

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 29, 2011

TO: Old and Historic Board of Architectural Review

FROM: BAR Staff

SUBJECT: Torpedo Factory Art Center Replacement Sign Project

For the past year, City Staff have been meeting with representatives from the Torpedo Factory Art Center regarding replacement of the existing banners and other signage. Section 9-103(A) of the Zoning Ordinance states that “[T]his Article IX governs the erection and display of all signs, marquees and awnings in the city, except those erected and displayed by the city, the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States in furtherance of their governmental responsibility and those required by law to be erected and displayed.” While the Board has previously reviewed and approved signage at the Torpedo Factory, these signs have been determined to be a “furtherance of governmental responsibility” and therefore do not require formal approval by the Board of Architectural Review. However, the Torpedo Factory artists and the Office of the Arts, as well as BAR Staff, request that the BAR review and comment on the proposed replacement signage program.

The banner and sign replacement proposed for the Torpedo Factory are part of a larger rebranding effort. As part of this project, the applicant is eliminating some signage area and expanding the area in some locations for a total gain of only 44.59 square feet on this block long building complex. Currently, the Torpedo Factory has 11 vinyl/nylon banners that read “Art Center” located around the building. The existing signs are faded and worn and do not adequately direct visitors to the space or describe the activities on the interior. The applicant is proposing an in-kind replacement of the 11 banners with one new banner installed at the corner of King and Union Streets. The new banners will be made of a high-quality vinyl screen and will be attached to the existing brackets and hardware. The banners will feature images of artists at work and artwork as well as one each for The Art League and the Alexandria Archaeology Museum. The banners will not have any references to individual artists or galleries. The banners will include text stating “Shop, Create, Explore, Imagine” and “Torpedo Factory Art Center.” The banners will be updated annually.

In addition, two wall-mounted sign frames will be installed at the main entrance and will state hours of operation and other useful information as well as allow for changeable

posters for special events. These will replace a single existing wall sign and a sandwich board sign. As part of this sign program, small “utility” signs such as for the loading dock and hours of operation at secondary entrances will also be installed. These are small in nature, located appropriately and contain essential information for the public. Awning fabric on the waterfront side will be replaced and “Welcome” will be added to the valance.

Staff has worked with the artists and their representatives for more than a year to determine an appropriate sign master plan. The Torpedo Factory Art Center representatives have created a comprehensive package that outlines the proposed replacement in detail. Some of the proposed signs are being installed under a grant and others will be installed as funds become available.

There will also be a brief presentation by Torpedo Factory representatives under Other Business at the May 4, 2011 Old and Historic BAR hearing where the BAR’s feedback will be requested. Staff finds the proposed signage to be appropriate for a building of this size and scale and believes that the signs are graphically more clear and appropriately reflect the many different activities within the Torpedo Factory Art Center. Staff commends the applicant for proposing a holistic sign plan that will be a great improvement over the existing signage for this important civic building.