

Docket Item #6
BAR CASE #2008-0055

BAR Meeting
May 7, 2008

ISSUE: Signs

APPLICANT: Comfort One Shoes

LOCATION: 201 King Street

ZONE: KR/King Street Urban Retail

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends after-the-fact approval of the SHOES window signs in three windows on King Street and one window on North Lee Street with the following conditions:

1. That the applicant remove the vertical signage listing the names of shoe manufactures; and,
2. That the two posters in the windows along King Street be set back at least 4' from the face of the window so as not be counted toward the overall building signage.

Insert map here.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting after-the-fact approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for window signs for Comfort One Shoes at 201 King Street. The signage consist of vinyl letters spelling the word SHOES in the upper transoms of three storefront windows along King Street and one window along North Lee Street. Two of the windows on King Street and one window on North Lee Street also contain vertical signage listing the names of the shoes sold at Comfort One.

II. HISTORY:

The three-story, brick building at corner of King Street and North Lee Street was constructed in 1851 as a store and warehouse for William Bayne, grocer and commission merchant. The building is occupied by a retail store on the first level and offices on the upper levels.

The Board has reviewed many signs for the multiple tenants in the building over the years. The two existing circular Comfort One hanging signs (formerly Comfort Zone) were approved in 1993 and 1996 (BAR Case #93-124, 8/18/1993 and BAR Case #96-050, 3/20/1996). In the past, the Board has also approved signs for tenants which have since left the building, including two signs for “Oceans of Wildlife Art Gallery” (BAR Case #1997-0178, 9/3/1997) and two signs for a second story coffee shop (BAR Case #2003-0050, 4/23/2003). More recently the Board approved a hanging sign, “The Alexandria Times”, installed above the King Street entrance to the upper levels (BAR Case #2005-0156, 7/20/2005). That sign has since been removed. At the present time the only approved signs on the building are the two hanging signs for Comfort One Shoes.

The applicant is before the Board because staff became aware of these existing and unapproved signs during the review of a hanging sign for Stokefire, another tenant at 201 King Street. The Board approved a hanging sign for Stokefire on February 20, 2008 (BAR CASE #2008-0009), with the condition that sufficient sign area be created on the King Street front of the building by removing the word “SHOE” in the window transoms. The Board also required that all existing signage on the building be brought into zoning conformance (including sign area and BAR approvals). The applicant and the two other building tenants (Comfort One Shoes and Sterling Title Company), were sent zoning ordinance violation letters on February 19, 2008. All three tenants have submitted applications to the Board for their after-the-fact signage.

III: ANALYSIS

At the present time the amount of signage on the King Street frontage exceeds the amount of signage permitted in the Zoning Ordinance. Furthermore, the existing vertical window signage listing the names of the different brands of shoes sold at Comfort One Shoes is considered “special advertising” and is not permitted under the Zoning Ordinance. The large posters hanging in the storefront windows are also counted toward the buildings overall signage; the posters must be set back 4’ or greater from the window in order to be excluded from the calculated sign area.

The *Design Guidelines* recommend that buildings with multiple business and retail tenants have a sign plan for coordinated graphics and placement. The Board minutes from 1986 describe a previously approved plan for the building stipulating three projecting signs for the building and three directory signs. Although the Board approved a sign plan over 20 years ago for the building the Board has repeatedly approved additional hanging signs for upper level tenants.

The applicant understands that the Board took an action on the Stockfire hanging-sign BAR application which addressed signage at the Comfort One Shoe store; however, the applicant would like the Board to reconsider their recommendation with the current application. Staff is sensitive to the applicant's desire to maintain some window signage for the existing shoe store, which has been installed for approximately 10 years. Staff can support the retention of the SHOES signs provided that the applicant remove the list of the shoe brands sold at Comfort One Shoes and the posters in two of the windows along King Street be set back at least 4' from the window so as not to be considered exterior signage. No additional signage can be installed along the King Street frontage of 201 King Street and still comply with the Zoning Ordinance sign area limits.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends after-the-fact approval of the SHOES window signs in three windows on King Street and one window on Lee Street with the following conditions:

1. That the applicant remove the vertical signage listing the names of shoe manufactures; and,
2. That the two posters in the windows along King Street be set back at least 4' from the face of the window so as not be counted toward the overall building signage.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

No comments.

Office of Historic Alexandria:

R-1 Deny.

S-1 Suggest removing shoes signage on windows.