

Docket Item #1  
BAR CASE # 2011-0212

BAR Meeting  
September 7, 2011

**ISSUE:** Signage  
**APPLICANT:** T.J. Stones  
**LOCATION:** 608 Montgomery Street  
**ZONE:** CDX / Commercial Downtown Zone

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

1. That the two sets of halo-illuminated, reverse-channel wall mounted letters affixed to the existing brick panel insets above the storefront bays will not exceed 14” in height.
2. That the blade sign’s illumination is not animated and does not flash or run around the perimeter of the sign.
3. That the illumination levels of all signage will be reviewed and approved by BAR staff in field upon completion.

**\*\*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 final approval if the work is not commenced and diligently and substantially pursued by the end of that 12-month period.

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



## **I. ISSUE:**

### *Background*

BAR Staff met with the applicant and his architect on several occasions and has provided ongoing consultation on the design over the past several months. In an early scheme, the applicant had proposed to install a much more illuminated design in the brick frame insets above the storefronts. This design included a brushed-aluminum panel set on a dark blue painted aluminum cabinet surrounded by incandescent bulbs with neon gold letters (see Figure 6). Staff encouraged the applicant to explore alternatives which included either halo-illuminated reverse-channel-set metal letters or pin-mounted metal letters with external goose neck mounted lighting. As a result of the Staff's recommendations, the present proposal has approximately one third the illumination of the original submission, while still providing the design character the applicant desired.

Currently, temporary signage has been approved by Staff and installed on the building. The temporary signage is the approximate size of the proposed, lighted blade sign. However, the zoning ordinance requires that the height above grade needs to be increased approximately four inches (4") - to an overall eight feet (8') above grade.

### *Proposal*

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for signage to be mounted on an existing business located at 608 Montgomery Street. The applicant is proposing to install:

1. A lighted, wall mounted aluminum blade sign between the projecting storefront bays. The proposed sign, "TJ STONES," measures 1'-10" by 7' and includes metal channel gold neon letters and bulb lights. The sign will be mounted 8' above grade and be level with the height of the parapet. The colors of the metal sign are a turquoise base with gold letters. (12.81 sq. ft.)
2. Two sets of halo-illuminated, reverse-channel wall mounted letters into the existing brick panel insets above the storefront bays. The new letters will read "TAP ROOM" and "GRILL ROOM". The brown colored aluminum letters will be 16" high, and project 7" from the face of the building and approximately 10' and 12' long respectively. (29.29 sq. ft. total)
3. Two, frosted, door decals on the existing doors measuring 18" w x 10" h. (2.49 sq. ft. total)
4. A wood, menu board to the left of the main entrance. The frame of the menu board is painted black to match the window frames. The menu board is 19" w x 39" h. (5.13 sq. ft.)

Total Signage Proposed: 49.72 sq. ft. (Total Signage Allowed: 55 sq. ft.)

## **II. HISTORY:**

608 Montgomery Street is a one-story flat roof brick building with parapet constructed in 1946, according to the City's Department of Real Estate Assessments. The building is detailed with two storefront entrances set upon brick bulkheads covered with copper standing seam metal

roofs. The west entrance is currently flush with the façade of the building flanked by picture windows. Its original configuration would have been similar to the design of the existing east entrance with its recessed entrance and four, single-light display windows. The building is also ornamented with a basketweave panel inset in the brick above the storefronts. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps illustrate that the building has been utilized as a restaurant since its original construction.

*Previous Approvals:*

BAR staff has administratively approved a temporary unlit, blade sign for this building on February 23, 2011 (BAR# 2011-0043). Additionally, the removal of the non-historic stone planter boxes from the ROW was also administratively approved.

**III. ANALYSIS:**

The proposed project complies with Zoning Ordinance requirements. The *Design Guidelines* generally recommends only one sign per business. However, the Board has often approved more than one type of sign per business and evaluates each proposal on a case by case basis. Additionally, the *Guidelines* specify that “signs should be designed in styles, materials, type faces, colors and lettering appropriate and sympathetic to the historic style of the building.”

The subject one-story masonry building was built in 1947 and contains the remnants of the simplified version of the mid-20th century “open front” storefront design. This design celebrated the display window as the most prominent design element. Some of the design elements utilized in this building are the recessed entry with an angular storefront plan, the picture frame motif, brick bulkheads, and plate glass. After World War II, commercial architecture and its associated signage evolved as new materials were introduced into the marketplace and gained popularity. Individual, metal pin-mounted letters, back-lit plastic or glass faced metal-framed box signs, neon tubing set into open-face metal channel letters and halo-illuminated reverse channel metal letters became popular during this time.<sup>1</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance maps illustrate that the majority of the buildings in this portion of the district were constructed in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century. A quick reconnaissance survey of the existing historic and recent BAR approved signage in this portion of the district revealed similar signs comparable with the applicant’s proposal (see Staff’s photos below)



Asia Café



Royal Restaurant



Dixie Pig



Sheraton Suites

<sup>1</sup> Dyson, Carol A. AIA. How to Work with Storefronts of the Mid-Twentieth Century.



Staff feels that the proposed signs are appropriate for a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century building. The design of the signs and use of historically appropriate materials relate to the architecture and do not hide or obscure its significant features. The proposed location of the blade sign between the two, existing storefronts complements the existing architectural style of the building. To ensure that the blade sign is consistent with the BAR and zoning requirements, Staff recommends that the Board require that the sign's illumination be fixed and not flash or run around the perimeter of the sign as chaser lights. Additionally, the metal halo-illuminated letters to be installed in the brick panel insets above the storefront bays should be reduced in height from 16" to 14" to avoid visual conflict with the 16" interior height of the existing brick inset.

Staff notes that door decals and menu boards generally are administratively approved however; collectively the overall sign package exceeded the number of signs which could be approved by Staff. Additionally, the size of the menu board exceeded the size permitted by the *Administrative Approval Guidelines*.<sup>2</sup> However, staff believes that these signs are minimal in size, compatible in materials, and blend in with the storefront. Therefore, staff does not object to the installation of the door decals or menu board.

Finally, as this building is 1-1/2 blocks off of Washington Street there is a concern that, without oversight, excessive illumination of the new signs could be intrusive to the George Washington Parkway streetscape. To ensure that the Parkway is protected, Staff recommends that the Board condition the approval requiring that the intensity of the illumination be reviewed and approved by BAR Staff in the field. Although this proposed sign program would not be appropriate on the predominately 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings along the King and Washington Street corridors, Staff believes that the proposed modern interpretation of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century signage is suitable for this area of the district and compatible in style with this mid-20<sup>th</sup> century building and its context. The placement of the signs, as conditioned, will not hide or require the removal of historic architectural features, as recommended in the *Guidelines*.

The Board will note that the National Park Service has prepared written comments regarding the proposed sign package for the Board's consideration. These comments are attached on Page 8 of this report. The National Park Service's concerns are with the visibility of the neon and LED lighted signs from Washington Street. BAR Staff agrees that the proposed signage will be visible down this side street from southbound Washington Street. However, staff respectfully disagrees with their analysis that the design and illumination is not in keeping with the memorial character of the Parkway. Staff feels the design of the signage is consistent with nationally accepted preservation principals, which encourage utilization of historic and architecturally appropriate and compatible replacement materials whenever possible.

Staff finds that this proposal is an excellent example of how to implement new signage onto a historic building by referencing period materials and designs without destroying the building's original architectural integrity, damaging historic fabric or negatively impacting the streetscape. The proposed signage is clearly modern but is compatible with the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century style of the building, which is simple in design and ornamentation. Finally, the proposed signs, as designed, will not obscure any of the building's original architectural detailing and are being installed so they can be easily reversible. Staff recommends approval with the above recommended conditions.

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<sup>2</sup> The Guidelines permit up to 4 sq. ft. in sign area.

Staff also commends the owner for their rehabilitation of this building. The current owner has eliminated an inappropriate full-width awning to expose the original storefronts and removed non-historic stone planters which were constructed within the ROW (see Figure 7).

**STAFF:**

Michele Oaks, Historic Preservation Planner, Planning & Zoning  
Al Cox, FAIA, Historic Preservation Manager, Planning & Zoning

**IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS**

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

**Code Administration:**

No comments received.

**Transportation and Environmental Services:**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- R1. The building permit plans shall comply with requirements of City Code Section 5-6-224 regarding the location of downspouts, foundation drains and sump pumps. Refer to Memorandum to Industry dated June 18, 2004. [Memorandum is available online at the City web site under Transportation\Engineering and Design\Memos to Industry.]. (T&ES)
- R2. Applicant shall be responsible for repairs to the adjacent city right-of-way if damaged during construction activity. (T&ES)
- R3. All improvements to the city right-of-way such as curbing, sidewalk, driveway aprons, etc. must be city standard design. (T&ES)
- R4. No permanent structure may be constructed over any existing private and/or public utility easements. It is the responsibility of the applicant to identify any and all existing easements on all plans submitted for approvals. (T&ES)
- R5. The building permit must be approved and issued prior to the issuance of any permit for demolition. (T&ES)

**FINDINGS:**

- F1. Conditions from other approvals shall apply. (ENC2011-00003; SUP2011-00049) (T&ES)

## CODE REQUIREMENTS

- C-1 Any work within the right-of-way requires a separate permit from T&ES. (Sec. 5-2) (T&ES)
- C-2 A sign may be erected or displayed flat against a building wall or at an angle thereto, so long as the sign does not project more than four feet from the building wall or within one foot of an established curb line and the bottom of the sign is at least eight feet above a sidewalk or parking area and at least 14.5 feet above any alley. (Sec. 5-2-29(c)) (T&ES)
- C-3 The owner shall obtain and maintain a policy of general liability insurance in the amount of \$1,000,000 which will indemnify the owner (and all successors in interest); and the city as an additional named insured, against claims, demands, suits and related costs, including attorneys' fees, arising from any bodily injury or property damage which may occur as a result of the encroachment. (Sec. 5-29 (h)(1)) (T&ES)C-5 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Solid Waste Control, Title 5, Chapter 1, which sets forth the requirements for the recycling of materials (Sec. 5-1-99). (T&ES)
- C-4 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Noise Control Code, Title 11, Chapter 5, which sets the maximum permissible noise level as measured at the property line. (T&ES)
- C-5 Roof, surface and sub-surface drains be connected to the public storm sewer system, if available, by continuous underground pipe. Where storm sewer is not available applicant must provide a design to mitigate impact of stormwater drainage onto adjacent properties and to the satisfaction of the Director of Transportation & Environmental Services. (Sec.5-6-224) (T&ES)
- C-6 All secondary utilities serving this site shall be placed underground. (Sec. 5-3-3) (T&ES)

## **V. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE COMMENTS**

### **BAR 2011-0212, 608 Montgomery Street**

We have reviewed the project, and we do have concerns regarding the proposed lighted sign that will be placed perpendicular to the building. While the style of the sign is appropriate to the mid-twentieth century time period when this section of Alexandria was developed, we feel that the stylized sign is not keeping with the "dignity, purpose and memorial character" of Washington Street, just a half block away.

We have long advocated for muted lighting on Washington Street and minimal advertising. The neon and LED sign proposed here will be visible from Washington Street, especially at night. BAR staff has informed us that the sign will not be animated, contains no "racing lights", and can be stepped down after a review period. We appreciate these facts. But we cannot ignore the fact that this submission represents the type of sign we would least like to see in the Washington Street corridor.

If this proposal was for an establishment on Washington Street, we would strongly oppose its installation. There is a very similar establishment already on South Washington Street: the bar/restaurant Southside 815. Southside 815 is located in a one-story building of a similar age, in an area developed in the mid-twentieth century, and has no such sign.

Our concerns with BAR 2011-0212 are tempered by the fact the proposed sign will be on a side street, but we do not want to set precedent. The BAR has done an excellent job of viewing each submission before the BAR as a singular action, while taking the context of the surrounding neighborhood and the memorial character of Washington Street into consideration. Should similar signs be proposed in the future, we hope the BAR will apply such scrutiny to those as well.



V. IMAGES



Figure 1: Current Proposal



Figure 2: Existing Night Conditions

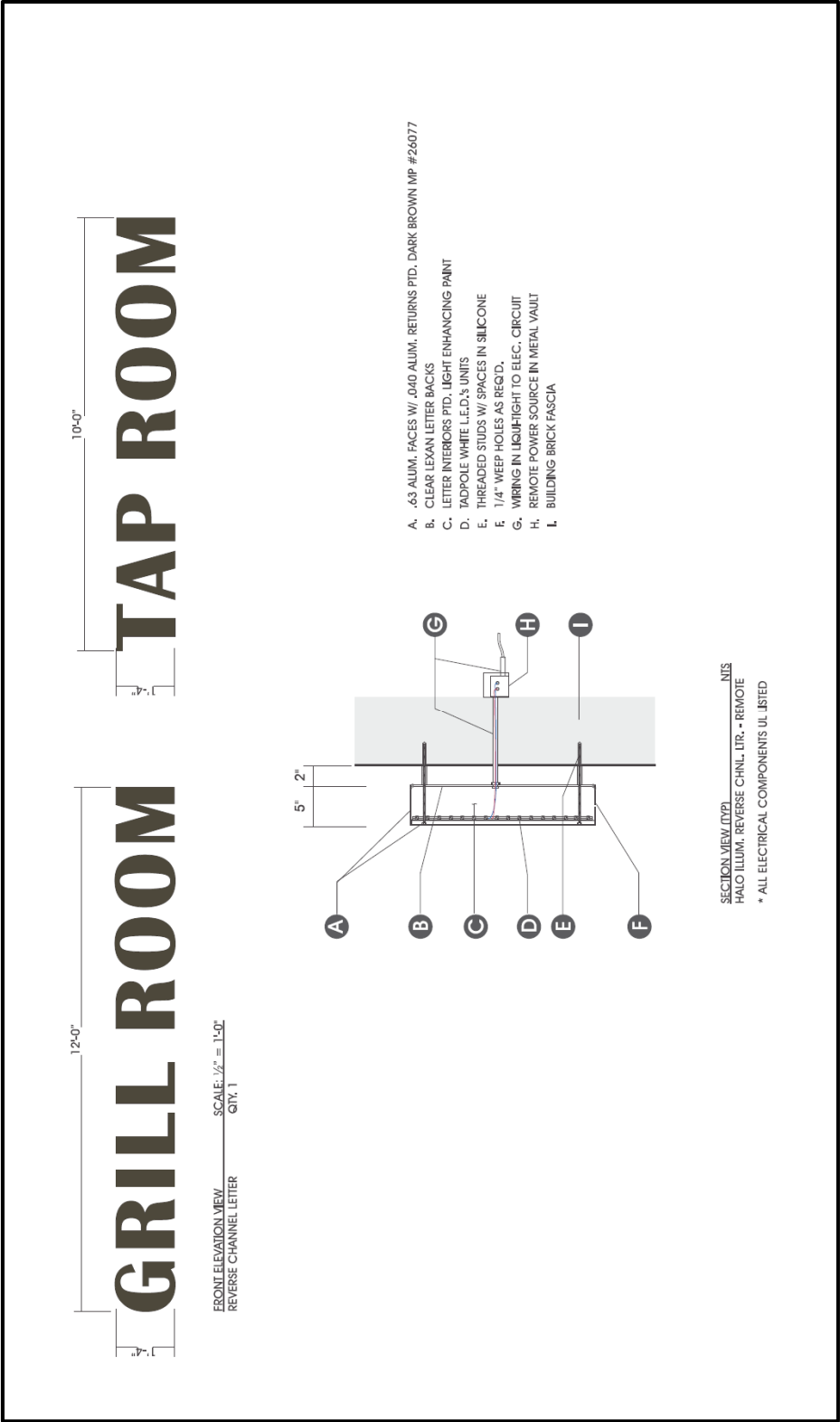


Figure 3: Proposed Wall Mounted Letters

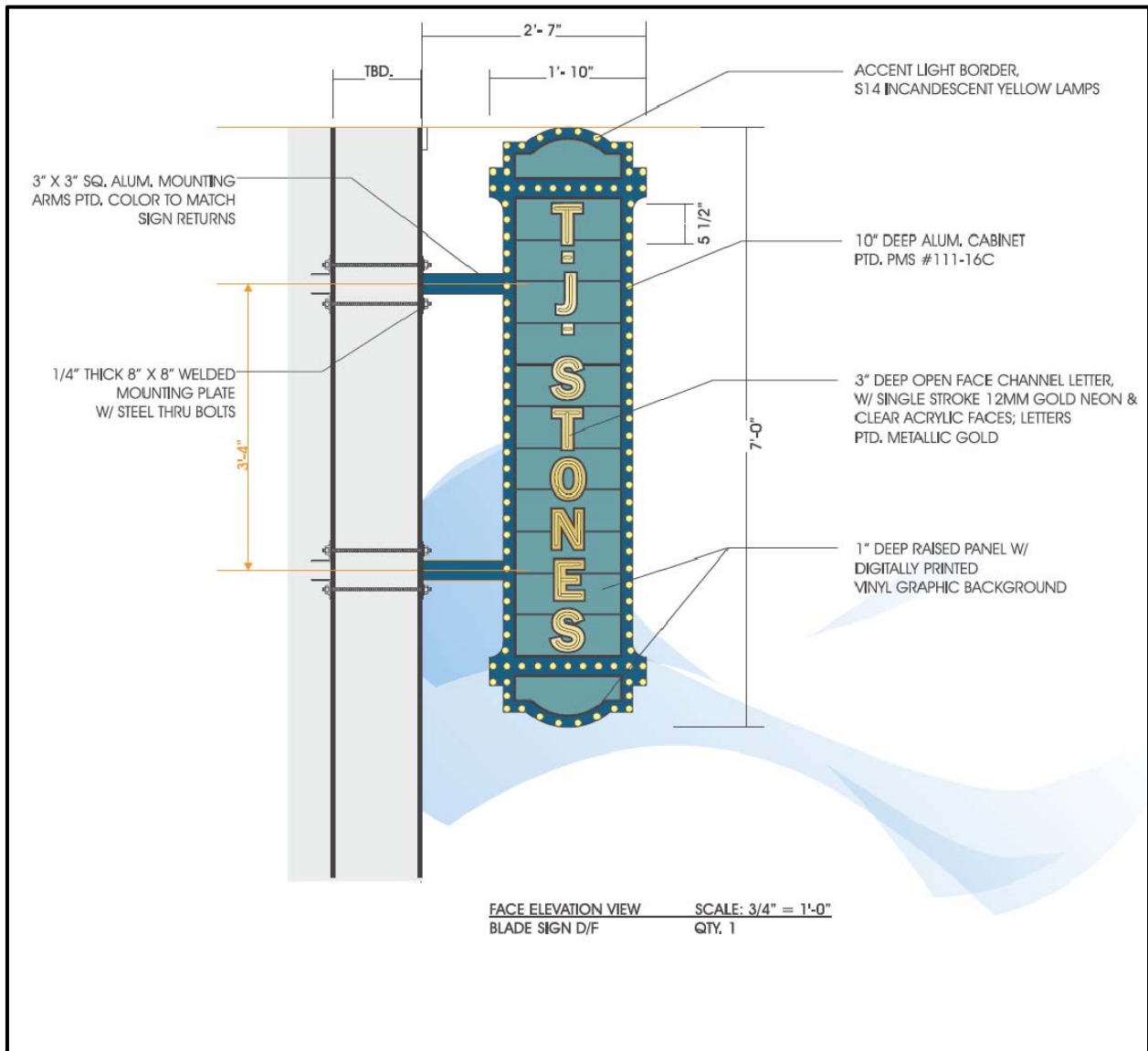


Figure 4: Proposed Blade Sign

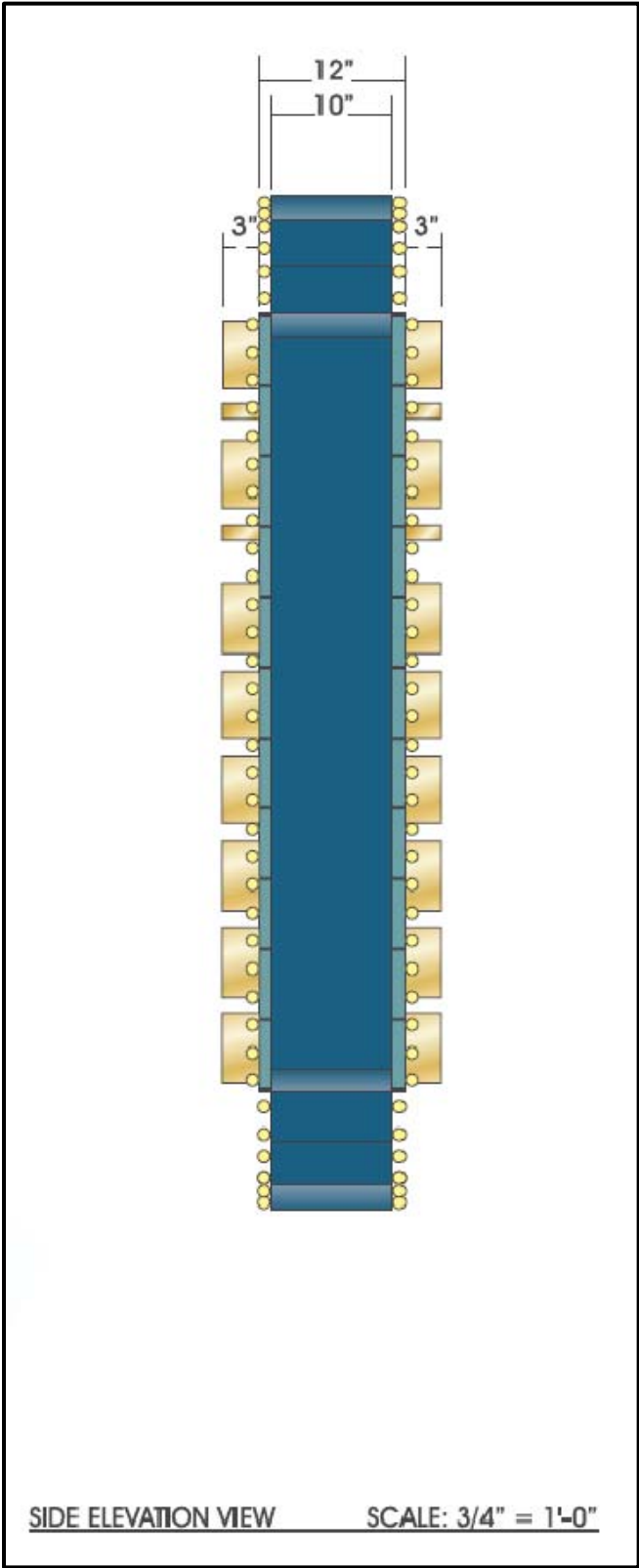


Figure 5: Proposed Blade Sign





Figure 6: First Submittal - February 2011



Figure 7: Previous Owner's Storefront – with Awning and Stone Planters