

From:

Subject:

FW: [EXTERNAL]910 King Street Application

Date:

Tuesday, May 6, 2025 4:19:00 PM

Attachments:

Dear Chair Scott and Members of the Board of Architectural Review –

The following is a message from Yvonne Callahan regarding docket items #11 and #12, BAR#2025-00114 and BAR#2025-00154, 910 King Street for your consideration on Wednesday, May 7, 2025.

We will provide paper copies on the dais. Thank you.

Ted Alberon (He/Him)
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From: Yvonne Callahan

Date: May 6, 2025 at 1:30:34 PM EDT

To: William Conkey

Subject: [EXTERNAL]910 King Street Application

Dear Mr. Conkey,

The undersigned would respectfully request that this email be distributed to Chairman Scott and members of the BAR prior to its meeting on May 7.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Re: BAR #2025-00114 and #2025-00154

Dear Chairman Scott and member of the Alexandria Board of Architectural Review Committee:

We have carefully read the staff report concerning this case. It is thorough and addresses many of the concerns arising from the proposed inappropriate alterations to this architecturally significant and highly visible building on King Street.

However, with all due respect to our excellent staff, the number

and nature of the concerns expressed in the report are individually and cumulatively too significant for staff approval without further review by the Board and by the public at another hearing that we believe must follow in this matter.

Therefore, we urge that the Board defer this matter for a restudy of all proposed alterations. Following such a restudy, and hopefully with significant modifications made by the Applicant, we would ask that this matter be heard again by the Board in public session.

In short, we believe that this matter requires more input from the Board itself as well as from the public. We believe that these extremely important issues concerning this building should not be determined solely by staff.

Our serious concerns about this application are as follows:

1. As noted in the BAR's Design Guidelines, roof decks should be as inconspicuous as possible so as not to detract from the overall architectural character of the historic structure. They should be set well back from the front façade, so that neither the deck nor guardrail is visible to a pedestrian on the sidewalk across the street. The railings should be minimally visible and as small as possible to comply with the building code.

None of those guidelines have been followed in this application. To the contrary, all such guidelines are being ignored in this case.

There is no question that many, if not most, residential and commercial rooftop decks throughout Old Town comply with these guidelines. The proposed roof deck is elevated approximately 2'-6" above the cornice facing King Street and almost 6' above the roof in the rear, not including the 3'-6" tall guardrail, and extends toward the street beyond the face of the façade, as shown on drawing 1/A42. While the proposed use of this roof as a putting green may be an appropriate function in this situation, it should not be used to dictate the minimum size of the roof deck.

To make this roof deck an appropriate addition to this property, it should be lowered to a maximum of 7 inches above the adjacent existing roof surface at the high side of the roof slope. It should also be set back approximately 6 feet, and be flush with the north face of the north chimney.

We also ask that the stair penthouse be lowered to the minimum height necessary in line with the lower roof deck surface.

2. The elevated roof deck proposed here in fact appears to be a workaround to allow installation of a roof sign not otherwise permitted under the Alexandria City Code zoning ordinances.

The undersigned are strongly opposed to both the PVC "Sign Band" as being historically and architecturally inappropriate. We are also opposed to the letters or signs which appear to be 24.18

feet in height being placed at this location. This car-lot scale sign might be appropriate in a suburban shopping center context, but it is certainly not appropriate here.

Even if by some mischance the proposed roof deck is not lowered below the front cornice, this Sign Band, or new and unnecessary parapet, should not be permitted.

3. The staff report on page 7 refers to an “existing modern knee wall located towards the front of the existing roof.” This feature would be removed by the proposed roof deck.

As is evident from the photo of the façade on the application sheet #A40, this is clearly a parapet that is very likely an original feature that visually extends the bay window through and above the cornice.

It was quite common to have a rooflet or architectural feature above window bays on Queen Anne dwellings to emphasize their verticality and enhance the skyline. The Queen Anne rowhouse directly across the street has one of these rooflets and they may be found throughout the historic districts.

We would request that this parapet be preserved, absence firm evidence that it is not an original feature.

4. The LED flood light cut sheets attached to the application indicate that each of the “rainbow theme” floodlights is 3,000 Lumens, equivalent to 300-watt incandescent bulbs. According to the application documentation, these are multi-color changing uplights and can be set to strobe or flash.

Past BAR policy has been clear that architectural building lighting may accent historic decorative features but must not be the brightest structure on the blockface, nor should lighting itself be used as a feature designed to attract attention.

We believe that the lighting being proposed here is unacceptable under any standard of appropriateness in the O & H

Furthermore, the City’s green building policy strongly discourages uplighting and supports the International Dark Skies Initiative; therefore, any up-lights must be carefully shielded.

Another issue with regard to the lighting is that the application provides no evidence on how the 110-volt light fixtures placed all over the façade will be wired without drilling a significant number of holes in the masonry wall or by running conduit on the brick walls. We believe that any approved plans must provide detailed descriptions on how such electrical wiring will be installed with the integrity of the masonry preserved.

In addition, based on the survey in the application, both the west and north walls of this structure are located on City property. Therefore, the proposed flood light fixtures on both of these elevations increase that encroachment and would not be permitted according to Code.

We would ask that the rooftop sign be eliminated, together

with the sign band, the six LED flood lights, and the five flood lights proposed on the west elevation.

5. The carriage lights at the front are not appropriate for a building which is an outstanding example of the Victorian period in Alexandria. Appropriate lights for an 1892 structure are readily available commercially.

6. The ornamental wrought iron on this building is an inartful attempt to change the *circa* 1892 Queen Anne Victorian façade to a Beaux Arts style structure more appropriate in Paris or New Orleans than Old Town. It is totally historically and architecturally inappropriate on this structure in this location. Even simpler cast-iron railings common in New Orleans or Savanna are rarely seen in Old Town.

Such proposed extensive ironwork detracts from the molded and patterned extruded brick that is a primary character defining feature of the façade and is in fact a spectacular example of the use of decorative masonry during this period. Nothing should compete with this remarkable brick work.

We would ask that the current proposed wrought iron railings and ornamentation be eliminated. It is far more appropriate to install very simple, open handrails (not guardrails) at the front step. Likewise, all guardrails for the rooftop deck must be as simple as possible to comply with the building code and no taller than 3'-6" above the deck.

7. Preserving the details of the masonry of the property as a whole is critical to the restoration of this building. The crisp, extruded red brick and dark red mortar butter joints give the highly articulated façade a uniform and monolithic sculptural expression that is virtually unmatched before or since this period. It is essential that the applicant, or the applicant's subcontractor, work with staff to ensure the ongoing masonry repair work be done in such a manner as to preserve and protect this highly significant architectural detail.

No portion of the extruded brick facade should be painted for any reason. Staff has previously required that such brick facades be carefully cleaned, as gently as possible, using gradually stronger chemical cleaners as approved in advance. We understand that power tools or water blasting used to remove mortar for repointing is inappropriate. Replacement mortar must match the color, texture and profile the original joints on each portion of the building; all such repointing must be approved by staff before proceeding.

9. The wood Victorian front door appears to be original to the building and has been well protected by its recessed location. The application is silent on the retention of this critical historic feature.

If a door within an open vestibule is visible from a public way, it was considered by past BAR policy an exterior feature and required BAR approval to alter or remove, as the Guidelines emphasize

retention of these rapidly disappearing historic features. Therefore, if a new storm door is approved on the façade, it must be full light with clear glass.

In addition, the owner should undertake to restore and retain the existing historic door in situ.

It should be noted as well that the Seneca sandstone stoop is original. Given the softness of this type of sandstone, any mounting of railing posts must be supervised by staff as it may be appropriate.

10. Finally, while this was not raised in the application or the staff report, we would ask that the applicant work with the City Arborist to protect the existing trees on City Property adjacent when working on the west side of the building.

We would ask that the BAR review our comments carefully. We ask that our recommendations be carefully considered, and that the BAR take such steps as may be necessary to provide a time and place for review of this matter when this matter is brought to the BAR and the public again. We believe these extra steps are vital in order to preserve and protect this architectural gem in the Old and Historic District.

Respectfully submitted,

Gail Rothrock, HAF

William Schuyler, Vice-President, Old Town Civic Association

Steve Milone, Past President, Old Town Civic Association

Yvonne Weight Callahan, President, Old Town Civic Association



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