

Docket Item # 5  
BAR CASE #2009-0209

BAR Meeting  
November 4, 2009

**ISSUE:** Signage  
**APPLICANT:** Carr 625 First Street, LLC  
**LOCATION:** 625 First Street  
**ZONE:** CD/Commercial

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION :** Staff recommends approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness application with the conditions:

1. That the bracket and wall signage be mounted to the building through the mortar joints.
2. That the hanging sign's design is revised to include the text "Café Monte Carlo" in place of the "CMC."

**BOARD ACTION OCTOBER 7, 2009: Deferred for restudy, 5-0.**

On the call of the Chair, the Board voted 5-0 to defer the Certificate of Appropriateness application.

**REASON:** The Board generally agreed with the Staff analysis and found the proposed signage appropriate and compatible with the site. However, they wanted the applicant to explore reducing the size of the wall sign. Additionally, they deferred the item in order for the applicant to remove the non-compliant internally illuminated "open" sign located in the storefront window.

**SPEAKERS:** Sonny Wasim, applicant, responded to the Board's questions.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION at October 7, 2009:** Staff recommends approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness application with the condition:

1. That the bracket and wall signage be mounted to the building through the mortar joints.

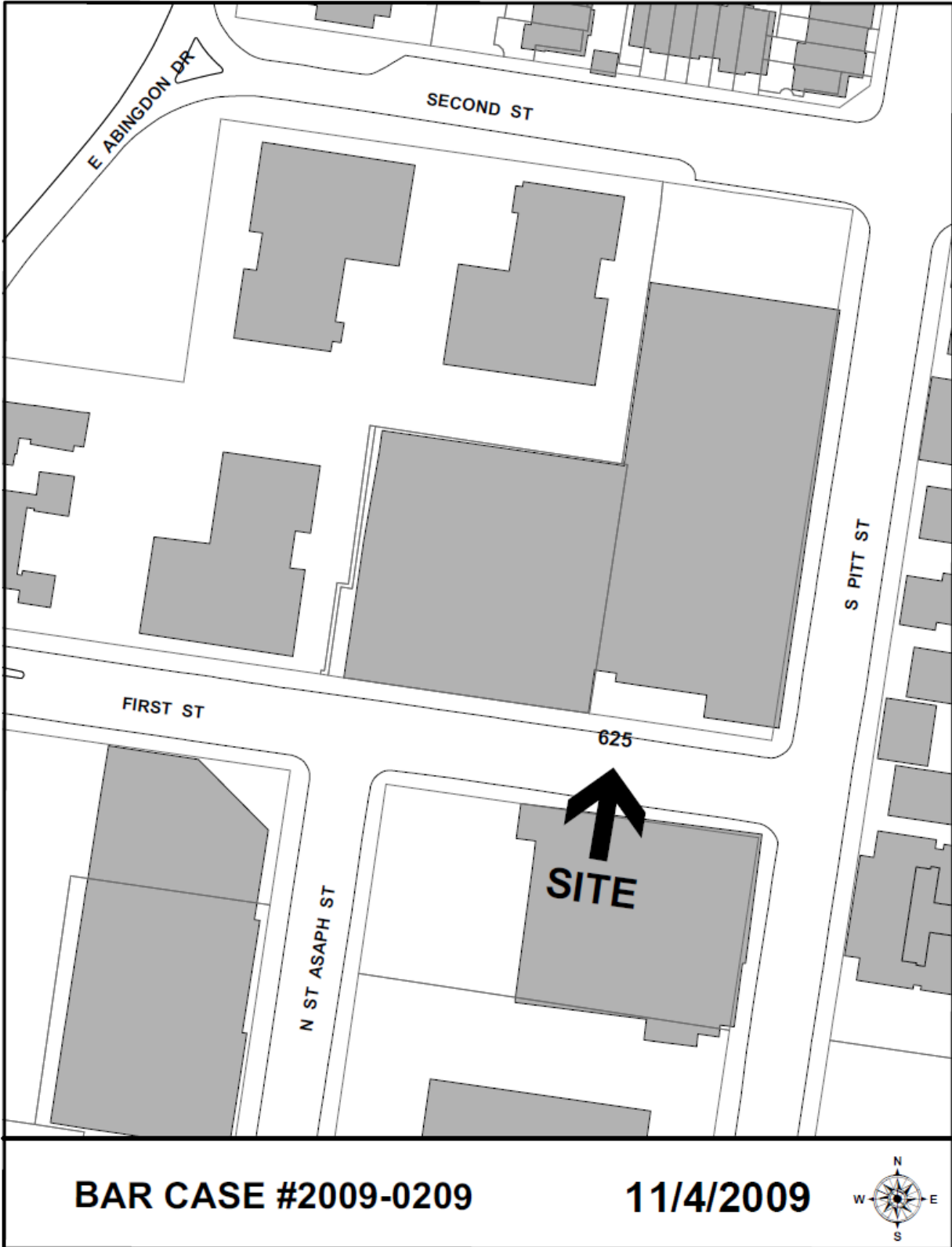
\*EXPIRATION OF APPROVALS NOTE: In accordance with Sections 10-106(B) and 10-206(B) of the Zoning Ordinance, any official Board of Architectural Review approval will expire 12 months from the date of issuance if the work is not commenced and diligently and substantially pursued by the end of that 12-month period. In the case for a certificate or permit for a project that requires a development special use permit or site plan under section 11-400 of the zoning ordinance, the period of validity shall be coincident with the validity of the development special use permit or site plan as determined pursuant to section 11-418 of the ordinance.

\*\*BUILDING PERMIT NOTE: Most projects approved by the Board of Architectural Review require the

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issuance of one or more construction permits by Building and Fire Code Administration (including signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Administration, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-746-4200 for further information.



**UPDATE:**

At the October 7, 2009 hearing the Board generally agreed with the Staff analysis and found the proposed signage appropriate and compatible with site. However, they wanted the applicant to explore reducing the size of the wall sign and provide photo mock-ups taken from the oblique street view. Additionally, they deferred the item in order for the applicant to remove the non-compliant internally illuminated “open” sign located in the storefront window.

The applicant confirmed on October 19, 2009, that the non-compliant lit “open” sign located in the storefront window has been removed.

**I. ISSUE:**

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of two, separate business identifier signs at the east end of the building located at 625 First Street. The application is for:

1. A new, double-sided hanging sign mounted on a new black metal sign bracket. This proposed twenty-four inch (24”) wide by twenty-four inch (24”) high by ½” deep square-shaped sign will be fabricated on MDO Plywood (Medium Density Overlay) with vinyl graphics applied to both sides of the sign. The proposed color scheme is a solid blue background overlaid with canary yellow graphics, identifying the restaurant name and logo “CMC.”
2. A new, ½ inch wide, MDO, wall sign mounted above the restaurant’s exterior entrance. The sign proposes a canary yellow background punctuated with blue vinyl lettering identifying the restaurant name “Café Monte Carlo.” The rectangular sign measures two feet (2’) high by eight feet (8’) long.

**II. HISTORY:**

The Holiday Inn and Commonwealth Center was constructed beginning in 1982. The boundary line for the Old and Historic Alexandria District runs through the building.

*Previous Approvals:*

In 2007, the Board approved alterations to convert a window opening to a door (BAR Case #2007-00228, 11/14/2007).

In 2008, the Board approved signage and lighting along the south elevation of the hotel (BAR Case #2008-0191, 11/05/2008). The conditions of this approval were:

1. That the applicant relocates the freestanding directional signs onto the subject property or seek approval of an encroachment by City Council.
2. That the building-mounted signage be anchored through the mortar joints.

3. That the applicant revises the directional signs to be externally illuminated, pending final approval by Staff.
4. That the proposed green-colored up lighting and down lighting on the brick piers be eliminated.

On March 18, 2009, the Board approved thirteen (13) awnings fabricated of black, Sunbrella fabric to be installed along the front (south) elevation of the building. Each awning is a shed roof form and measures 12 feet long by 3 feet wide. Additionally, the Board approved a new sign “Bistro on First” to be installed on the restaurant’s awning. This sign was never installed.

### **III: ANALYSIS:**

The proposed signs comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

The current sign proposal has been only altered in one area since the previous BAR hearing. The applicant has deleted “Café Monte Carlo” from the hanging sign and replaced it with “CMC”. Staff is concerned that this design change will be confusing to a patron, who would be unsure what type of business the sign is advertising. Staff recommends that the hanging sign’s design be revised to reflect the original submittal.

The applicant has provided the Board with the requested photo mock-ups showing the proposed wall sign from the oblique street view. The proposal for this wall sign has not been changed since the previous hearing as the applicant feels strongly that the size of the sign is needed for his storefront visibility. The applicant notes in the attached explanation (page 12) that the business currently has 73 feet of storefront which is setback 42 feet 8 inches from the sidewalk and the location of the café on a cul-de-sac provides a visibility challenge. Staff concurs with the applicant’s assessment of these visibility challenges. This storefront is located at the end of a street, recessed considerably from the public right-of-way. Beyond the hotel patronage, it would be extremely difficult to gain pedestrian traffic unless the storefront had two forms of signage, as proposed.

The Board of Architectural Review’s (BAR) main objectives when reviewing the installation of signage on contemporary resources within the Historic District are to ensure that the proposal will be compatible with the existing building and not have a negative impact on the existing building, existing streetscape or the historic district. Staff feels that the proposal, with the recommended changes, will achieve these objectives.

The *Design Guidelines* stipulate that signs should be “designed to be compatible with the historic building or structure,” and “They should be designed in styles, materials, type faces, colors and lettering that are appropriate and sympathetic to the historic style of the building.” The

proposed signs for the restaurant are generally appropriate for this non-historic building in style, design, form and materials. They will be constructed out of MDO plywood, which is a stable wood product which resists warping and bending, as recommended in the *Guidelines*.

Regarding the color of the signs, the *Guidelines* note that “The color should be appropriate to the building. This hotel is modern and simplistic in its form and as such these small and simply detailed signs will complement its “simple, unadorned” facade.

*Proximity to George Washington Memorial Parkway:*

The *Design Guidelines* also note that the Board “is particularly concerned with the maintenance of the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway which passes through Alexandria as Washington Street. Therefore, requests for changes to facades on Washington Street must be compatible with the memorial nature of the Parkway.” Although not located on Washington Street, segments of the subject property’s façade are visible from Washington Street and alterations and changes to this façade need to be evaluated in terms of their potential impact to this important resource. After an evaluation of the site from the Washington Street corridor, the location of the subject proposal will not be visible from the Parkway. Therefore, this proposal will not negatively impact the memorial nature or integrity of the Parkway.

The proposal will also have no negative impact on the existing streetscape or the integrity of the historic district. Therefore, Staff recommends that the Board approve the application with the condition that the bracket and wall signage be mounted to the building through the mortar joints and that the hanging sign’s design is revised to include the text “Café Monte Carlo”.

**IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness application with the conditions:

1. That the bracket and wall signage be mounted to the building through the mortar joints.
2. That the hanging sign’s design is revised to include the text “Café Monte Carlo”.

**STAFF:**

Michele Oaks, Historic Preservation Planner, Planning & Zoning  
Stephen Milone, Division Chief, Zoning and Land Use Services

**V. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS**

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

Code Administration:

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

C-1 Wall letters / signs must comply with USBC [H103-H111] Please indicate the method to be used for anchoring the letters to the wall.

C-2 Projecting, hanging signs must comply with USBC [H103-H107, H112] for type of materials, maximum projection, vertical clearance below all parts of the sign, and additional loads.

Office of Historic Alexandria:

No comments received.

**VI. IMAGES:**



**Figure 1: Existing Conditions**



**Figure 2: Existing Conditions**





Figure 3: Previous Proposed Blade Sign

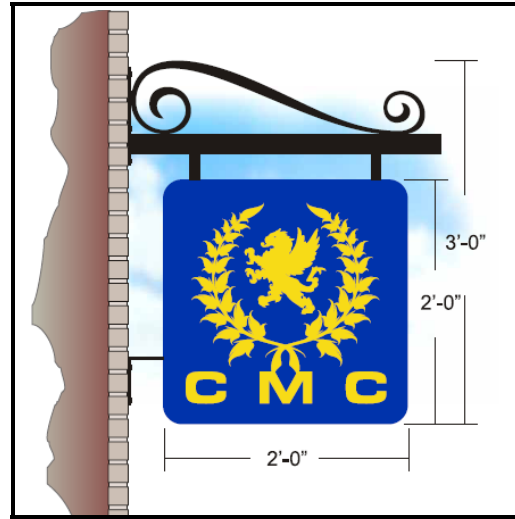


Figure 4: Current Proposed Blade Sign

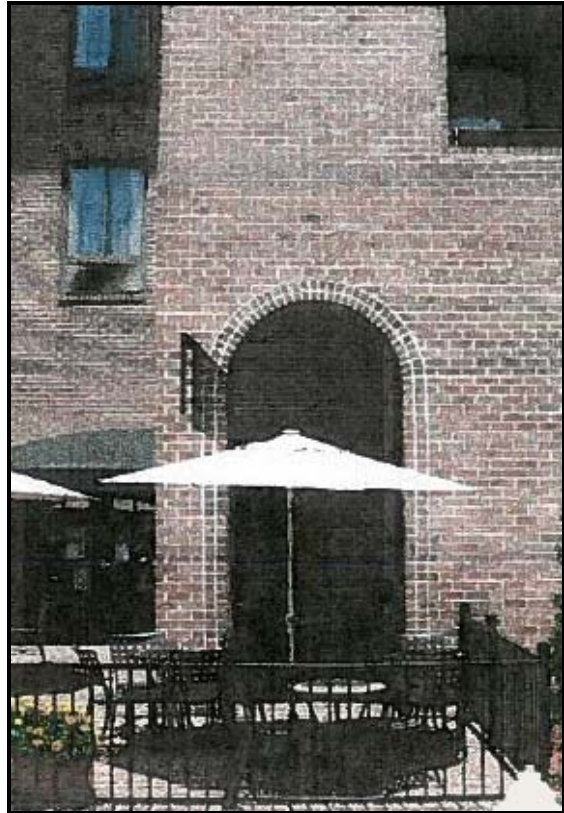


Figure 5: Proposed Blade Sign Location

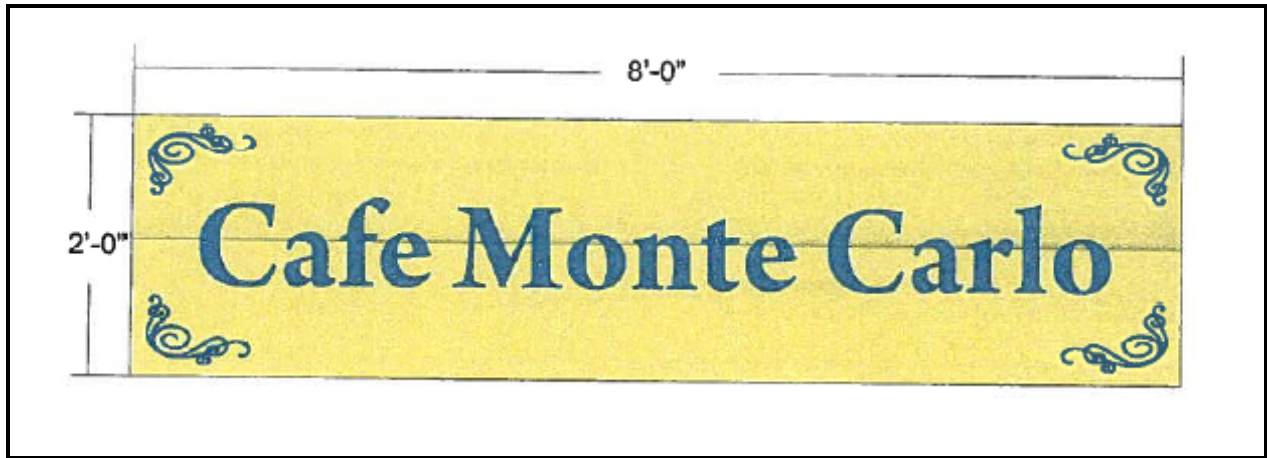


Figure 6: Proposed Wall Mounted Sign

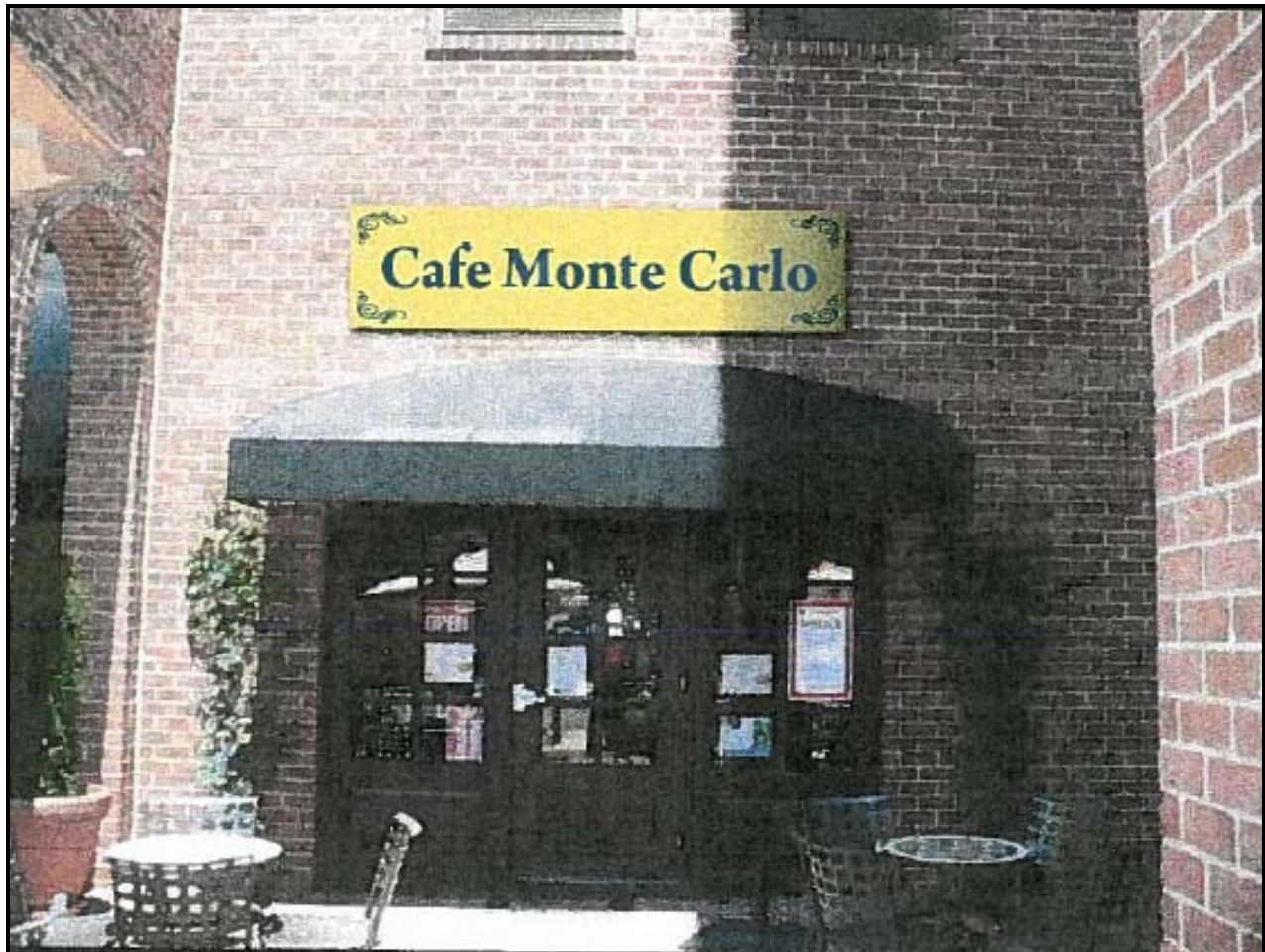


Figure 7: Proposed Wall Mounted Sign Location





Figure 8: Proposed Wall Mounted Sign Location



Figure 9: Proposed Wall Mounted Sign Location

Please veiw new/revised attached drawings, for Cafe Monte Carlo, a few concerns though:

- 1) I have 73 feet of store front, I really think I should be allowed At least 2 by 8 feet sign ?
- 2) The side walk is 42 Feet and 8 inches from the storefront, I'M in an alcove or you could even call it cul de sac. Please view pictures taken from different angles.
- 3) The pan blade sign if made smaller, would result to using abbreviated CMC intials, which really looks tacky. The pan blade sign, looks very good with complte name of the restaurant. Please do remember I'm approximately 43 feet away from the side walk.

I have spent a lot of money(389k) to do business in the old town district, the least I could ask for is to have a visible sign, so I could remain in business. For now I have only created 4 jobs. Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely  
Sonny Abraham

**Figure 10: E-mail Transcript of 10/19/09 from Applicant**