

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 29, 2010
TO: Old and Historic BAR Members
FROM: BAR Staff
SUBJECT: Administrative Approval Policy for HVAC Screening at Ford's Landing

As Staff has mentioned to the Board earlier this year, the through-wall HVAC units at Ford's Landing are failing. Direct replacement condensing units are not commercially available and the original design was, possibly, flawed. The Board understood that Staff had approved the mechanical permits for two emergency replacements, pending submission of a master plan for screening these units throughout Ford's Landing.

At the November 3, 2010 hearing, the BAR is to hear two cases regarding screening for new HVAC condensing units at two townhouses at Ford's Landing, both located on Keith's Lane. The HOA has retained the services of a consultant, Bradbury Consultants, to study the issue of relocating and screening HVAC units throughout Ford's Landing and to prepare a report outlining recommendations. The HOA has indicated that the report will be completed by February 2011. We anticipate that the HOA will submit an application to the BAR by early spring of 2011. **Staff recommends that the Board allow BAR Staff to administratively approve future alterations to similar townhouses located on Keith's Lane (adjacent to the dog park on the north side) and Alexander Street (adjacent to Jones Point Park on the south side) as both areas abut public parks and have similar conditions, as necessary, before the Board has the opportunity to approve a comprehensive approval package.**

The Architectural Control and Covenants Committee (ACCC) approved the following requirements for HVAC screening for the Keith's Lane townhouses adjacent to the dog park:

1. The deck is to be expanded to accommodate the HVAC units. The expanded deck should be constructed with lumber that matches the existing wood stoop and should be painted with an HOA approved paint.
2. The deck railing height should be 36" to hide the HVAC units. The slats should be 2½ inches apart and should match the original stoop's railing.
3. Below the expanded deck, lattice should be installed that matches the existing lattice on the partitions separating the townhouses.
4. The infill brick and mortar should match the existing brick and mortar on the townhouse.

Staff finds the requirements recommended by the HOA/ACCC to be appropriate and consistent with the *Design Guidelines*, as discussed in the two BAR cases docketed for November 3, 2010 (BAR Case #2010-0223 and BAR Case # 2010-0224). Staff finds the screening requirements that the HOA/ACCC have proposed for these units are the least visually obtrusive and most compatible with the architectural integrity of the existing townhouses on Keith's Lane. In addition, Staff finds that these proposed requirements can also appropriately meet the screening requirements for townhouses located on Alexander Street. Anticipating that future requests may come before the full report can be reviewed, Staff requests that the Board adopt a policy to allow for administrative review and approval for these particular townhouses. Finding suitable alternatives for replacing HVAC units throughout Ford's Landing development will be a complex and challenging undertaking, noting that there are a variety of configurations. Staff walked around the development with members of the HOA and ACCC to identify particularly challenging areas. Some of the townhouses on the interior of the complex do not have ground level open space and there is no plan yet for where the condensing units for these units will be placed.

Staff therefore recommends that the Board adopt a policy allowing BAR Staff to approve HVAC screening by enlarging the existing stoop through the authority permitted in Sec. 10-109 of the Zoning Ordinance regarding permitted maintenance of exterior architectural features. As these townhouses already have an existing wood stoop and railing, Staff finds that the expansion of the stoop to a deck that can accommodate the new HVAC units and the brick infill on the rear elevation may be considered "ordinary maintenance, including repair and replacement with the same design, color and material, without the necessity of a certificate of appropriateness..." As the expanded deck retains the same materials, scale and design as the existing stoop, it should not be considered a new feature. Furthermore, it "does not result in the substantial removal of an exterior feature that is considered to have historic and/or architectural significance." Adopting a policy that allows for this type of administrative approval will streamline the approval process for applicants in these townhouses and reduce the need for redundant BAR applications. Owners will still have to apply for an administrative approval and meet all the requirements outlined above.

When the HOA brings forth an application regarding the relocation and screening of HVAC units throughout Ford's Landing, Staff recommends that the existing administrative approval policy for Ford's Landing be revised to be consistent with the policies adopted as part of the Modern and Sustainable Materials initiative and standard BAR administrative approval procedures. Previously, the Board approved a matrix for acceptable replacement materials at Ford's Landing with a specialized administrative approval process.