

Docket Item # 13
BAR CASE #2008-0170

BAR Meeting
October 15, 2008

ISSUE: Signage
APPLICANT: TD Bank, NA
LOCATION: 119 South Washington Street
ZONE: CD/Commercial

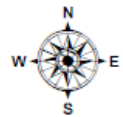
STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the proposed signs not be illuminated;
2. That the aluminum box on which the new TD Bank signage is mounted is changed to a matte brass plaque similar to the sign backing previously approved and currently installed for Commerce Bank;
3. That the new sign backing have a beveled edge similar to the existing Commerce Bank sign;
4. That the applicant return to the Board with any proposed signage for the Prince Street doors; and
5. That the new signs are no larger than the existing Commerce Bank signs.



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10/15/2008



I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of three signs for TD Bank at 119 South Washington Street. The existing tenant, Commerce Bank, has been purchased by TD Bank.

The applicant proposes to replace the existing Commerce Bank signs with new TD BANK signs measuring 3'6" by 10'2". The existing matte brass background on which the individual sign components are mounted will be replaced with an aluminum box painted a brass color. The TD portion of the sign will be a box sign made of aluminum with an acrylic face. The green and white sign will be internally illuminated. The dark green individual letters which make up the BANK portion of the sign will be constructed of aluminum and will be halo lit. The green racing strip below the word BANK will also be an internally illuminated box sign.

II. HISTORY:

The three story masonry building at the northwest corner of the prominent Prince and South Washington Street intersection was built in 1930 for the Virginia Public Service Company. It is Alexandria's grandest Art Deco office building, exhibiting many characteristics of the style such as the contrast between smooth planar expanses with areas of concentrated ornamentation. The Prince and Washington Street facades have a polished granite base with limestone above. The windows are steel. Ornamentation includes a carved stone frieze panel, an ornate metal and glass entrance on Washington Street and metal panels with relief and filigree designs. The main entrance is on Washington Street and is given special emphasis through its concentration of ornamentation and vertical orientation, which contrasts with the overall horizontal form of the building. The ornamentation of the central bay begins with the elaborate door surround with half round glass and metal lighted columns and terminates with the rooftop flagpole. Large metal framed plate glass show windows flank the prominent Washington Street entrance.

The building was begun in May 1929 and completed in September 1930. It was greeted with both praise for its modernity and criticism for its brash non-traditional design. In addition to the Virginia Public Service Company, it housed offices for Seaboard Public Service Company and for the Utility Securities Company. The Virginia Public Service Company was succeeded by the Virginia Electric Power Company, which retained ownership of the building until 1950. For several decades after, it housed a variety of federal government offices. In 1988, the building underwent extensive interior renovations and the first and second floors were transformed into retail space. In 1988 and 1989, the Board approved signage and awnings for Pier 1 Imports (BAR Case #1999-0078, June 27, 1988 and April 5, 1989). The exterior of the building has a high level of integrity. With the exception of the elevator tower at the back, it appears largely unaltered from the original elevation drawings. The two large show windows on either side of the front entrance appear to have been replaced with modern metal windows in the same size nearly the same configuration as the original windows.

Frank D. Chase (1877-1937), a Chicago-based architect, designed the building. Chase founded

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Frank D. Chase & Company in 1913 and was known for his design of factory and administrative building for industrial firms. Most of his buildings were located in the Chicago area. Interestingly, at one time Mr. Chase was president of the Western Electric Company. This may explain why he was chosen by the Virginia Public Service Company to design their flagship building in Alexandria. [*Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc. 1970; facsimile of 1956 edition), p. 119; Helen P. Ross, "The Last Word in Modern Office Buildings: The Virginia Public Service Building in Alexandria, Virginia," George Washington University, unpublished mss., Board of Architectural Review Staff files; Planning and Zoning Staff, Alexandria Virginia, "Twentieth Century Architectural Resources in the National Historic Landmark, Alexandria Historic District, Alexandria, Virginia," Preliminary Draft, January 30, 1997].

In 1988 and 1989, the Board approved signage and awnings for Pier 1 Imports (BAR Case #99-78, 6/27/1988 and 4/5/1989). In 1988, in anticipation of the use of the ground floor of the building by Pier 1 Imports, a request was made to enlarge the ground floor corner windows on Washington Street by combining the two paired windows into single large display windows (BAR Case #88-78, 6/1/1988). The request was opposed by Staff and the Art Deco Society of Washington and denied by the Board.

More recently, in 2004, the Board approved the current signage as well as modifications to the front entryway (BAR Case #2004-0261). The BAR heard the case on four separate occasions prior to rendering their final decision on March 17, 2004. The Board's final action is as follows:

1. Approval of the internal illumination of the red "C" in the previously approved signage;
2. The internally-illuminated "C" shall be equipped with a timer that will automatically shut off the internal illumination of the "C" from 10:00 p.m. to dusk the next day;
3. Any proposed expansion to the permitted hours for internal illumination will require a new application to the Old and Historic District Board of Architectural Review;
4. The signage is to be attached through the joints of the mortar;
5. The entry way is to be professionally conserved; and,
6. The center glass panels at the entry are to be clear glass with frosted squiggles as submitted.

III: ANALYSIS:

The proposed wall sign complies with zoning ordinance requirements.

Staff has a number of concerns regarding the proposed signage, namely the illumination of the sign, the size of the signs and the aluminum box on which the individual sign components will be mounted.

Staff also notes that the *Design Guidelines* recommend that, in general, only one sign per business is appropriate (Signs - page 3). In this case, however, Staff believes the strong symmetrical nature and the length of the Washington Street facade (over 94 feet long) calls for two equal sized signs on

either side of the center axis. The fact that the building is located on a corner makes the additional signage on Prince Street acceptable.

Illumination:

Staff finds the proposed illumination – both through internal illumination and halo lighting – to be inappropriate for this important historic building, especially given its location along the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The *Design Guidelines* specifically state that “The Board is particularly concerned with the maintenance and memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway which passes through Alexandria as Washington Street. Therefore, requests for signage on Washington Street must be compatible with the memorial nature of the parkway.” In addition, the *Guidelines* specifically discourage the use of internally illuminated signs. Staff recommends that the proposed lighting of the TD BANK sign be deleted. While Staff would prefer to see the signs not illuminated in any way, Staff could support a more subtle form of lighting such as gooseneck lights mounted above the signs.

Size:

The application materials indicate that the proposed signs will be the same size as the existing signs. However, the measurements provided are larger than the existing signs. Staff believes that the proposed signs should be no larger than the existing signs, which are 9.5’ in length along Washington Street and 7.5’ in length on the Prince Street elevation (the height of the existing and proposed signs is the same).

Sign backing:

When the existing Commerce Bank signs were approved in 2005, Staff supported the applicant’s proposal to use a matte brass plaque as a backer for the sign components because it minimized the number of penetrations into the limestone facade. In addition, the matte brass plaque helped to relate the otherwise modern looking signage to the Art Deco style building. Staff does not believe that the proposed aluminum box is the most appropriate material for the new signs and would prefer to see the applicant use a backing similar to the one installed for the Commerce Bank signs, including a beveled edge.

Prince Street door:

The submitted drawings show that the Prince Street door will have clear glass providing views into the bank. What currently exists is a completely opaqued door with a small area of signage identifying Commerce Bank. Staff can only assume based on the drawings that the existing signage and opaque film will be removed. The applicant should be aware that should new signage be proposed for this location it will need to be reviewed and approved by the Board.

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

1. That the proposed signs not be illuminated;
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V. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

F-1 The applicant shall obtain a sign permit for the proposed sign and/ or wall lettering.

C-2 Wall letters / signs must comply with USBC [H103-H111] Please indicate the method to be used for anchoring the letters to the wall.

C-3 Electrical plans shall accompany the permit application that fully details the signage as well as layouts and schematics of the electrical system.

Office of Historic Alexandria:

No comments received.

National Park Service:

No comments received.

VI. IMAGES

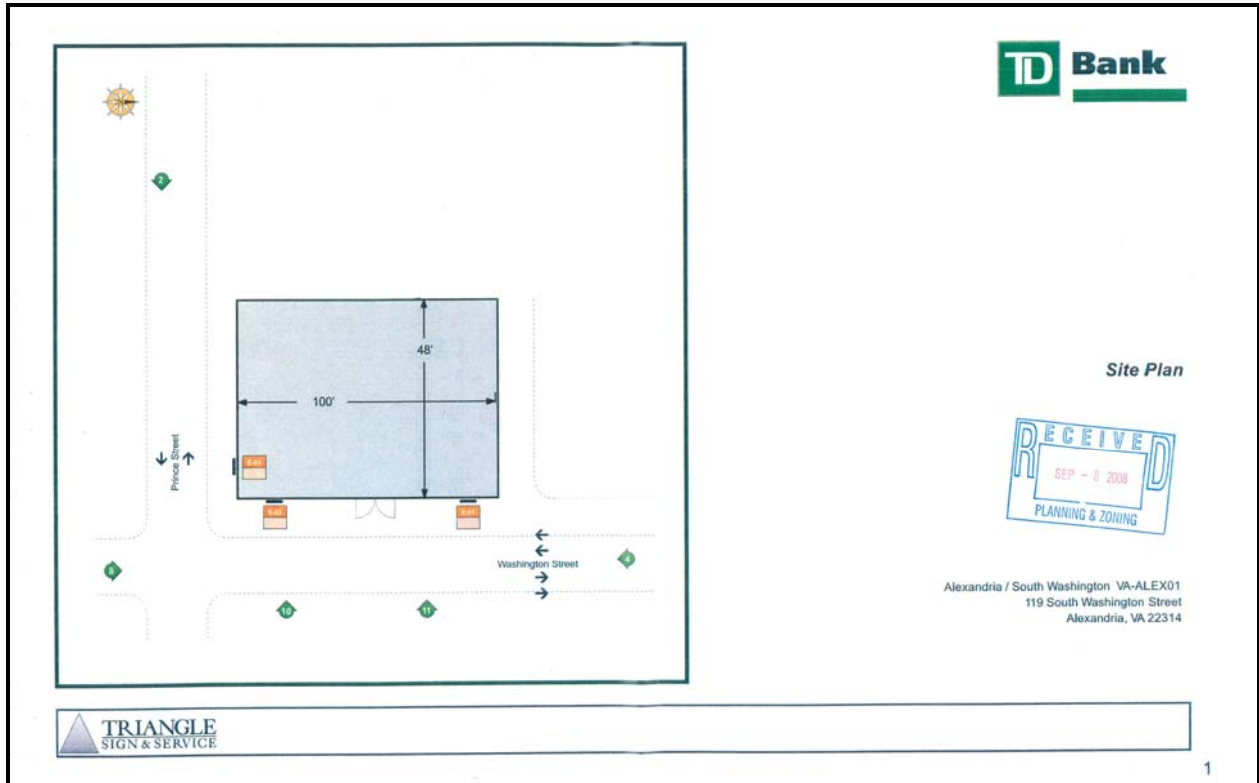


Figure 1: Sign locations



Figure 2: Existing and proposed Washington Street signs

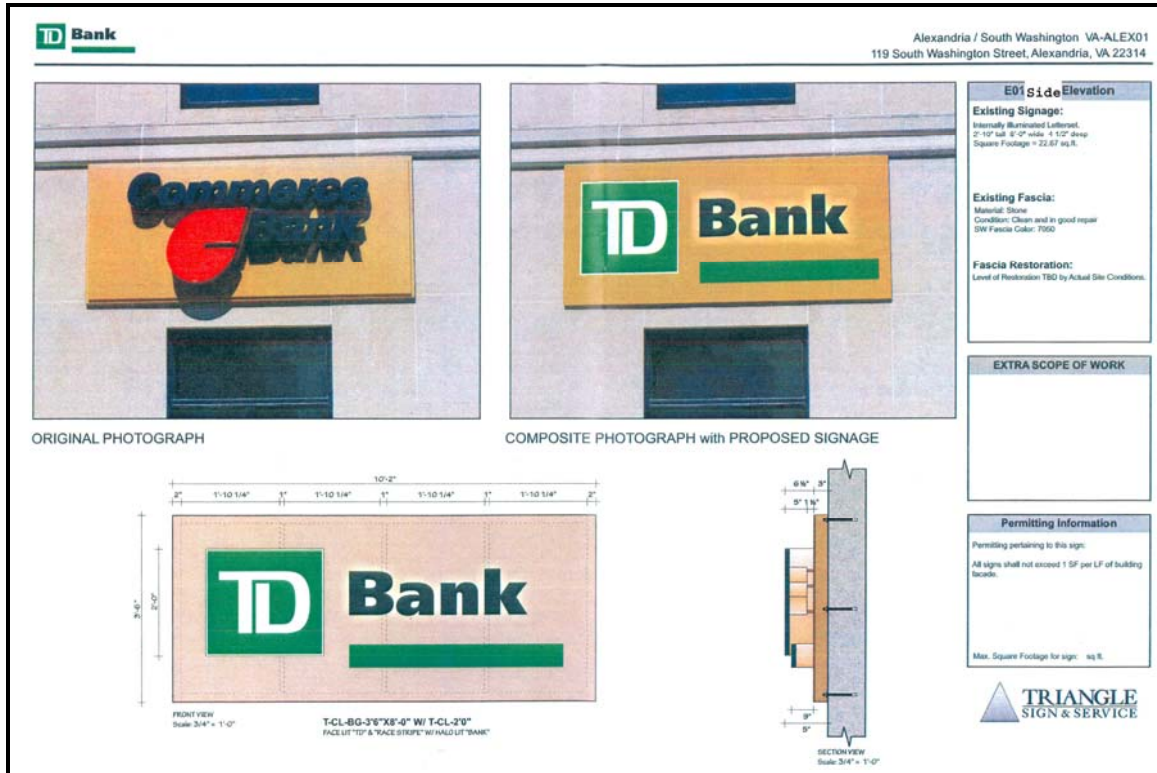


Figure 3: Existing and proposed Prince Street sign



Figure 4: Proposed Washington Street elevation

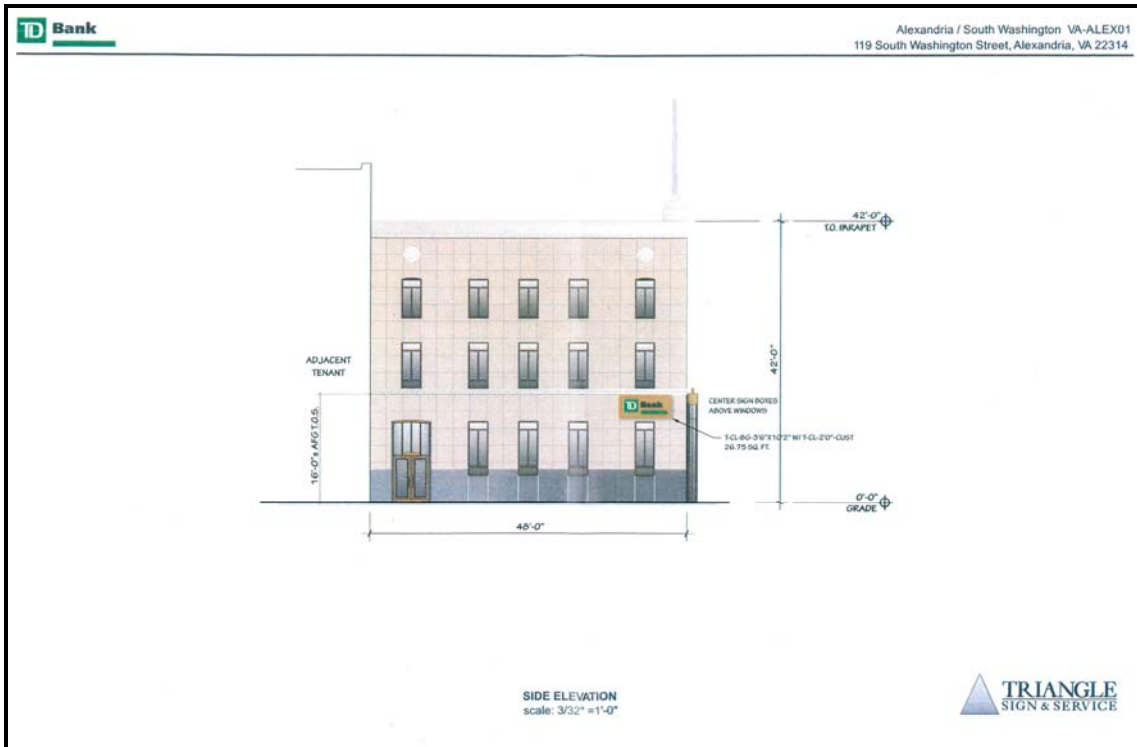


Figure 5: Proposed Prince Street elevation

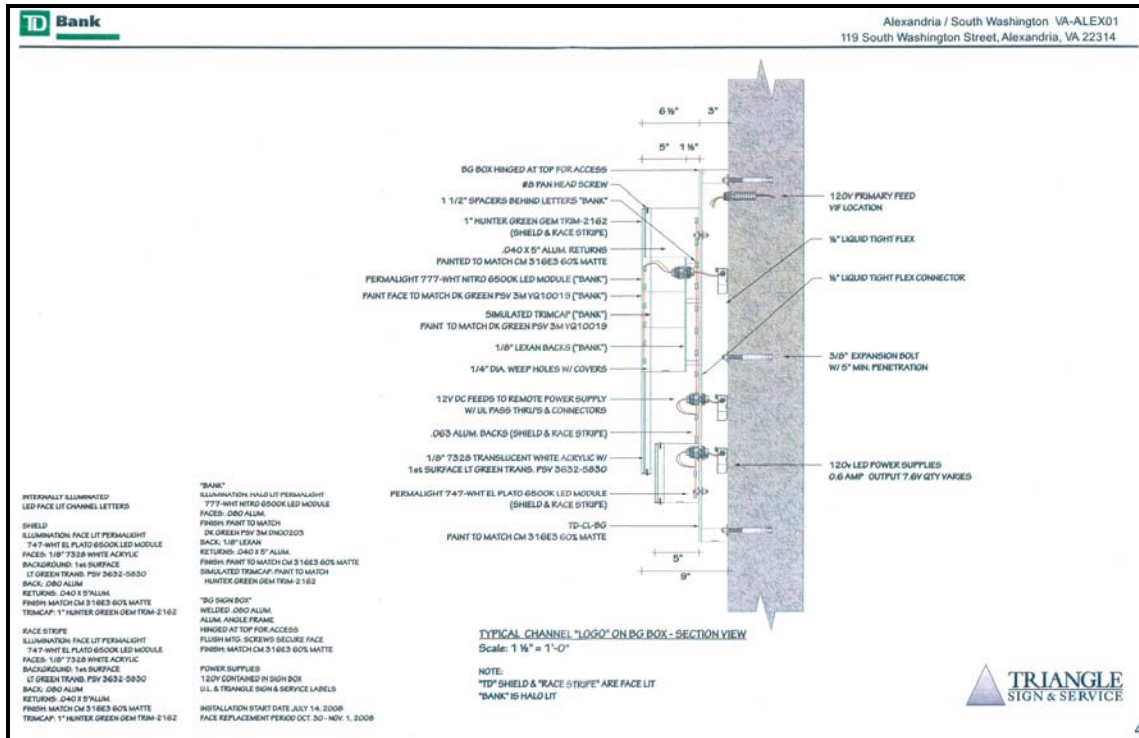


Figure 6: Sign section

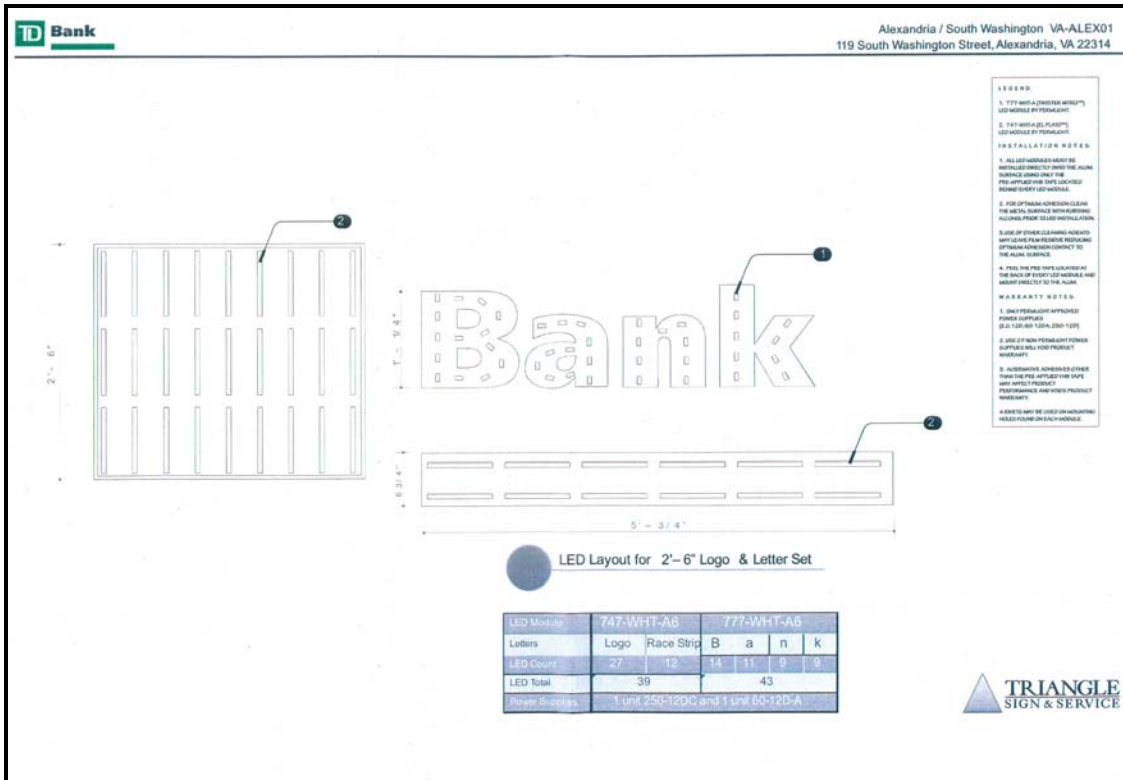


Figure 7: LED layout for Prince Street sign

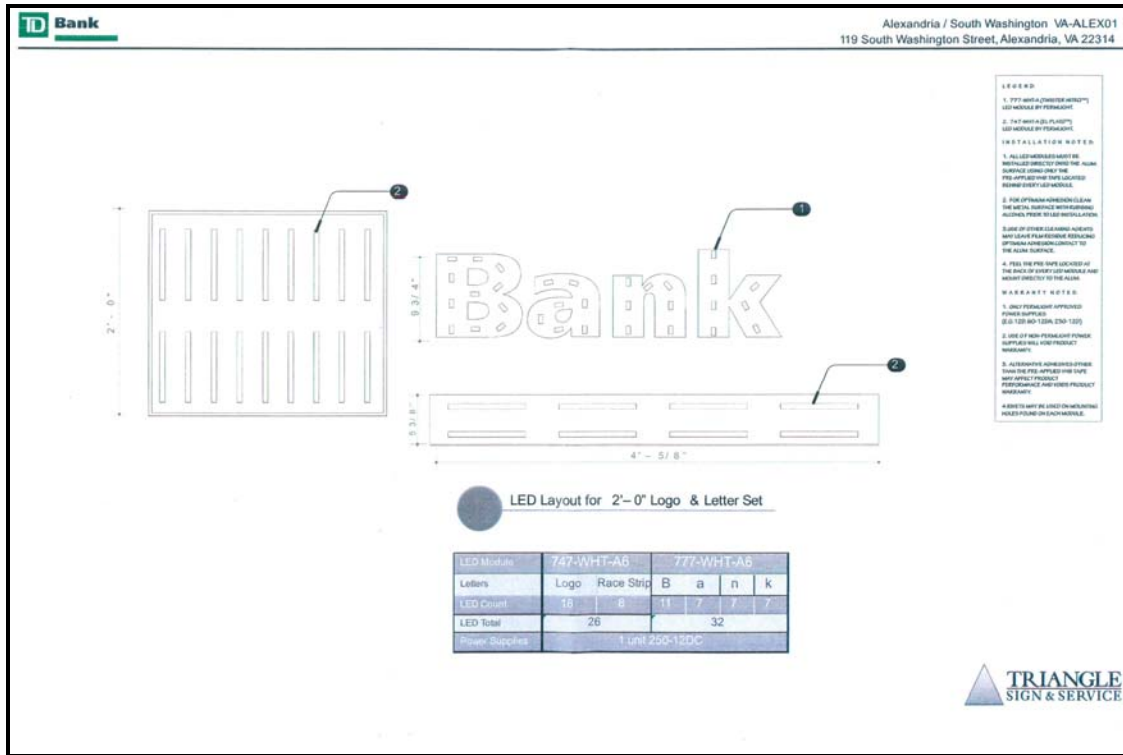


Figure 8: LED layout for Washington Street signs