

Docket Item # 12
BAR CASE # 2007-0094

BAR Meeting
June 6, 2007

ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Potowmack Crossing Condominiums by Pauline Mitchell
LOCATION: 1600 W. Abingdon Drive
ZONE: RC/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

- 1) That the existing wood door surrounds be repaired and retained; and,
- 2) That the replacement doors and sidelights at the front of the building be wood with fixed external muntin bars.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval for alterations to the entrances of the three-story (with basement) brick buildings composing the Potowmack Crossing I Condominiums. The garden apartment type complex consists of thirty six contiguous buildings arranged in four U-shaped groupings. Each of the four groupings forms a courtyard opening toward West Abingdon Drive, which is located parallel to and just west of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Each of the 36 buildings has a front and rear door. The doors are wood with nine lights above two panels. The rear doors are set in a simple punched brick opening. There are two types of surrounds on the front, both of wood. The simpler and more numerous surround is labeled “Door Type A” in the submitted materials. This surround consists of flat pilasters carrying a flat pediment with dentil trim. “Door Type B” has side lights, composed of four lights above a wooden panel, flanking the door and a surround composed of flat pilasters supporting a broken pediment with an urn form in the center. The door sills are concrete. The door hardware is a simple brass knob. The lights are brass carriage lamps. The intercoms are located on the door jambs. Based on old photographs in BAR files, Staff believes the doors and exterior lights date to the circa 1985 renovation of the building. However, the existing surrounds appear to be original.

The applicant is proposing to replace all existing doors and door surrounds, sills, exterior light fixtures and intercom panels. The doors will be steel with clear glass panels and “external grille inserts” (fixed external muntin bars) manufactured by (Masonite HD Model No. 160-09E). They will have the same configuration as the existing doors: nine lights above two panels. The hardware will be a Baldwin Colonial knob and lockset (Model No. 5210-112) with a Venetian Bronze finish. Door Type B will have sidelights made of steel with three lights above a single panel. These differ from the existing (and the original) which have four lights. Like the doors, the sidelights will have external grille inserts. The surrounds will be assembled from a variety of Fypon (polyurethane) casing and trim pieces and will closely match the design of the existing wood surrounds. Staff did note, however, that the proposed Door Type B pediment has an acorn ornament rather than the urn form of the original. The new exterior light fixtures will be Model No. 4101 in the Manor Series manufactured by Hanover Lantern. The finish on the simple lantern style fixture will be weathered bronze. The intercom panel will be Model No. AM612-06P by Alpha Communications. The anodized aluminum panel will be 5” wide by 11.5” long.

II. HISTORY:

The apartment complex, originally known as the Abingdon Apartments, was constructed between 1942 and 1945. It was one of many garden apartment type complexes constructed in Alexandria beginning in 1939 and continuing through the war years as the city struggled to accommodate the swelling population resulting from the buildup in governmental and defense industry employment. The southern, and somewhat later, northern end of Washington Street became the focus of apartment complex development. The northern end of town where the Abingdon was constructed had been characterized by undeveloped land and miscellaneous industrial concerns, but rapidly developed into a locus of garden style apartment complexes, including Bashford Hall Apartments (402-418 Bashford Lane, 1942-1943), Harbor Terrace Apartments (1301-1417 East Abingdon Drive and 509-607 Bashford Lane, 1943-1944), Locharmor Gardens Apartments (500-614 Bashford Lane, 1939-1940) and Mason Hall Apartments (1420 West Abingdon Drive, 1949). Alexandria’s garden apartments were almost

always designed in the Colonial Revival style and many took the names of historic sites in the area. Thus Abingdon, with its red brick, Colonial style door surrounds and cupolas was named for the Abingdon, a former colonial estate located just up the George Washington Memorial parkway where Reagan National Airport is now.

The complex was converted from apartments to condominiums in the mid-1980s, at which time it assumed the name Potowmack Crossing. The Board approved a series of alterations in 1985, including site improvements, signage, installation of new windows, new entry doors and exterior light fixtures (BAR Case #s 85-155, 8/14/1985; 85-54, 5/1/85; 85-139, 7/10/1985). More recently, in 1999, the Board approved the current free standing sign at the south end of the complex (BAR Case #98-00041, 4/16/1999).

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed alterations comply with the zoning ordinance requirements.

Staff has no objection to the proposed replacement of the concrete sills, light fixtures or intercoms. The sills will be replaced in kind. The light fixtures will be replacing circa 1985 fixtures and with compatible new fixtures. The intercom, while not architecturally compatible, is a necessary feature and is relatively unobtrusive. On the other hand, Staff is unable to recommend approval of the replacement of the original wood door surrounds with new Fypon surrounds or the replacement of the existing wood doors and sidelights with metal units. The *Design Guidelines* note that decorative door surrounds are a character defining feature of a building and should not be removed to install a new door” (Exterior Doors – Page 2). The existing doors and sidelights are not original, however, they are similar to the original and are of wood. The *Design Guidelines* state that metal doors are appropriate only in certain limited circumstances for 20th century, retail, commercial and industrial buildings (Exterior Doors – Page 2 & 3). Staff believes the use of metal doors for the front of a residential building is inappropriate. Therefore, Staff recommends that at least on the front the new doors and sidelights be wood with fixed external muntin bars. Staff would not object to the use of the proposed metal doors on the rear as these are not as readily visible.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

- 1) That the existing wood door surrounds be repaired and retained; and,
- 2) That the replacement doors and sidelights at the front of the building be wood with fixed external muntin bars.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-2 Additions and alterations to the existing structure and/or installation and/or altering of equipment therein requires a building permit (USBC 108.1). Five sets of plans, bearing the signature and seal of a design professional registered in the Commonwealth of Virginia, must accompany the written application (USBC 109.1).
- C-3 A Construction permit will be required for the proposed project.
- C-4 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

Historic Alexandria:

No comments.