

Docket Item # 13
BAR CASE #2008-0225

BAR Meeting
December 3, 2008

ISSUE: Alterations to previously approved plans (signs)

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 only illumination permitted for the proposed signage be the letters “TD” on the monogram box, with the green portion being opaque, and the “Bank” lettering halo-lit;
2. That the white outline is deleted and the opaque green material be extended to the edge of the logo portion of the sign;
3. That the back lit illumination on the green racing stripe is deleted or that the racing stripe is deleted entirely;
4. That the illumination shall be equipped with a timer that will automatically shut off the illumination from 10:00pm to dusk the next day;
5. That the opaque film on the Prince Street doors and large decorative transom be deleted.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant, TD Bank, is requesting approval of modifications to previously approved plans for signage at 119 South Washington Street. The applicant appeared before the Board on October 15, 2008 and received the following approval:

On a motion by Mr. Neale, seconded by Ms. Neihardt, the Board voted to approve the application as amended with the following conditions:

1. That the only illumination permitted for the proposed signage be the letters "TD" on the monogram box, with the green portion being opaque, and the "Bank" lettering halo-lit;
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;
5. That the new signs are no larger than the existing Commerce Bank signs; and
6. That the illumination shall be equipped with a timer that will automatically shut off the illumination from 10:00pm to dusk the next day.

The vote was 6-0.

The applicant asserts that the approved minutes do not reflect the action taken by the Board, specifically as they relate to the TD logo portion of the signs and the back lit green racing stripe (condition #1).

The applicant is also proposing to completely obscure the glass on the Prince Street double doors and large transom with a dark green vinyl film.

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 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.

In 2004, the Board approved signage for the previous bank tenant, Commerce Bank, as well as modifications to the front entryway (BAR Case #2004-0261). The BAR heard the case on four separate occasions prior to rendering a final decision on March 17, 2004. As noted above, the BAR approved three TD Bank signs on October 15, 2008 (BAR 2008-0170).

III: ANALYSIS:

The materials submitted with this application reflect the majority of the conditions set forth by the Board, including the beveled edge, the size of the signs and the automatic shut off for the illumination. It should be noted that the matte brass backing is actually an aluminum box with a matte brass finish, exactly like the sign for the previous tenant, Commerce Bank.

The *Design Guidelines* chapter on windows specifically states that: “Street level windows on commercial buildings should not be painted or otherwise made opaque.” Although commercial doors are not directly addressed, Staff believes the same recommendation should apply. As a result, Staff recommends that the proposed opaque film be eliminated.

The area of disagreement between Staff and the applicant relates to the illumination of the three boxed signs. While Staff continues to have reservations about the illumination of signs along the George Washington Memorial Parkway, in October the Board did approve some degree of illumination. While Staff was initially concerned that the illumination behind the green portion of the logo sign would still allow light to come through, the photograph of another TD Bank sign provided by the applicant demonstrates that the green portion is completely opaque. However, Staff believes that the white stripe around the TD logo is unnecessary and recommends that it be deleted and that the green color be continued to the edge. Staff would also argue that the Board never intended to recommend approval of the back lit green racing stripe and recommends that it either not be illuminated or that it be removed entirely.

Because the submitted materials already reflect a number of the Board’s previous conditions, only the relevant conditions are being brought forward, along with Staff’s new recommendations.

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

1. That the only illumination permitted for the proposed signage be the letters “TD” on the monogram box, with the green portion being opaque, and the “Bank” lettering halo-lit;
2. That the white outline is deleted and the opaque green material be extended to the edge of the logo portion of the sign;
3. That the back lit illumination on the green racing stripe is deleted or that the racing stripe is deleted entirely;
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5. That the opaque film on the Prince Street doors and large decorative transom be deleted.

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

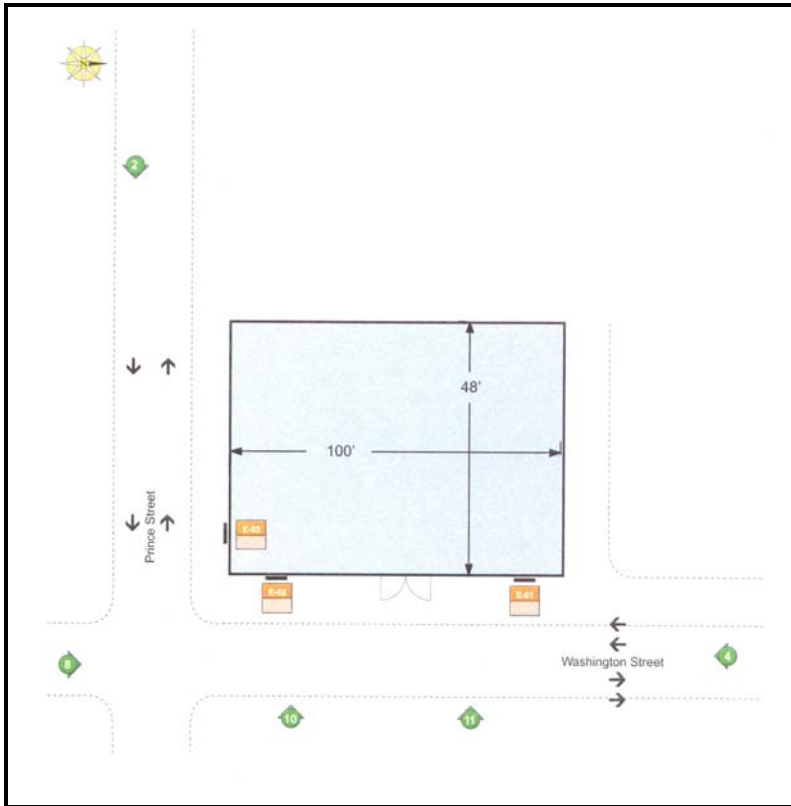


Figure 1: Site Plan



Figure 2: Washington Street Elevation



Figure 3: Existing and Proposed Washington Street Signage



Figure 4: Prince Street Elevation



Figure 5: Existing and Proposed Prince Street Signage



Figure 6: Photo of Existing TD Bank Sign

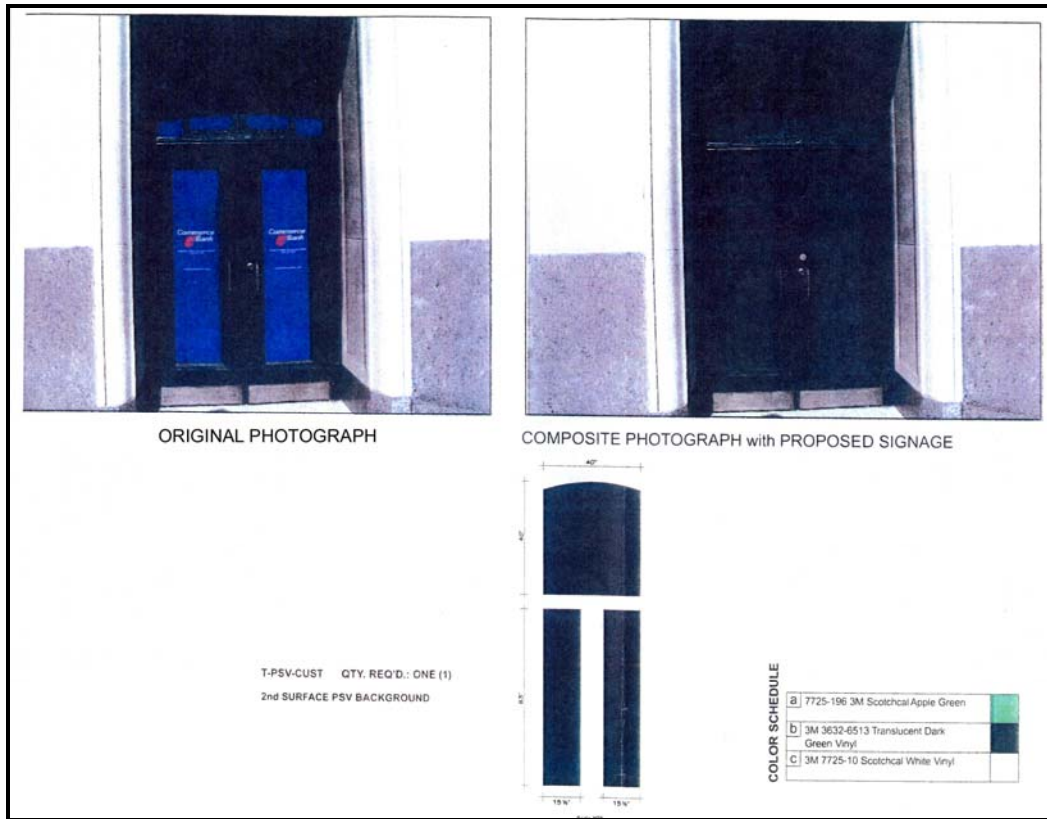


Figure 7: Existing and Proposed Prince Street Door/Transom

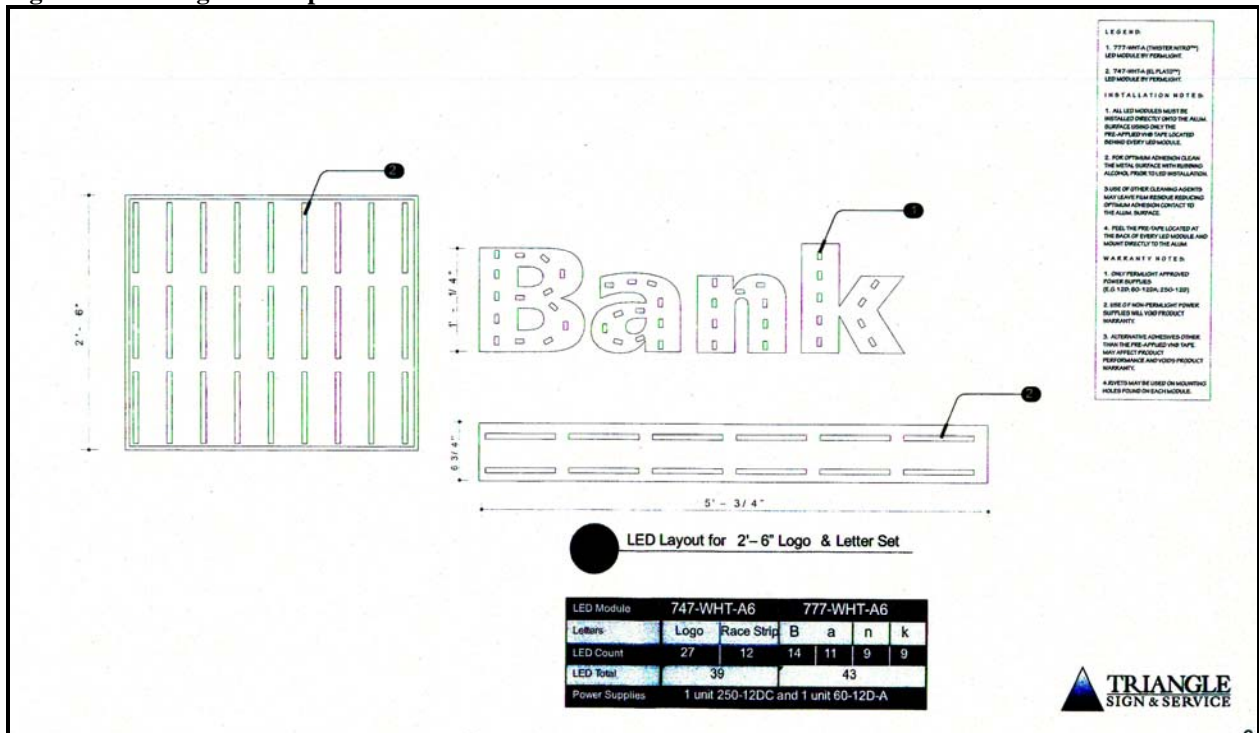


Figure 8: LED Layout for Washington Street Signs

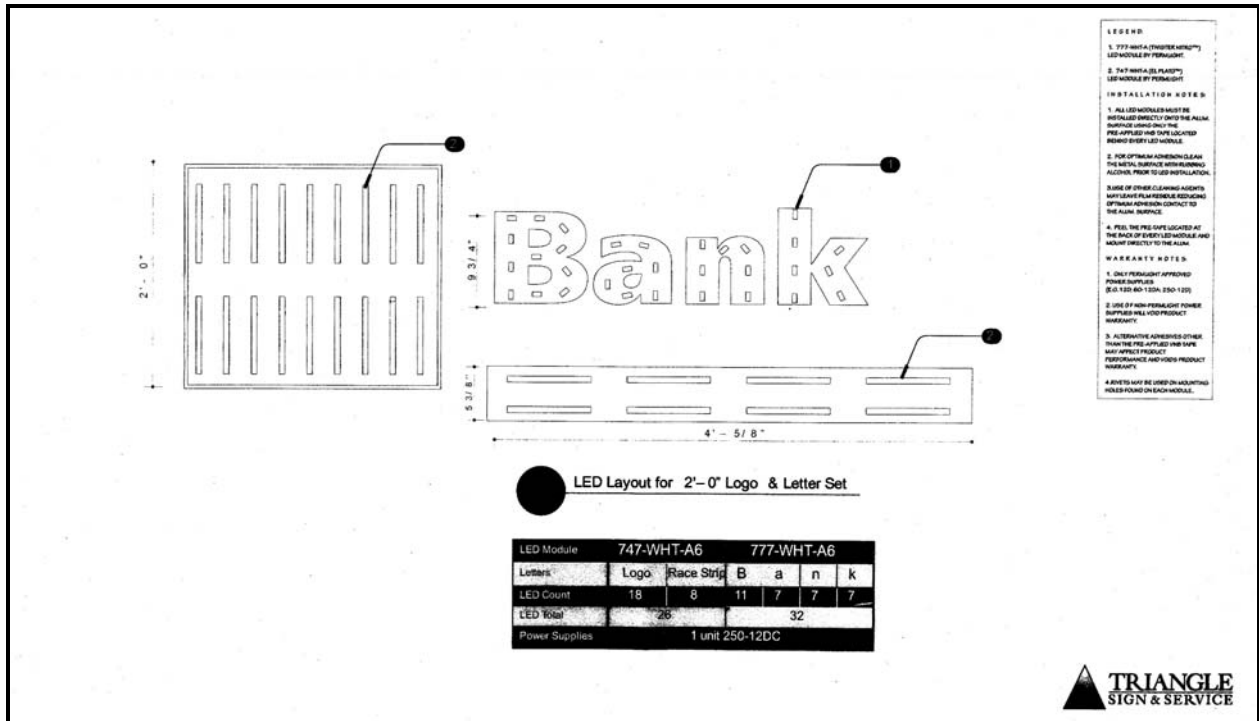


Figure 9: LED Layout Prince Street Sign

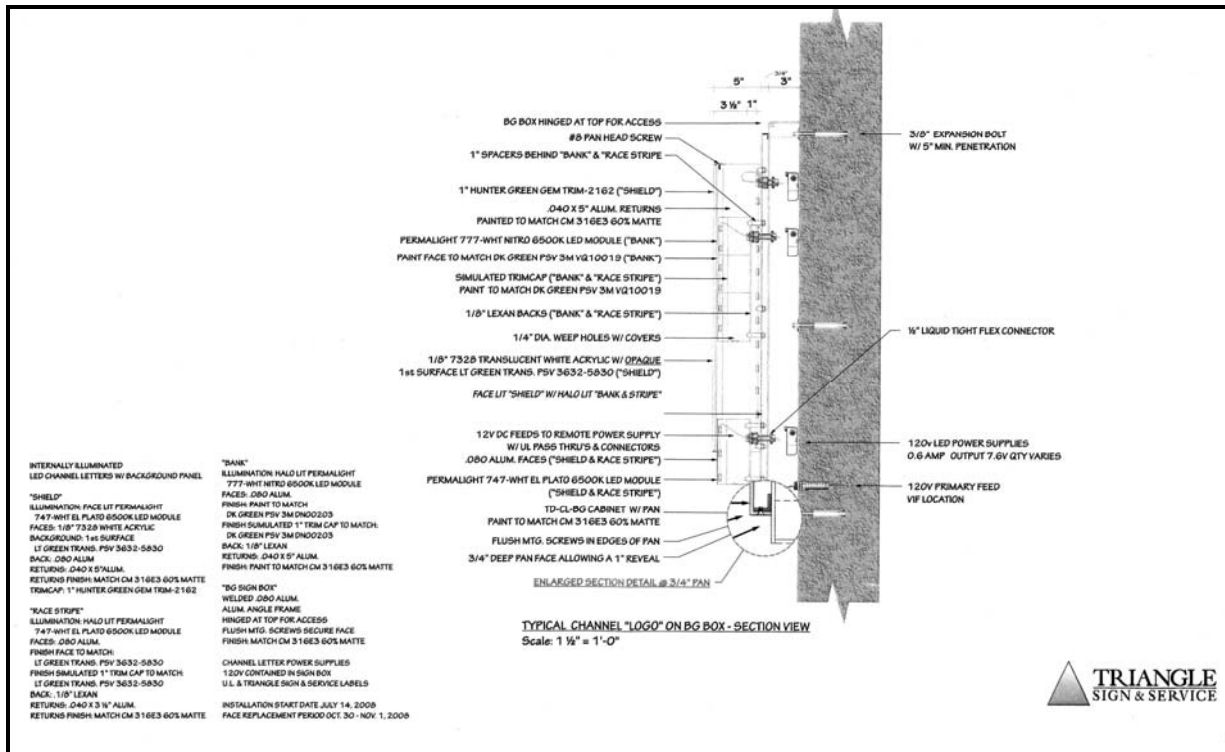


Figure 10: Section of Sign