

Docket Item # 5  
BAR CASE # 2007-0112

BAR Meeting  
June 27, 2007

**ISSUE:** Alterations to Previously Approved Plans  
**APPLICANT:** City of Alexandria, Department of General Services  
**LOCATION:** 901 Wythe Street  
**ZONE:** POS

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

- 1) That the applicant work with staff to identify an alternate material for the front entrance and rear canopies, with staff approval;
- 2) Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.
- 3) The above statement (in C-1) must appear in the General Notes of the site plan and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.

**\*\*BUILDING PERMIT NOTE:** Most projects approved by the Board of Architectural Review require the issuance of one or more construction permits by the Code Enforcement Bureau (including signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Enforcement, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-838-4360 for further information.

(Insert sketch here)

**I. ISSUE:**

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations to previously approved plans for the new Charles Houston Recreation Center at 901 Wythe Street. The alterations consist of the following items:

- 1) A handicap ramp and stairs on the North Alfred Street elevation; the handicap ramp will also provide access to the kitchen facilities for the new center. The dog-legged ramp will be enclosed with brick walls matching the brick on the recreation center. The brick walls range in height from 2'10" to 3'8", depending on the grade. The stairs will have four steps and will provide access to the North Alfred Street side entrance door. Both the ramp and the stairs will have painted metal handrails. The applicant provided sections and details for the proposed ramp (see Sheet A3.21).
- 2) A low brick wall with iron railing located on the front of the senior's porch on the North Alfred Street elevation. Since the approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness, the applicant is requesting approval to incorporate a low wall with a metal railing in front of the senior's porch located on North Alfred Street. The brick low wall will be constructed in a running bond brick pattern with a precast concrete wall coping. A 1'2" black metal picket railing will be installed on top of the concrete coping. The grade behind the low wall will be higher than the grade on the street side. The applicant provided sections and details for the proposed low wall (see Sheet A7/A3.1A).
- 3) Additional railings along the entry stairs on the main elevation along Wythe Street and at the preschool exit on North Alfred Street. The applicant is proposing a 1" stainless steel pipe railing for the steps leading to the main entrance into the recreation center off of Wythe Street. The applicant provided a section showing the railing details (see Sheet A1/A3.8). The railing proposed for the preschool exit on North Alfred Street will be a black metal picket railing to match the previously approved fencing (see Sheet A1/A3.19).
- 4) Exterior lighting, including wall mounted sconce lighting along the walls of the building perimeter. The proposed wall mounted perimeter lighting will be a powder-coated white colored, half cylinder fixture manufactured in aluminum, projecting 7" from the face of the building, 9" tall, and 18" long. Some of the fixtures are trapezoidal while others are rounded. The fixture will have the ability to project light both up and down from the fixture, using a high pressure sodium bulb. The applicant provided manufacturer specifications for the fixture and elevations of the building showing the location of the fixture around the perimeter of the new recreation center. The applicant is also requesting approval to install several uprights under the entrance canopy on Wythe Street, to be mounted on the top flange of the bottom chord of the truss system. These flood luminaires will be white aluminum using high pressure sodium bulbs. The applicant provided manufacturer specifications on the uplighting as well as a wall section showing the location under the entrance canopy and on the front pillars.
- 5) Additional door to gymnasium on Madison Street elevation. The applicants are proposing an additional door to match the previously approved doors to the gymnasium.

- 6) Material for front entrance canopy and the canopy on the Madison Street elevation. The applicant is proposing on the curved soffit of the canopies to use a flat seam galvalume material. The material will match the material used on the sloped roof sections of the recreation center, but will have flat seams rather than standing seams. The seam shall run parallel to the length of the canopy with the seams at 16" on center. The applicant provided wall sections of the canopies with the material identified.
- 7) Signage for front entrance elevation and rear entrance elevation canopies. The proposed signage will be located on the two canopies and will read "Charles Houston Recreation Center." 9" tall aluminum letters will be individually mounted on the canopy. The letters will be 1" thick. The font of the text will be Helvetica Bold. The applicant provided cut sheets and installation information on the proposed signage. The signage is identified on the elevations.
- 8) Roof ladder from low roof to the gymnasium roof. The applicant is requesting a roof ladder to provide access from the low roof to the roof over the gymnasium. The metal ladder will be visible from public rights-of-way. The applicant provided a roof plan and a section and detailing of the ladder (see Sheet A1/A3.2).

## **II. HISTORY:**

The site of the Charles H. Houston Recreation Center is significant in Alexandria's history as the home of the Parker-Gray School. The square bounded by Madison, Wythe, North Alfred, and North Patrick streets was part of the Henry Daingerfield estate in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Hopkins Atlas* of 1877 shows that the main house and other outbuildings were generally located to the south of the subject square, which remained undeveloped. The use of the subject square over the next forty years is unknown. In 1920 the Parker-Gray Elementary School was constructed on the southern end of the square, facing Wythe Street.

The Parker-Gray Elementary School was constructed for the education of African American boys and girls, replacing the deteriorating and inadequate Hallowell (boys) and Snowden (girls) schoolhouses. The new building was named for John F. Parker and Sarah J. Gray, beloved teachers in those two schools. Initially, the school served grades one through eight. In 1932, Parker-Gray became Alexandria's first African American high school. Prior to this, African American students who wished to continue their education had to travel by bus to Washington, D.C., to attend either Dunbar High School or Armstrong High School. Parker-Gray's first four-year high school class graduated in 1936. Over time the Parker-Gray High School gained a reputation for its dedicated teaching staff who, despite the constraints of segregation, were able to provide a positive learning experience. Despite a series of additions in the intervening years, increased enrollment created a need for larger quarters for the high school by 1950. That year, the high school relocated to a new building at 1207 Madison Street. The high school retained the name, Parker-Gray. The old school on Wythe Street was then renamed Charles Houston Elementary School, in appreciation of the famous NAACP lawyer who wrote the brief that upheld the cause of integration in the Supreme Court. Integration of Alexandria's schools was

achieved in 1964. During the desegregating years, Charles Houston Elementary School closed and it eventually burned.

The existing Charles Houston Recreation Center building was constructed in 1976. The well-known Alexandria firm, VVKR designed the facility in partnership with Turner Associates, a Washington, D.C. firm. The center was renovated in 1990 at which time a boxing area was added on the west side. These plans were prepared by Rust, Orling and Neale. Inadequate to present day needs, a 2005 study by Lukmire Partnership identified a desired program for a new or renovated facility at this site. Lukmire Partnership then investigated three options including one which would renovate and expand the existing facility and two for entirely new one-story facilities with differing footprints. On October 25, 2005, City Council determined that the project would be entirely new construction rather than a combination of renovation and new construction.

The Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review approved a Permit to Demolish the existing Charles Houston Center and a Concept for the new facility on May 10, 2006 (BAR Case #'s 2006-0092 and 2006-0093). The Board approved the Certificate of Appropriateness for final design details and materials on December 13, 2006 (BAR Case # 2006-0263).

### **III. ANALYSIS:**

Proposed ramps, railings, stairs, additional doors, and lighting comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

In December of 2006, when the Board approved a Certificate of Appropriateness, the Board included the following conditions:

- 1) That the applicant works with staff to identify an alternate roofing material, rather than the proposed Galvalume, for the pitched roof sections of the building;
- 2) That the applicant work with staff to refine the overhanging eaves by reducing the height of the fascia of the overhanging eaves and that the termination gable of the enclosed gutter be reduced in scale;
- 3) That the secondary exit doors on the pavilions shown as single doors with side windows be revised to be either double doors or different door and window configuration and approved by staff;
- 4) That the precast concrete lintels be more robust in depth but shortened in length, by about 1/2 brick, with revisions approved by staff;
- 5) That any additional garden walls, playground and trash enclosures, and any other landscape structures be brought back to the Board for approval;
- 6) Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of

artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds; and

- 7) The above statement must appear in the General Notes of the site plan and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.

The applicant has addressed the conditions and have incorporated them into their building permits sets, and are reflected in the elevations submitted with the current proposed items. With the Board's guidance, staff has worked with the applicant and has determined that the proposed standing seam, natural finish (non-coated) Galvalume for the sloped sections of the roof is an acceptable material for roofing purposes.

In general, staff supports the proposed additional items requested under this application. Most of these items are the result of the continued development of design details and functions of the new recreation center: handicap ramp, low wall and railing at the senior porch, signage, exterior perimeter lighting, roof ladder, additional doors, and stair railings. In staff's opinion, the items are compatible to and in keeping with the design, design details, and materials approved with the Concept and Certificate of Appropriateness.

However, one item of concern is the use of a flat seam Galvalume on the soffit of the canopy details, at the main entrance on Wythe Street and rear entrance on the Madison Street side. In discussions with the applicant over the year-and-a-half period of the design process, it was understood by Planning and Zoning staff that these features would be signature elements and of a high quality material. As signature design elements, the canopies had been presented to staff to be highly finished, refined, and of a smooth material. While the natural finish Galvalume--a more industrial material-- has been supported by staff and determined appropriate for use on the sloping sections of the roof, staff is reluctant to support the use of flat seam Galvalume for the soffit/canopies. The sloping sections of the roof where Galvalume is appropriate are removed from close visual accessibility by the public, while the canopies on the front and rear entrances will be much more accessible to users. Thus, staff recommends that the applicant explore other high quality materials for use on the canopies' soffits, in consultation with staff.

#### **IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

- 1) That the applicant work with staff to identify an alternate material for the front entrance and rear canopies, with staff approval;
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CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 Canopies must comply with USBC 3202.3.1 for support and clearance from the sidewalk, and the applicable sections of USBC's Chapter 11. Structural designs of fabric covered canopies must comply with USBC 3105.3. The horizontal portions of the framework must not be less than 8 feet nor more than 12 feet above the sidewalk and the clearance between the covering or valance and the sidewalk must not be less than 7 feet.
- C-2 The handicap ramps must comply with the requirements of USBC 1010.1. The front approach to the exterior door (which is on the pull side) must comply with the landing requirements of USBC 1010.6. Handrails must comply with USBC 1010.8

Historic Alexandria:

No comments received.

Alexandria Archaeology:

- F-1 The G.M. Hopkins Insurance map from 1877 indicates that this property was part of a large estate owned by Henry Daingerfield. The main house and most of the other mapped structures were located on the block to the south. The 1850 tax records note that John Foster was probably the occupant of the house at the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the property was the site of one of the City's African American schools—Parker Gray. While it is likely that construction of the current structure on the property would have destroyed much of the evidence of earlier historic activities, there is a possibility that deep features may still be present.
- C-1 Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.
- C-2 The above statement (in C-1) must appear in the General Notes of the site plan and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.