

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 24, 2009

TO: Old and Historic Alexandria Board of Architectural Review

FROM: BAR Staff

SUBJECT: Information Session: Consideration of a request for demolition at 702 North Washington Street

Attached for your review please find information relating to the request by the owner and his representatives to consider a proposal for wholesale demolition of the motel building located at 702 North Washington Street, known as the Travelodge. The applicant has prepared supporting materials for your review. The applicant and Staff have met on several occasions to discuss the proposal, as well as conducted a site visit to view the alterations and changes to the building. The owner's intent would be to re-develop the site with a new commercial building, meeting the requirements of the Washington Street Standards, should a Permit to Demolish be granted.

Background:

The applicant, Harry P. "Bud" Hart and Mary Catherine Gibbs representing the owner Ray Mahmood, approached P & Z Staff for a discussion regarding the possible demolition of the building located at 702 North Washington Street, with the intent to redevelop the site for a commercial use. During the meetings with the Department and in response to comments from BAR Staff, the applicant hired an architectural historian to research the history of the building and identify any changes that have occurred since construction. BAR Staff also conducted research on the property to determine whether the building maintained its historic integrity to be considered a significant building in the historic district. It was also important to evaluate the building in the context of other "roadside architecture" related resources found along Washington Street. The applicant agreed to bring the item to the Board to provide information and allow for discussion on the proposed demolition, recognizing its important location along North Washington Street within the District, prior to formally docketing an application for a Permit to Demolish and concept review of new construction and Certificate of Appropriateness.

History of 702 North Washington Street:

The building located at 702 North Washington Street is a brick, Colonial Revival-style two story motel building, at the corner of Wythe and North Washington Streets, in the Old and Historic Alexandria District. According to minutes of Board meetings, the Board

approved a new 24-room, motel building at this location on April 4, 1955, with revised drawings approved by the Board on October 13, 1955. In reviewing the 1958 Sanborn Fire Insurance map, the original hotel, known as the Virginia Motel, was a C-shaped building, fronting on North Washington Street. The lots immediately north of the motel, at 706 and 708 North Washington Street, contained two, semi-detached apartment buildings. As originally constructed, the motel was mostly two stories, with a gable-end containing two entrances with heavy door surround, and a one-story restaurant section at the corner with large, multi-pane windows. The parking area was accessed from Wythe Street. The applicant has provided a postcard from circa 1965 that shows the original appearance of the motel. The architect for the original design has not been identified.

After 1965, the two adjacent buildings to the north were demolished, and the motel was expanded to its current configuration. A new L-shape component was constructed on the lots at 706 and 708 North Washington Street. An additional 18 rooms were added, providing the motel with a total of 40 guest rooms. A second-story was added to the corner restaurant section of the building, and the storefront facing North Washington Street was significantly altered, with new multi-paned windows. The applicant has provided information on the architect for the addition to the motel, Dwight Chase.

Since the motel's expansion circa 1965, Staff could only locate other applications reviewed by the Board for signage.

Criteria for a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate:

In considering a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate, the Board must consider the following criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, §10-105(B):

- (1) Is the building or structure of such architectural or historical interest that its moving, removing, capsulating or razing would be to the detriment of the public interest?
- (2) Is the building or structure of such interest that it could be made into a historic house?
- (3) Is the building or structure of such old and unusual or uncommon design, texture and material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty?
- (4) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway?
- (5) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve and protect an historic place or area of historic interest in the city?
- (6) Would retention of the building or structure promote the general welfare by maintaining and increasing real estate values, generating business, creating new positions, attracting tourists, students, writers, historians, artists and artisans, attracting new residents, encouraging study and interest in American history, stimulating interest and study in architecture and design, educating citizens in American culture and heritage, and making the city a more attractive and desirable place in which to live?
- (7) In the instance of a building or structure owned by the city or the

redevelopment and housing authority, such building or structure having been acquired pursuant to a duly approved urban renewal (redevelopment) plan, would retention of the building or structure promote the general welfare in view of the needs of the city for an urban renewal (redevelopment) project?

Analysis:

In reviewing the information provided by the applicant, reviewing additional information located by Staff, and from site visits to the property, Staff believes that 702 North Washington Street does not meet the Criteria set forth in the Ordinance for Demolition. While initially constructed in 1955, the motel was greatly altered in 1965 so that its architectural and historic integrity has been diminished, due to the loss of original and character-defining features and details, including the chamfered corner restaurant section and storefront and entrances along North Washington Street.

In Staff's opinion, the building is not a significant building in the historic district due to its loss of integrity, and because it would not qualify as a contributing building to the Old and Historic Alexandria National Register District or the Mount Vernon Memorial Highway District—the current period of significance for the National Register District is 1749-1933. If the period of significance of the National Register District was adjusted to capture buildings that were at least 50-years old and maintained integrity, the period would end in 1959, which would still make the current form of the building from 1965 less than the age of requirement for inclusion.

Staff also believes the building should be considered in its context of built resources related to “roadside architecture”, that is, buildings constructed along the Country's expanded highways and roadways, to accommodate automobile uses, including gas stations, restaurants, and motels. While many of these types of resources were constructed along the George Washington/Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway, only a few are extant and unaltered from their original construction. In looking at the remaining examples of these types of resources, Staff does not believe 702 North Washington is prime example of motel types of roadside architecture. In Staff's opinion, the Towne Motel at 808 North Washington Street, constructed in 1957, appears to be a more intact example of this type of built resource. Furthermore, the Towne Motel remains in a block that contains other buildings that relate to “roadside architecture”, including the gas station at 834 North Washington Street, and the Little Tavern hamburger shop 828 North Washington Street.

In conclusion, with the information received and evaluated, Staff could support a Permit to Demolish for 702 North Washington Street, because the building does not retain historic or architectural integrity, and does not meet any of the established Criteria in the Ordinance. While the applicant is only requesting a discussion of the proposed demolition of the motel, and not a review of a concept for new construction, Staff would like to remind the applicant that any new construction at this site would be required to meet the Washington Street Standards found in the Ordinance, and any additional requirements located in the Design Guidelines.

HART, CALLEY, GIBBS & KARP, P.C.

ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELLORS AT LAW

307 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314-2557

TELEPHONE (703) 836-5757
FAX (703) 548-5443
hcgk.law@verizon.net

HARRY P. HART
MARY CATHERINE H. GIBBS
HERBERT L. KARP

ASSOCIATE
DAVID L. CHAMOWITZ

OF COUNSEL
CONSTANCE H. PIERCE

RETIRED
ROBERT L. MURPHY, 2001
CYRIL D. CALLEY, 2005

LURAY OFFICE:

170 KIBLER DRIVE
LURAY, VA 22835

TELEPHONE: 540-743-2922
FAX: 540-743-2422

June 10, 2009

Mr. Lee Webb, Principal Planner
Historic Preservation Division
Department of Planning & Zoning
City Hall, Room 2100
Alexandria, VA 22314

JUN 10 2009

Re: 702 N. Washington Street, DSUP#2008-0024

Dear Mr. Webb:

Based upon comments received from Staff on January 9, 2009, the Applicant hired an architectural historian to respond to the following comments from Staff:

Existing Motel Building

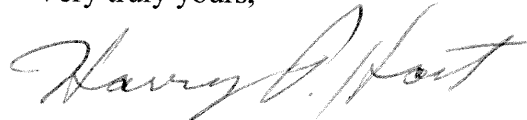
6. According to Old and Historic Alexandria BAR records, the existing building was approved for new construction in 1955, with construction occurring in 1956. Subsequent approvals by the BAR for the property consisted mostly of signage. The motel first appears on the 1958 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.
7. A Permit to Demolish must approved by the Old and Historic Alexandria BAR prior to the demolition of the existing building. Because of the age of the building, approximately 52 years old, the building has the potential to be determined historic. Further evaluation is needed to determine how this building relates and compares to other buildings located along Washington Street, that are characterized as "roadside architecture". Other comparable buildings would include extant motels constructed in the 1950s, gas stations, and the Howard Johnson restaurant building (now Wendy's, converting to a PNC Bank). The existing motel is representative of Colonial Revival roadside architecture.
8. Has any consideration been given to retaining a part of the existing building adjacent to the sidewalk and incorporating it into the new design?

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9. Staff would recommend that a work session be held with the Old and Historic Alexandria BAR to discuss the proposed demolition of the existing building as well as review the proposed new construction.

In response to these comments, enclosed please find a letter and a report from Ms. Anne H. Adams finding that, in her professional opinion, "there is no reason under the relevant Criteria or any other generally accepted historic preservation criteria that the Building should not be demolished." We'd ask that Staff review the report and docket our item for a work session with the Old and Historic Alexandria BAR as soon as possible. Feel free to contact us with any questions.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harry P. Hart".

Harry P. Hart

Enclosure

Cc: Mr. Ray Mahmood



Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP
2300 N Street, NW | Washington, DC 20037-1122 | tel 202.663.8000 | fax 202.663.8007

Anne H. Adams
202-663-8884
anne.adams@pillsburylaw.com

BY ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

June 1, 2009

Mr. Ray Mahmood
President
Mahmood Investment Corporation
700 North Washington Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: Evaluation of the Travelodge,
702 North Washington Street, Alexandria, VA

Dear Mr. Mahmood:

You have asked that I evaluate the Travelodge at 702 North Washington Street, Alexandria, VA ("Building") in the context of the "Criteria for demolition in the Old and Historic Alexandria District and for 100-Year Old Buildings" found in Chapter 4 of the City of Alexandria, Virginia Design Guidelines ("Criteria"). In order to do that I have: visited the Building several times; evaluated research on the Building; and considered the Building in the context of the Old and Historic Alexandria District ("Historic District") and the George Washington Memorial Parkway ("Parkway"). I have also considered whether the Building possesses any significance in its own right. I understand that your interest in this evaluation is to determine whether there is any historic preservation reason that the Building should not be demolished. It is my professional opinion that there is no reason under the relevant Criteria or any other generally accepted historic preservation criteria that the Building should not be demolished.

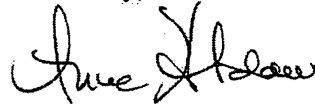
The Building was originally constructed in the mid-1950s as the Virginia Motel. It took on its current appearance c. 1965. At that time the Building was almost doubled in size, the shape of its footprint was changed, and a second floor was added to part of the original Building. The Building's front façade along North Washington Street was also altered. This mid-1960s Building does not contribute to the character of the Old and Historic Alexandria District, the period of significance of which may run through the 1930s. It is not a contributing element of the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Nor is its design or its form consistent with the architectural character or quality of the historic buildings in the District that line the Parkway as it travels through the District. Furthermore, the Building does not possess the exceptional significance generally

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recognized as a requirement for buildings less than fifty (50) years old to deserve or warrant special protection or consideration in the name of historic preservation.

The report attached to this letter addresses six (6) of the seven (7) Criteria (the seventh not being relevant in this context) and elaborates on my conclusion that the Building is not worthy of preservation. In support of that conclusion the report includes background information on the Building and the Old and Historic Alexandria District and the Parkway. It also briefly discusses the evaluation of buildings less than fifty (50) years old. Should you have any questions about my conclusion, or need any additional information, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Anne H. Adams
Architectural Historian

cc: Mary Catherine Gibbs

Evaluation of the Travelodge at 702 North Washington Street, Alexandria, VA

Background on 702 North Washington Street

In order to evaluate the Travelodge at 702 North Washington Street ("Building"), in the context of the Criteria for demolition in the Old and Historic Alexandria District and for 100-Year Old Buildings ("Criteria") it is necessary to first understand the nature of that Building, specifically, when it was constructed, whether it is significant in any way, and how it relates to the character and significance of the Old and Historic Alexandria District ("District") and the George Washington Memorial Parkway ("Parkway"). While extensive information about the Building has not been located, sufficient information exists for such an evaluation.

The Building was constructed as the Virginia Motel in the mid 1950s; the Board of Architectural Review minutes of April 15, 1955 reference the application of Thomas Meletis for a motel at 700-702 North Washington Street and a motel at that location appears on the 1958 Sanborn map. It was a C-shaped building, fronting on North Washington Street, with a parking court facing Wythe Street (see copy of period post card at Exhibit 1)). The identity of the architect of the Building is unknown at this time. The Virginia Motel was a fairly late and architecturally uninteresting example of the tourist accommodations that proliferated along Route 1 from the 1920s through the mid twentieth century. Most of the Building, which was constructed of brick, was two-stories. However, the part of the building at the corner was only one story; its chamfered corner featured the entrance to the motel's "Coffee Shoppe". Large multi-light show windows defined the faces of the Coffee Shoppe. The two-story gable-end element on North Washington Street featured two doors at the first floor, two windows at the second floor, and a round window in the peak of the gable.

The twenty-four rooms fronted on the C-shaped courtyard. The second floor of the motel projected beyond the lower level, creating an arcade at the first floor. Decorative metal columns appeared at both levels of the building and may or may not have been structural at the first floor. Through-the-wall heating and air conditioning units provided individual temperature control for motel guests.

To the extent that the building could be assigned an architectural label it could be described as vaguely Colonial Revival, in as much as it had a gable roof, multi-light double-hung windows, and traditional detailing such as jack arches with keystones. Its design is in keeping with the continuous use of traditional design features that began in the late nineteenth century and continues to this day. With each decade after World War I the quality of Colonial Revival design, particularly in commercial buildings, has generally waned; diluted examples of the style predominated over more stylistically rigorous examples. The Virginia Motel is a fairly generic example of the style.

Throughout 1965 owner Thomas Meletis received a number of permits to alter the Virginia Motel. The architect for these substantial alterations was Dwight G. Chase, whose office was at 1817 Richmond Highway, Alexandria, VA. In order to make space for the proposed additions, the two buildings to the north of the original Virginia Motel were demolished; the motel was then expanded on the newly-vacant property. Chase designed an L-shaped addition that backed up to the original building and created a parking lot on North Washington Street. The alterations to the original Building obliterated whatever odd charm and architectural interest the original motel originally had. While the design of the addition and alterations generally conformed to the design of the original, the details of the addition are even more diluted than in the original Building.

The addition more than doubled the number of rooms in the motel. Also part of these alterations was the addition of a second floor over the Coffee Shoppe and the reconfiguration of the North Washington Street elevation. The chamfered corner was squared off. The show windows of the Coffee Shoppe were replaced by a single show window flanked by doors, all within a heavy wood frame. The two doors at the first floor of the original gable end were replaced by a single large show window. The North Washington Street elevation of the addition features show windows and an entrance near the corner (see copies of construction photographs at Exhibit 2). Some of the alterations to the original building were accomplished in a less than finely detailed manner, with residual pieces of the original building simply left in place and worked around.

Although 1965 drawings show a balcony on both sides of the L-shaped addition the balcony currently only exists along the back (west) leg of the L. The railing at the second floor of the balcony is metal, and the balcony is supported by brick piers. It is possible that the brick piers at the first floor of the original Building were added at the same time the addition was constructed. The windows in the courtyard face of the addition are similar to the windows in the original motel. However, the windows in parts of the North Washington Street elevation and along the back of the building are metal, perhaps replacements since the date of the addition. Other alterations have occurred over the years, including the replacement of one of the show windows on the front of the Building and alterations to doors. The original signage was removed and new Travelodge signage was added when the latter replaced the former in the Building (see Exhibit 3 for current pictures of the Building).

The addition is simpler in its design and detailing than that the original Building; it is essentially another decade removed from the origins of the Colonial Revival style. Its design intent is to be expected, given the location of the Building in the Old and Historic Alexandria District, but it is no more than a passing reference to the historic architectural character of the District. The Building may be compatible with the historic character of the District (except the street-facing parking lots) but it is certainly neither contributing to character of the District nor of the architectural quality associated with the District.

Dwight Chase, the architect responsible for the 1965 appearance of the Building, was born in Portland, Oregon on September 29, 1924. He received his architecture degree from the University of Virginia in 1949. He worked for a number of firms, most notably Faulkner and Kingbury in the District of Columbia and Robert Willgoos in Alexandria, before establishing a solo practice in 1959. Interestingly, the former was known for its Modern buildings and the latter, at one time a member of the Board of Architectural Review, was known for his Colonial Revival designs. Chase maintained an office in Virginia and was registered in the District, Maryland, and Virginia. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects (Washington Metropolitan Chapter) from 1956 to 1965 and then again from 1976 through the early 1980s. He was living in California during the second period of membership.

Chase's work encompassed a variety of building types, including churches, schools, houses, and commercial buildings. Known buildings designed by Chase include: Hammond High School (1956), Alexandria, VA; and St. James Episcopal Church, Mount Vernon, VA; Groveton Baptist Church, Alexandria, VA; Mantua Elementary School, Fairfax, VA; and various buildings for the Potomac Chemical Corporation, Fairfax, VA, all dating before 1962. The Groveton Baptist Church is an interesting Mid-Century Modern design, typical of the predominant architectural thinking of the period, when Modernism was the fashion. It is stylistically more interesting and rigorous than the reworking of the Virginia Motel. Of course, a Modern building would certainly not have been approved within the boundaries of the District.

As it stands, the Building is an undistinguished example of its building type and it does little to enhance the North Washington Streetscape. Its design is ordinary. The parking lot that was created as part of the 1965 addition detracts from the streetscape. There is nothing about this Building that suggests significance, particularly the exceptional significance generally acknowledged to be required for a building less than fifty years old to warrant special historic preservation consideration or protection. It is architecturally ordinary, generally and for its building type. Although Chase may have been a competent architect there is nothing that suggests that he was a significant architect.

The Building is not significant in the context of the Old and Historic Alexandria District. Originally laid out in 1749, Alexandria is most noted for its exceptional collection of architecturally and historically significant late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century buildings. Its collection of early urban buildings, both residential and commercial, is truly remarkable. Ongoing development in the District included examples of architectural styles popular through the later nineteenth-century and into the early-twentieth century. Buildings dating from as late as the 1930s, such as the US Post Office and Courthouse at 200 South Washington Street (1930) and the Art Deco office building at 117 South Washington Street (c. 1930s) have been determined to contribute to the character of the District.

Accordingly, although the exact end date of the period of significance of the historic district is undefined, based on the National Register of Historic Places

documentation the period of significance runs through the 1930s. It certainly does not extend to the 1950s when the Virginia Motel was originally constructed, or to 1965, when the Building took on its current appearance. Therefore, by definition the Building cannot be deemed to contribute to the character or significance of the District. Additionally, the architectural quality of the Building is substantially inferior to the buildings that define and contribute to the architectural character of the historic district.

The Building also does not contribute to the Mount Vernon Memorial Parkway, which is that part of the George Washington Memorial Parkway that travels through Alexandria along Washington Street, which was incorporated into the Parkway when it was constructed. Constructed between 1929 and 1932 (which is the period of significance of the Parkway), the Parkway was conceived and built as part of the celebration of the bicentennial of George Washington's birth. It was the first parkway constructed by the federal government and the first with a commemorative association. It is the road itself, ending at Washington's Mount Vernon, with its abutting greensward, vistas to the Potomac River, landscaping, and its dignified arched bridges that are the defining features of the Parkway. Washington Street, laid out in the eighteenth century and lined by historic buildings dating from the late eighteenth century through the first three decades of the twentieth century, is incorporated into the Parkway where it runs through Alexandria. These buildings are contributing elements of the Old and Historic Alexandria District. And while they may be located within the National Register of Historic Places boundaries of the Parkway, they are not components of the Parkway itself.

Consideration of Criteria in Chapter 4

Given the nature of the Building, how do the Criteria apply to this ordinary building which is less than fifty years old? Generally speaking, they do not apply, certainly not in any meaningful way or in any way that does not also apply to any building along Washington Street in the District just because the building exists. The Criteria are individually addressed below.

Criteria for demolition in the Old and Historic Alexandria District and for 100-Year Old Buildings:

(1) Is the building or structure of such architectural or historical interest that its moving, removing, capsulating, or razing would be to the detriment of the public interest?

No. The Building is not of such architectural or historical interest that its razing would be a detriment to the public interest. The Building is not a contributing element in the District and it contributes nothing to the understanding of the history or architecture that makes the District significant. Nor is the Building a component of the Parkway. It is not significant in its own right. It contributes little to the quality of the streetscape along North Washington Street or the Parkway and its parking lot creates a hole in the streetscape where a building would be preferable.

(2) Is the building or structure of such interest that it could be made into an historic shrine?

No. There is nothing about the Building that even suggests that it should be made into a historic shrine. The elevation of buildings to such status should be reserved for the best and most important buildings, those buildings that transcend the ordinary, the good, and even, when in a district, the general overall importance of that district. Such building should be exceptionally important and must be able to convey that extraordinary importance. Such is not the case with this Building.

(3) Is the building or structure of such old or unusual or uncommon design, texture and material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty?

No. There is nothing old, unusual, or uncommon about the design, texture, or material of this Building such that it could not be reproduced if there were any reason to do so. There is, of course, no reason to reproduce such an architecturally-undistinguished building, particularly one constructed of ordinary, commonly available materials, with fairly crudely executed details, particularly those that resulted from the 1965 addition and alterations to the Building.

(4) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway?

No. The Building does not contribute to the memorial character of the Parkway. Indeed, the Parkway is not about buildings but rather it is about the character of the greenway itself, with its expansive views to the Potomac River, its landscaping, and the bridges and hardscape directly associated with the road itself. While this Building and others may be included in the boundaries of the Parkway that does not mean they are significant to any aspect of the Parkway, including its memorial character. The only buildings mentioned in the National Register of Historic Places documentation on the Parkway are the eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings lining Washington Street in Alexandria that were there when the street was incorporated into the Parkway and the Mount Vernon Inn and a Park Police office that were built in conjunction with the Parkway. The Virginia Motel, built more than thirty years after the completion of the Parkway, cannot be considered to contribute in any way to the character of the roadway.

(5) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve and protect an historic place or area of historic interest in the city?

No. The Building is not part of the historic places that are the Old and Historic Alexandria District or the George Washington Memorial Parkway and its preservation would not help protect the significant character of either. The Building post-dates the period of significance of both by several decades. It cannot convey anything about the reasons the District or the Parkway are significant. Nor is it a significant piece of design or a significant example of its building type.

(6) Would retention of the building or structure promote the general welfare by maintaining and increasing real estate values, generating business, creating new positions, attracting tourists, students, writers, historians, artists and artisans, attracting new residents, stimulating interest and study in architecture and design, educating citizens in American culture and heritage and making the city a more attractive and desirable place to live?

I can only address those aspects of this question relating to stimulating interest and study of architecture and design, educating citizens in American culture and heritage, and making the city a more attractive place to live. Here, again, the answer is no. One can appropriately note what this Building is. It is a 1965 motel executed in the Colonial Revival style, as was likely required given its location within the District, but with relatively few stylistic features of that style. The Building has little to offer beyond the lowest common expression of architectural and design. It is neither a good example of its style nor a good example of the prevailing architectural trends of the time. It cannot educate people about what is significant about the District in which it happens to be located. And it does little to contribute to making the District an attractive and desirable place to live. Indeed, its parking lot on North Washington Street is a detriment to the quality and integrity of the streetscape.

(7) is not applicable in this current situation.

Conclusion

The former Virginia Motel, now a Travelodge, is an ordinary example of a 1965 tourist motel executed in an architectural vocabulary that was deemed acceptable for the its location in the District. The Building was perhaps more interesting in its original form than in its altered and expanded current form, but even then it contributed to the significance of neither the District nor the Parkway. There is nothing about this Building that warrants the protection or special consideration due architecturally or historically significant buildings. It post-dates the periods of significance of both the District and the Parkway and therefore, by definition, cannot be a contributing element in either. The Building is less than fifty years old and has no exceptional significance in its own right. The Criteria do not apply in any way that requires that the Building be retained for any historic preservation reason.

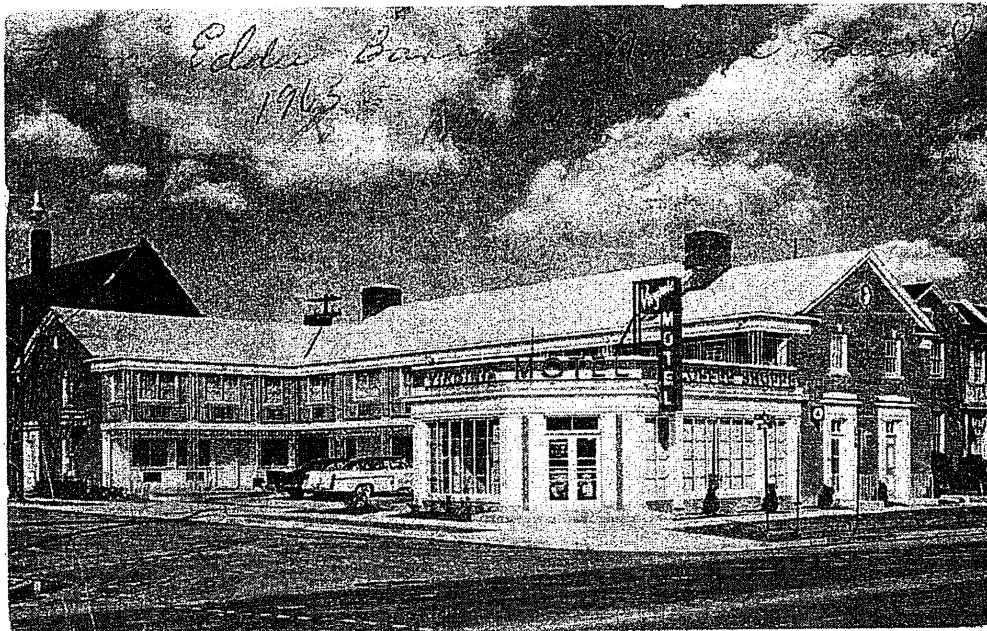


Exhibit 1 1965 postcard of the
Virginia Motel

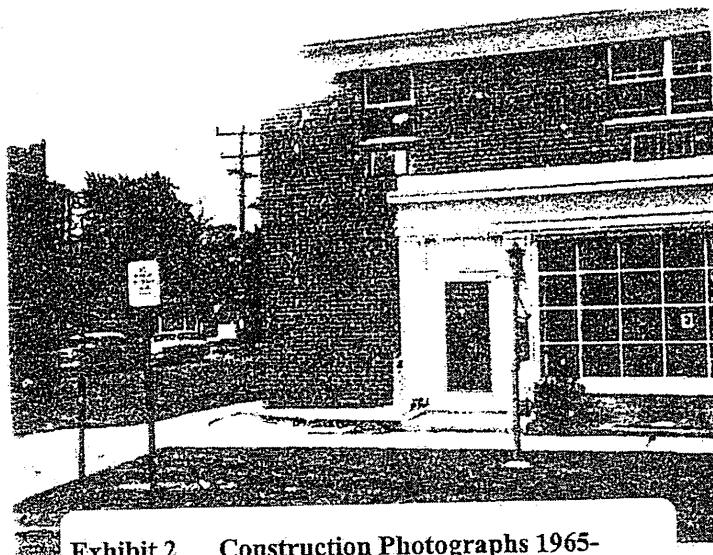
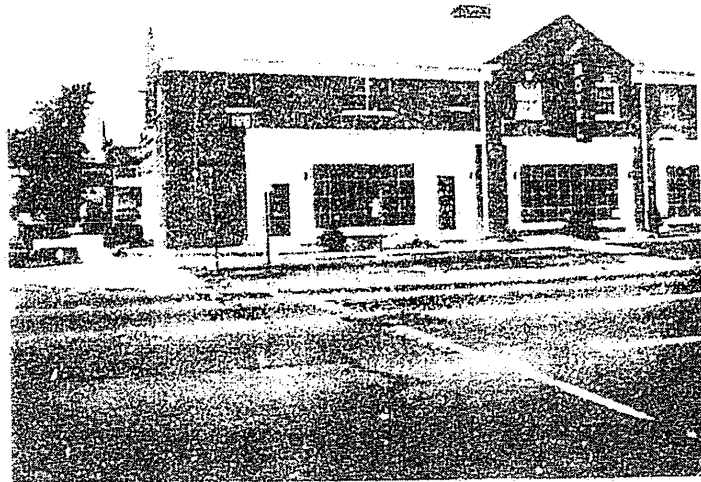
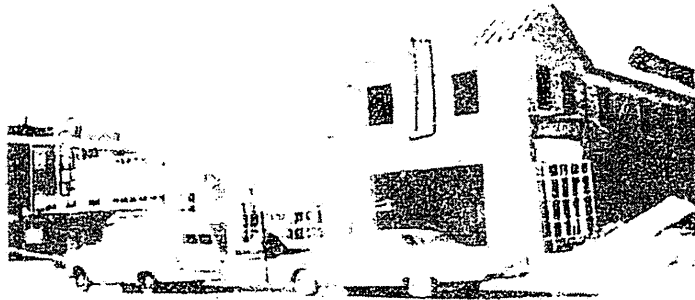


Exhibit 2 Construction Photographs 1965-1966



Exhibit 3a North Washington Street façade
Note remnant of original cham-
fered corner at lower left of picture.



Exhibit 3b South and west elevations of 1965 addition and north parking lot

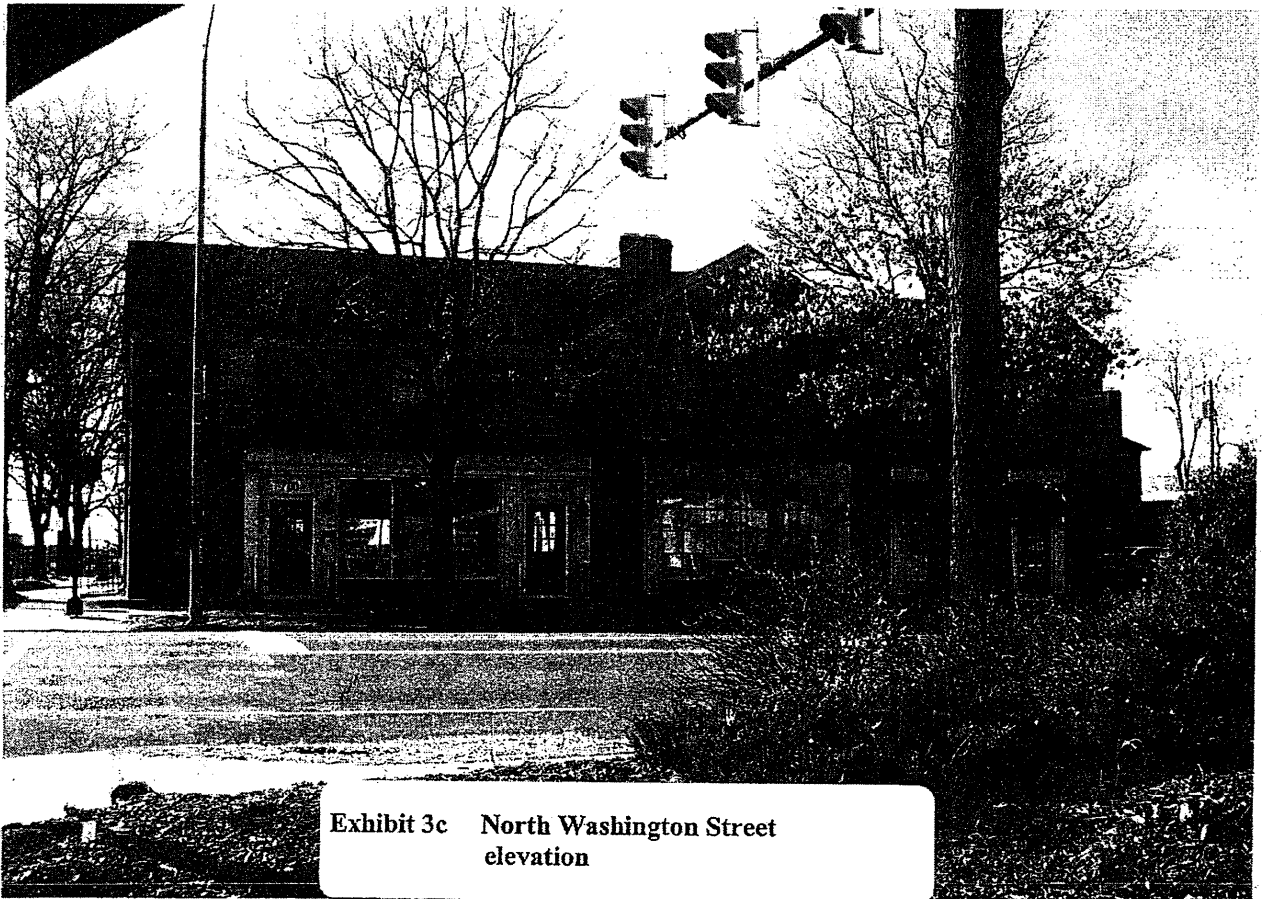


Exhibit 3c North Washington Street elevation

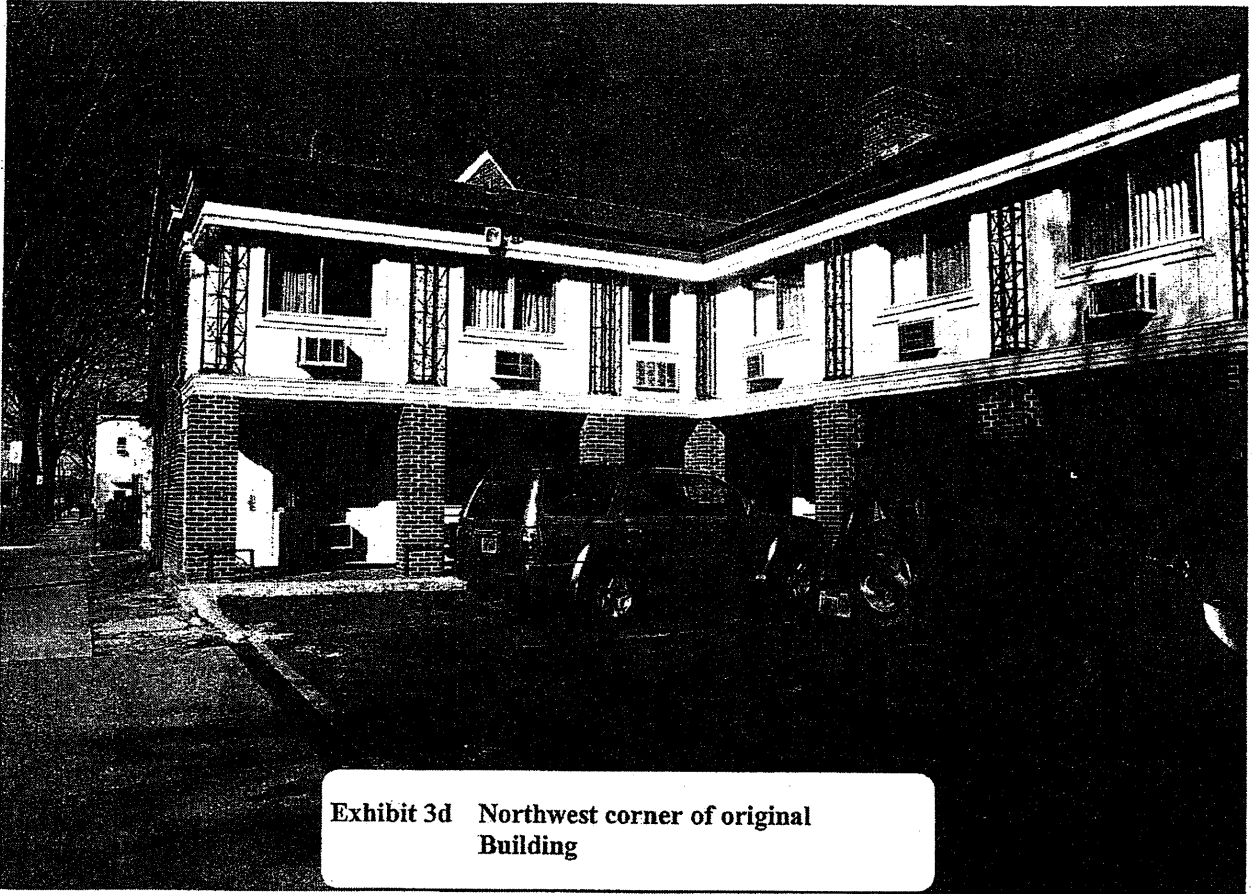


Exhibit 3d Northwest corner of original Building

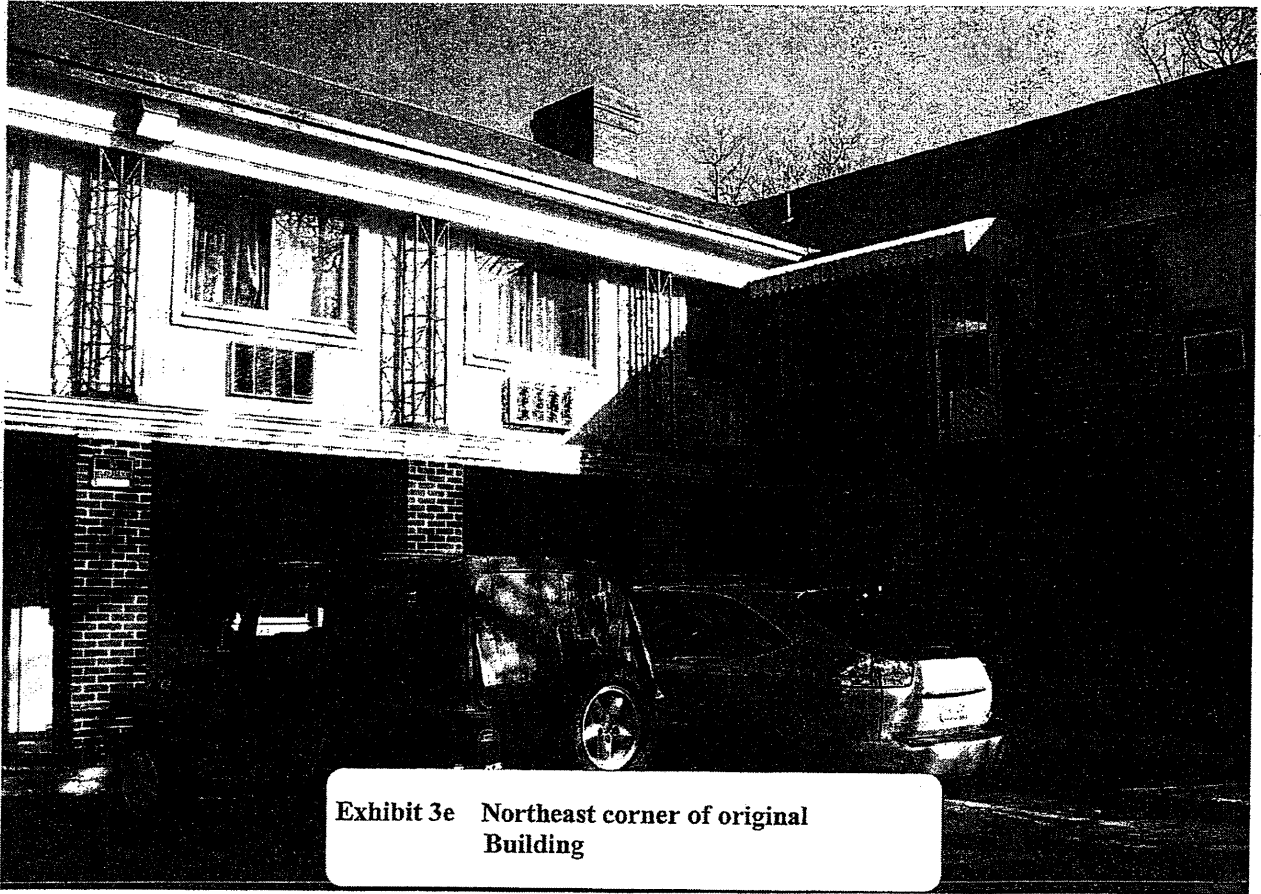


Exhibit 3e Northeast corner of original Building