

Docket Item # 12 & 13
BAR CASE # 2007-0104 &
BAR CASE # 2007-0105

BAR Meeting
June 20, 2007

ISSUE: After-the-fact alterations
APPLICANT: Gregory M. Wade
LOCATION: 616 North Washington Street
ZONE: OC/Commercial

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends:

1. Approval of the application for the installation of the two existing rooftop HVAC units with the condition that they be screened and that the screening be approved by Staff prior to installation; and,
2. That the waiver of rooftop screening be denied.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a certificate of appropriateness and a waiver of rooftop screening for two new rooftop HVAC units that were recently installed without approval. According to information provided by the applicant, the units both have a footprint of 29 1/4" x 33", but are two different heights: 29 1/2" and 39 3/4" tall. They are placed toward the middle of the roof of the building. The units are unscreened. The applicant is also requesting approval of a waiver of rooftop screening for the units.

The two story brick building faces North Washington Street. There are two north-south public alleys running through the 600 block of North Washington Street from Wythe Street to Pendleton Street. The block has parking lots facing North Columbus Street and Wythe Street. These create additional views into the block. Thus, the rear of 616 North Columbus Street and the new HVAC units are visible from the alleys, from Wythe Street and from North Columbus Street.

II. HISTORY:

The building is one of a row of ten, two story brick buildings stretching from 614 North Washington Street to 632 North Washington Street. Constructed in 1912, these building were built as houses with Colonial Revival inspired detailing. All had front porches. Over the years, the houses were converted to commercial uses and the front porches were removed.

In 1960, the Board approved alterations to the front of 616 North Washington Street and the installation of a sign (BAR minutes 1/13/1960, page 353). The Board approved numerous signs at this location over the next two decades. However, Staff did not locate any recent BAR reviews for this property.

On May 8, 2007, the applicant applied for a mechanical permit to install new rooftop HVAC units (MEC2007-01731). BAR staff made a site visit to determine visibility prior to signing off on the mechanical permit. At that time, staff discovered that the rooftop units had been installed and were visible from the public right-of-way. The applicant was then instructed to apply to the Board for approval and a hold was placed on the mechanical permit.

III. ANALYSIS:

Rooftop HVAC equipment must be screened with architectural materials or features of the same type and quality used on the exterior walls of the building (Section 6-403(B)(1) of the Zoning Ordinance). However, section 6-403(B)(3) of the Zoning Ordinance permits the BAR to waive or modify the rooftop HVAC screening requirement if the Board finds such requirement to be architecturally inappropriate. The HVAC units will be in compliance with the Zoning Ordinance requirements if the Board approves the waiver.

The *Design Guidelines* acknowledge the importance of air conditioning in modern life, but also note that, "[t]o the extent possible, HVAC equipment should be hidden from view" (HVAC Equipment – Page 2). It would have been preferable if the HVAC units had been sited on the ground with screening. It is not known whether this option was considered or whether it would be possible. Similarly, it is not known whether the HVAC units are optimally sited on the roof to minimize visibility from the ground at both the front and rear. However, it is unlikely that there

is any location on the roof that would completely obscure views of the equipment from the ground.

If the current rooftop location is accepted as a necessity, the question of screening remains. In many instances, Staff recommends and Board approves a waiver of rooftop screening. In these cases, it is felt that screening would overwhelm the building or would be more visually obtrusive than the HVAC units alone. However, in most cases, the equipment is not as exposed as it is here, where there are several vantage points in the public right-of-way from which to view the units and where the whole rear of the row can be seen at once. Staff notes that there are two other properties in the row that have exposed rooftop HVAC equipment. (No mechanical permits or BAR approvals were located for this equipment in a brief search of permits from the last decade or so.) However, this does not justify further degradation of views of the back of this row. Acceptance of the rooftop equipment without screening will surely result in further applications for the same along this row. Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the installation of the HVAC units at 616 North Washington Street with the condition that they be screened and recommends denial of the waiver of rooftop screening.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends:

1. Approval of the application for the installation of the two existing rooftop HVAC units with the condition that they be screened and that the screening be approved by Staff prior to installation; and,
2. That the waiver of rooftop screening be denied.

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).

Historic Alexandria:

No comments were received.