

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 23, 2010

TO: Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review

FROM: BAR Staff

SUBJECT: Approval of the Alexandria Wayfinding System Parking Identity Sign

Staff recommends that the Boards approve the Parking Identity signs, as depicted in the Wayfinding System Design Guidelines Manual, and add these as a sign type for approval in the *Criteria & Standards for Administrative Approval of Signs within the Historic Districts*, so that Staff may approve the most appropriate location for individual Parking Identity signs on a site-by-site basis using the criteria proposed below.

Wayfinding Program and Public Process

The current Wayfinding program was initiated in late 2007 with the selection of the design firm Sasaki and Associates to develop a citywide sign system. Sasaki first performed analysis of existing conditions, destinations and routes, and then initiated multiple phases of programming and design development in partnership with the City. A City-established Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), composed of a broad mix of civic, historic, business, and institutional interests citywide, met over the course of the process to develop a program and design compatible with the City as a whole as well as its unique areas. Over nine meetings and two virtual surveys, the SAG resolved issues of messaging, content, program, color, scale, shape and overall character that were then shared and refined in three community meetings and in partnership with the City.

The City Working Group (CWG), composed of representatives from Planning and Zoning (including Historic Preservation staff), Transportation & Environmental Services, Office of Historic Alexandria, General Services, and Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities, reviewed and refined the program in partnership with the consultant team and feedback from the SAG and the community. In addition, Staff has also presented the Wayfinding program to the Federation of Civic Associations, the Board of Old Town Civic Association, and the Beautification Commission. Comments from all of the above City Departments and civic organizations have been incorporated into the draft Wayfinding Systems Design Guidelines Manual.

Work sessions were held in January 2009 to update City Council, Planning Commission and both Boards of Architectural Review (BAR) on the progress of the design. At that time City Council requested that the BAR review and comment on the proposed Wayfinding program prior to approval by Planning Commission and prior to a funding decision from City Council. City Staff held second and third work sessions with the Old and Historic District BAR on February 18 (jointly with the Parker-Gray BAR) and March 18 in order to review and refine the signs. Following the installation of sign mock ups, a fourth work session was held jointly with the two BARs on May 19, 2010. A summary of the Board's comments at that work session was included as an attachment to this memo.

While both BARs have reviewed and commented on the proposed Wayfinding program, and Staff has incorporated the Boards' comments, only the Parking Identity signs used for commercial garages and lots require formal approval from the Boards prior to installation. As discussed at the prior work session, the majority of the signs outlined in the proposed Wayfinding program, such as gateway signs, pedestrian kiosks and interpretive signs, do not require BAR approval because they are considered non commercial signs that further governmental responsibilities, per section 9-103 of the Zoning Ordinance. For instance, Parking Trailblazer signs are considered governmental signs and do not require BAR approval. However, Parking Identity signs for commercial garages or lots require approval because they are not governmental signs and contain the operator's logo. Further, all Parking Identity signs which display the operator's logo must be located on private property.

Parking Identity Signs

The proposed Parking Identity signs will help visitors and residents identify public parking garages and lots as well as private parking garages and lots that are open to the public at least some of the time. These signs will be part of a coordinated system of signs that lead drivers from major arteries through Old Town and to specific parking locations to get the cars off of the streets of the districts as quickly and safely as possible.

The proposed Parking Identity sign measures 3 feet in width by 3 feet 7 inches in height and is made of painted metal with applied vinyl text. The main block of the sign (3 feet by 3 feet) has a large white "P" in a blue outlined box within a blue frame. For City-operated garages and lots, the lower portion of the sign will feature "City of Alexandria, Est. 1749" in light text on a black background. Privately-owned garages and lots will feature the operator's logo in that lower portion of the sign. If a freestanding Parking Identity sign must be located in the public right-of-way because there is no building wall on which to attach a sign, then no operator's logo will be permitted based on prohibitions in the zoning ordinance. The Parking Identity signs are proposed to have targeted illumination with small LED fixtures attached to the upper portion of the frame. The building-mounted sign will be attached to the face of the building with a simple black metal bracket. The freestanding sign will be attached to a square black metal pole.

Staff finds the proposed design for the Parking Identity signs to be appropriate and compatible with the character of the historic districts. The proposed design scheme, including the size, color, lighting and logo, is appropriate and consistent with the *Design Guidelines*. The Parking Identity signs have been revised throughout the review process to incorporate comments from the Stakeholder Advisory Group, both BARs, and Staff to ensure compatibility with the historic district. The color scheme coordinates with other elements of the Wayfinding program and complements the historic districts.

Staff estimates approximately 20 locations in the historic districts that could have Parking Identity signs.

Administrative Approval of Parking Identity Signs

Although the design, size and specifications of all Parking Identity signs are identical, Staff requests that the Board grant administrative approval authority to BAR Staff due to the unique nature of each site. The most appropriate location for individual Parking Identity signs can then be determined on a site-by-site basis by Staff. Staff proposes to incorporate this administrative approval as part of the *Criteria & Standards for Administrative Approval of Signs within the Historic Districts* amendment proposed concurrently with this application. If approved, parking garage and lot operators will then be able to seek administrative approval for the location of a Parking Identity sign through the administrative sign program.

In order to receive an administrative approval of a Parking Identity sign, an applicant must satisfy the specified criteria for the sign and its location, as noted below.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the BAR approve the following addition to the Criteria for Specific Sign Types in the *Criteria & Standards for Administrative Approval of Signs within the Historic Districts*:

Parking Identity Signs (Freestanding and Building Mounted)

Staff may approve the installation of a Parking Identity sign which meets the following criteria:

- *Only one Parking Identity sign will be permitted at each parking garage or lot entrance per block face.*
- *The sign must conform to the Parking Identity design depicted in the Wayfinding System Design Guidelines Manual.*
- *The sign and bracket (or pole for a freestanding sign) must be fabricated as part of the City's Wayfinding sign order, or otherwise as part of the City's process for fabricating signs.*
- *The sign will be located in the field by BAR Staff and mounted so as not to damage or obscure any architectural features on any building.*
- *Building-mounted signs will be located so that the bottom of the sign is a minimum of 8 feet above a public sidewalk and 14.5 feet above an alley used by vehicles. Signs cannot project more than 4 feet from the building wall or within 1 foot of the curb line.*
- *Building-mounted signs will be installed through the mortar joints rather than through the masonry units (e.g., brick) on masonry buildings.*
- *Existing parking identity signs that serve the same function must be removed, as appropriate and feasible, prior to installation of the new sign.*

STAFF

Al Cox, FAIA, Historic Preservation Manager

Catherine Miliaras, Historic Preservation Planner, Planning & Zoning

Carrie Beach, Neighborhood Planner, Planning & Zoning

Attachments: Joint BAR Wayfinding Work Session Summary, May 19, 2010

IV. IMAGES



Figure 1. Existing garage entrance on North Union Street.



Figure 2. Existing garage entrance on South Union Street.



Figure 3. Existing garage entrance on Cameron Street.



Figure 4. Existing entrance on North Lee Street.



Figure 5. Existing parking lot on The Strand.



Figure 6. Existing parking lot on North Saint Asaph.

DRAFT MAY 14, 2010

PK.1 Parking Identity FREESTANDING

OBJECTIVES

- Clearly direct to and identify visitor parking facilities
- "Brand" visitor parking for Alexandria and its Districts
- Infuse these signs with the flavor of Alexandria to enhance identity and welcoming image

RATIONALE

This sign identifies parking facilities with a consistent look, making them easier to locate and in turn getting cars off the road quicker. It eliminates the need for extra a-frame and directional signs which are presently used to overcome a lack of visibility.

LOCATION

Located at or near the entrance to surface parking lots, or garages where conditions make a building-mounted sign impractical.

CONTENT

Simple, stylized "P" icon is widely recognized. City wordmark or private operator logo may be located in the black footer panel.

ILLUMINATION

Integrated minimal gooseneck fixtures wash sign faces with light from above.

MATERIAL

Painted metal with applied vinyl text.

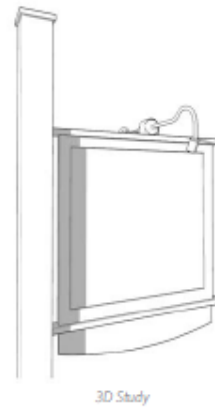
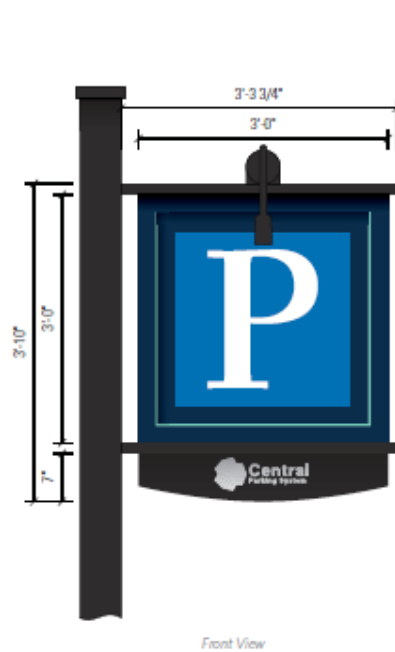


Figure 7. Freestanding Parking Identity Sign

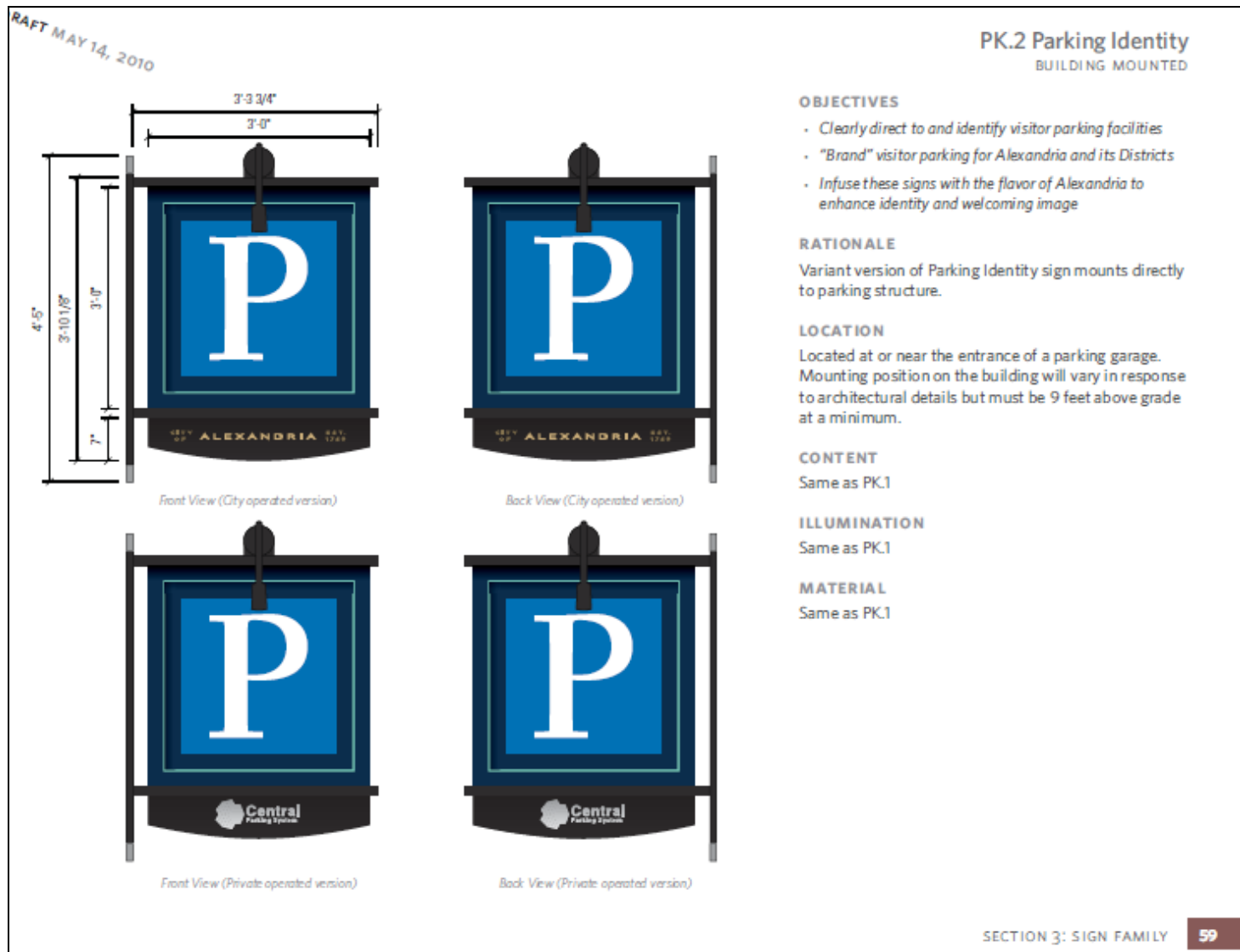


Figure 8. Building-mounted Parking Identity Sign



Figure 9. Proposed Parking Identity signs in place.

Joint BAR Wayfinding Work Session Summary

May 19, 2010

6:00 pm to 7:30 pm

City Council Work Room

Parker-Gray BAR Members in Attendance

Robert Duffy
Christina Kelley
Phil Moffat
Doug Meick
Deborah Rankin

Old and Historic BAR Members in Attendance

Tom Hulfish, Chairman
Oscar Fitzgerald
Arthur Keleher
Wayne Neale
John von Senden
Peter Smeallie
James Spencer

City Staff

Faroll Hamer, Director P&Z
Barbara Ross, Deputy Director P&Z
Carrie Beach, P&Z
Catherine Miliaras, P&Z
Al Cox, P&Z
Yon Lambert, T&ES
Joanna Frizzell, City Attorney's Office

AGENDA

1. Introduction and Purpose of Work Session (Carrie Beach)
2. Review of BAR concerns previously identified and overview of Wayfinding system and Design Guidelines Manual (Carrie Beach)
3. Discussion re: BAR's authority to review signs (Joanna Frizzell)
4. Feedback from BAR Members on Design Guidelines Manual and Mock-ups

MOCK-UP REVIEW

North-End Washington Street City Gateway (monument style sign)

- Very nice-looking, well proportioned and perfect for the amount of open space at this specific site.
- "Alexandria" on both the monument-style sign and the emblem is redundant. Eliminate the "Alexandria" text on the emblem in this instance.
- Difficult to see the date on the emblem.

- Discussion about why the sign does not say “City of” and “Est. 1749” with the recommendation that it say both “Welcome to Alexandria” and “Est. 1749”.

South-End Washington Street City Gateway

- Mock-up appears a bit flat. Will have a more three dimensional appearance once it is constructed.
- Could be improved by adding more definition, such as plantings or a more horizontal element, such as a broader brick base/plinth to anchor the sign and soften the “lollipop” look. Another suggestion was to surround the circular City emblem within a frame.
- Staff confirmed that City Gateway signs similar to this one would be located in the same locations as the existing thistle gateway signs throughout the City.
- Staff confirmed that illumination would be a soft external up-wash from the base.

DR.2 Vehicular Directional – King Street

- All BAR members thought the sign was too big and noted that people drive very slowly on King Street because of the traffic. It was suggested that the sign height and width be reduced by approximately 30% on 66’ wide streets and suggested reducing the number of messages, and/or using 2 ½ inch tall letters.
- Shouldn’t use the posted road speed as the standard for determining the appropriate font size – but the actual road speed. On King Street, this is more like 5 mph.
- In order to better balance pedestrian scale with vehicular signage needs, the Design Guidelines should recommend sign sizes in proportion to the street and sidewalk widths.
- “Old Town” at the top of the sign does not have enough contrast with the background and fades away.
- Difficult to read “City of Alexandria” at bottom of sign as well as noting that is superfluous on signs in this location.
- Consider treatment of the back of these signs. A lighter color might make the sign recede in lieu of the existing dark, overbearing color.

DR.1 Vehicular Directional – Washington Street

- Most Board members believed that the DR1 is perfect, proportional and works well with the scale of the multi-lane wide roadway. One member felt it was still too large and the DR2 might be more appropriate on the Parkway.

Pedestrian Mini-Kiosk

- Terrific, great and outstanding.
- Staff discussed reducing the number based on the need for information at an intersection.
- The colors on the map are too subtle and blend together too much. Needs more contrast.

Historic Destination ID Signs (large – eg: Lyceum and Lee-Fendall)

- These signs are trying to provide information at both a vehicular and pedestrian may, therefore, not be successful at either.
- Most members agreed that interpretive information about the site should not be put on these signs but instead provided via a cell phone tour or inside the building.
- Increase size of letters to emphasize the destination and remove extraneous information (no smoking and accessibility symbols, description of site, address, etc...). Most agreed that it is useful to have a site’s hours posted.

- One person mentioned that the need for the accessibility symbol should be confirmed with the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities.
- Like the three color schemes for civic, historic, parks.
- Existing Lyceum sign is much easier to read (Staff confirmed that the existing sign does not comply with the Washington St. sign guidelines because it is a freestanding sign).

Historic Destination ID Signs (small – eg: Apothecary and Friendship Firehouse)

- The Board members suggested that the existing museum signs be removed and that the Wayfinding signs be used throughout to provide immediate identification as a public facility.

Parking Trailblazers

- Blue on trailblazer sign should coordinate/match blue on the City standard street sign.
- Size and information provided is appropriate.

Parking Garage ID Signs

- The Boards understood that a Certificate of Appropriateness would be required for commercial text on parking garage signs and that staff would return with this application in June, 2010.
- The Board members wanted to remove all extraneous signs, such as A-frame signs, at the garages. However they acknowledged that reasonable accommodation could be made for additional signs such as “garage full” and evening parking rates where these provided significant convenience for the public – but they should comply with uniform specifications for design, color, etc.
- Keep parking sign colors consistent on all garages throughout the City.

A-Frames

- One member commented that the existing A-frames are “pretty trashy” and is not convinced that the proposed uniform design and stricter fabrication guidelines will result in better signs. He asked who will monitor the condition of the signs over time and who will remove the names of stores when they leave. He also noted that King Street is not wide enough in places to accommodate the A-frames because there are too many pedestrians. While he understands the benefit to the side street businesses, he believes that the negatives outweigh the positives. Others agreed.

General Comments

- Where multiple sizes of a sign type are approved, some form of Design Guideline and critical staff overview is needed to insure that the proper size (smallest functional) sign is used at each site.
- One member noted that there is a reluctance by staff to enforce the existing sign ordinance regulations because of the economy, leading to a proliferation of illegal commercial signs. There should be improved follow-up on sign complaints and sign violations (neon “open” signs for example), so that signs do not overwhelm the historic ambience.
- The proposed sign fonts are very readable and legible.
- The circulation map is difficult to read in the Design Guidelines Manual.

- The thermometer style map on the current blue and white pedestrian orientation signs on King Street is very easy to read to determine one's location in on King and may work better for finding merchants off of King Street than the A-frame signs. Consider using that simplified graphic style map in the new program.
- The entire West End should not be grouped together. Need to distinguish different areas of the City at a finer scale. The Jordan Ave. corridor, and Slater's Lane, are defacto key routes.
- The text on the district headers can be difficult to read in some places. The color scheme, especially the earth tones, may not have the high-contrast needed for readability in some cases, such as the circulation maps.
- Torpedo Factory needs to have more directional signage than currently exists.
- Consider signs with changeable text and have a well-thought out plan to add and remove places/allow for temporary events (such as the Waterfront Festival).
- Overall, the BAR members unanimously commended the Wayfinding program and how it has evolved, noting they are very pleased with what they have seen so far. One member stated: "Wayfinding is more than a good idea, it is necessary for the well being of the historic neighborhood – both to reduce the existing sign clutter and to improve the experience for visitors and residents."