

Docket Item #18
BAR CASE #2006-0141

BAR Meeting
July 19, 2006

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

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends re-approval of the awnings with the elimination of the proposed signage.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is seeking re-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 one over the entrance and one on each flanking window and, one on Wolfe Street over the easternmost window. The awnings will match the previously approved curved shape awnings and will be covered in green Sunbrella Firesist fabric. Each awning will have a sign “Mercantile Potomac Bank” in white lettering with the bank logo.

This is a request for re-approval of awnings that were originally approved by the Board last year.

II. HISTORY:

325 South Washington Street was built as the Nancye Fleming Dress shop in 1953. The building is modeled on one at Colonial Williamsburg, albeit not an historic one. When the Rockefeller team began acquiring properties in the historic section of Williamsburg it was quickly realized that the retail merchants and commercial tenants would have to be relocated. This realization produced Merchant’s Square, a two block square collection of approximately 40 buildings at the western end of the Duke of Gloucester Street near the College of William and Mary. Designed by Perry, Shaw and Hepburn in 1929, it was one of the first shopping centers in the country. Professor Richard Guy Wilson of the University of Virginia has called Merchant’s Square the “most influential aspect of the Williamsburg restoration.” One of the original buildings of the complex housed the local bank in Williamsburg. This building has a double hipped steeply raked roof atop which sits a cupola. It has a tripartite front with large windows and a central entryway. The Nancye Fleming shop essentially mimics this form with the addition of three dormers and triglyphs on the cornice. The dormers on the dress shop provide light and ventilation to two apartments above the store. Both are constructed in brick. The shop was constructed in 1953 and designed by Joseph Saunders, a prominent Alexandria architect in the mid-20th century.

In 2005 the Board approved awnings and signage for the Mercantile Potomac Bank but the awnings were never installed (BAR Case #2005-0254, 12/7/05).

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 awnings and 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:

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 on Washington Street must be compatible with the memorial nature of the Parkway. In addition, 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. In this instance the Board has already approve two signs, one on each side of the building, which have been installed. Staff believes that the addition of four more signs, one on each awning valance, is excessive and not in keeping with the memorial character of the Parkway nor with the recommendations of the *Design Guidelines*. Staff has no objection to re-approval of the awning without signage which were originally approved by the Board last year. Thus, staff recommends re-approval of the awnings without signage.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Therefore, Staff recommends re-approval of the awnings with the elimination of the proposed signage.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 A construction permit is required.

C-2 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-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.

Historic Alexandria:

No comment.