

Docket Item # 7
BAR CASE # 2007-0240

BAR Meeting
December 6, 2007

ISSUE: After-the-fact approval of previously unpainted masonry

APPLICANT: PMA Properties, 900 LLC

LOCATION: 900 Prince Street

ZONE: CL/Commercial

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends denial of the application with the additional direction to the applicant to remove the paint that has been applied to the building within 90 days.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of an after-the-fact Certificate of Appropriateness for painting the previously unpainted masonry building at 900 Prince Street. The building has largely been painted a greenish color. This application is before the Board as a result of a Stop Work Order issued by the Department for the unapproved work. The order was issued before the entire building was painted.

II. HISTORY:

900 Prince Street is a two story, flat roofed commercial building that was originally constructed in 1915 as the Mt. Vernon Dairy and was subsequently modified on a number of occasions and by 1958 was an automobile sales and service building. In the period 1975-1980 the Board approved a number of alterations to the building including additions.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed alterations comply with the Zoning Ordinance requirements.

The *Design Guidelines* are explicit on the issue of painting unpainted masonry. They state that “as a general rule, brick and masonry buildings should not be painted” and that “the Boards strongly discourage the painting of a previously unpainted masonry surface.” Underlying this principle is the belief that red brick buildings are one of the chief distinguishing characteristics of the historic district.

In the past few years, the Board has reviewed several after-the-fact requests for painting previously unpainted masonry. Most recently, the Board reviewed a case for 727 South Pitt Street where one of the original Yates Garden brick houses that was intended to remain unpainted had been painted without approval of the Board (BAR Case #2005-00130, 9/7/2005). The Board has also reviewed similar cases at 715 Princess Street where all but one side of the building had been previously painted. The Board approved the after-the-fact painting of the remaining wall (BAR Case #2005-0100, 5/18/05). In several other cases, the Board has denied the painting and ordered that the paint be removed. Examples of this include 305 Duke Street. (BAR Case #2002-0140, 6/19/02), 428 South Washington Street (BAR Case # 2001-00312, 1/16/02), and 629 South Fairfax Street (BAR Case #98-0093, 6/17/8). In the case of 727 South Pitt Street, the Board denied the approval of the painting and ordered the paint to be removed with 90 days. To date this has not occurred and the City has prepared documents and will file suit against the homeowner to compel removal of the paint.

Generally, in cases where Staff supports the painting of masonry, there have either been substantial alterations to the building or the brick is mismatched or of poor quality. This is not the case with this building. For this structure in particular, the brick used for the Prince and S. Alfred Street facades is a textured brick characteristic of buildings constructed in the first half of the twentieth century and provides more color variation and visual interest than a common smooth finish brick. The brick patterning and resulting mortar joints were thoughtfully designed and constructed. The brick texture, color variation and patterning are almost entirely lost by painting this formerly unpainted brick facade. Thus, staff does not support the painting of the building and believes that the paint that has been applied should be removed as expeditiously as possible.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends denial of the application with the additional direction to the applicant to remove the paint that has been applied to the building within 90 days.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

No comment.

Historic Alexandria:

No comments received.