

Docket Item # 7  
BAR CASE # 2007-0240

BAR Meeting  
February 6, 2008

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

**APPLICANT:** PMA Properties, 900 LLC

**LOCATION:** 900 Prince Street

**ZONE:** CL/Commercial

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**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.

**BOARD ACTION, DECEMBER 6, 2007:** On a motion by Dr. Fitzgerald, seconded by Mr. Keleher the Board deferred the application for restudy. The vote on the motion was 6-1 (Mr. Keleher was opposed).

**REASON:** The Board believed that the applicant should explore removing the paint and suggested that a contractor be hired to attempt to remove a section and that the City monitor the outcome.

**SPEAKERS:** Robert Kaufman, applicant, spoke in support  
Jeff Stone, 1420 Roberts Lane, spoke in support  
Thomas Silis, 113 South Alfred Street, spoke in support  
John Hynan, representing the Historic Alexandria Foundation, spoke in opposition  
Mark Stevenson, 917 Prince Street, spoke in support  
Poul Hertel, 1217 Michigan Court, spoke in opposition

**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)

Update: Since the last public hearing in December, the applicant has contacted several companies regarding the removal of the paint and carried out two tests. According to the information supplied by the applicant, the results of those tests for the removal of the paint were poor. Although the Board's condition for the restudy required City monitoring of these tests, City staff was not informed of the applicant's tests. Subsequently, because of the poor test results, the graffiti removal team of the City performed a similar test regarding the removal of the paint. The results of that test were similarly poor. However, all of these efforts involved similar paint removal efforts which included applying a solvent to the building surface for a period of time and then mechanically washing the surface. No tests have yet been performed with slow acting chemical paint removers. At the present time, staff does not believe that there is sufficient information to reliably make a determination regarding the efficacy of removing the paint to make an informed decision as to whether or not the paint can be removed without harm to the building. Based upon the foregoing, staff opinion that the paint should be removed has not changed.

### **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 within 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.