm or obscure the architecture and decorative features of historic buildings. (Awnings - Page 3)

Staff believes the large red awning will overwhelm the facade of this small and simple building and obscures the architectural elements and detailing of the front doorway. The business name on the awning is counted as signage and must meet the guidelines and requirements for signage. Staff notes the Design Guidelines have the following to say about signs:

Generally, only one sign per business is appropriate.

Signs should be designed to be compatible with the historic building or structure.

Signs should not detract from the architectural characteristics of historic structures. Similarly, signs should not overwhelm or obscure the architecture and decorative features of historic buildings. (Signs- page 3)

Staff believes the proposed new signage is redundant as there is an existing hanging sign in more or less the same area. Staff does not find the sign to be compatible as it is located on an overly large awning which overwhelms the facade and obscures the transom and the upper portion of the door surround and sidelights.

As a practical consideration, Staff does not believe the awning signage will do much to raise the visibility of the business as it is immediately adjacent to the existing hanging sign. The applicant may wish to consider redesigning the existing hanging sign to make it more noticeable, while still compatible with the building and surroundings. However, the applicant should be aware that any sign on Washington Street must be attached to the building where the business is conducted (zoning ordinance section 9-302(F)). If the applicant wished to place a new or redesigned sign on the freestanding light pole, a variance would be required from the Board of Zoning Appeals.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends denial of the application.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 Awnings must comply with all applicable requirements of USBC. Retractable and 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-2 A construction permit is required for the proposed project.

Historic Alexandria

The proposed awning would dominate and detract from the facade of this small building and obscure architectural features of the entrance i.e. transom and door surround. The crimson red color is over-powering.