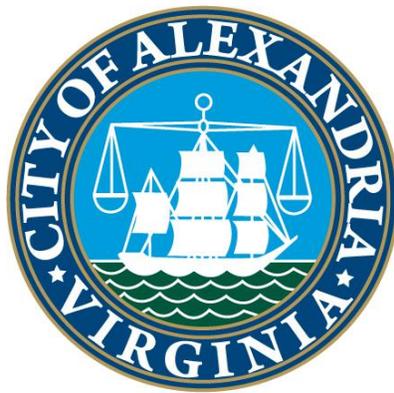


*The Design Guidelines for the Old and  
Historic Alexandria District and the  
Parker-Gray District, Chapter 8:  
Buildings along the Waterfront (adopted  
in May 1993)*



Please contact Planning & Zoning at 703.746.4666 for  
more information.

# CHAPTER 8

## BUILDINGS ALONG THE WATERFRONT

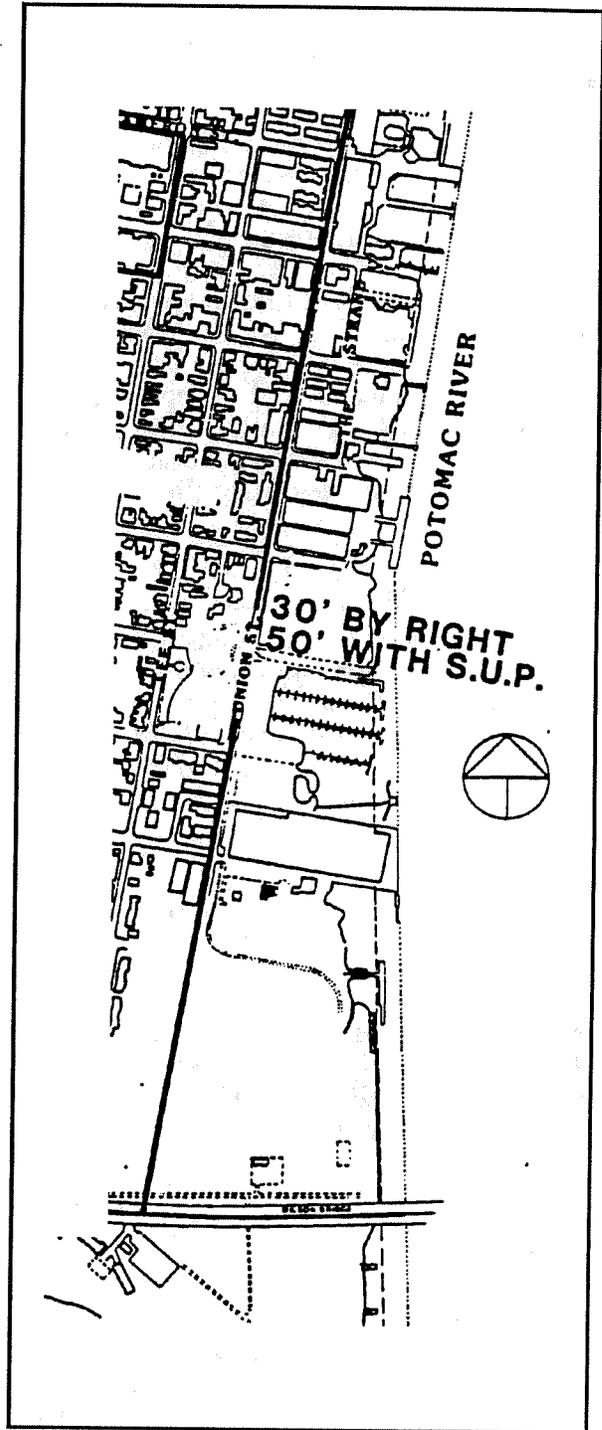
### INTRODUCTION

The waterfront area of the Old and Historic Alexandria District is subject to certain additional requirements over and above those generally required for approval of a certificate of appropriateness by the Board of Architectural Review. These requirements were established by City Council to ensure that development projects along the riverfront are compatible with the general architectural character of the historic district.

The waterfront area is defined in the Zoning Ordinance as Height District #3, Potomac River. This area is east of Union Street to the River and extends from Pendleton Street south to the Wilson Bridge (§6-400 of the Zoning Ordinance).

Since its founding, the city and its buildings have been intertwined with the Potomac River both as a means of commerce and as a principal source of livelihood. As such, the City is acutely aware of the need to preserve this connection with the waterfront. Therefore, the additional requirements are a way to insure that this connection is maintained. Reflecting this tradition, the Old Town Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan, establishes as a major goal continuous public access along the waterfront.

The additional requirements provide that building massing reflect the traditional expressed bay configuration found in the majority of 19th century buildings in the historic district; that building materials be of a high quality; that fenestration systems on new buildings reflect traditional patterns; and, that overall design attempt to reflect the



*Building Height. Height District #3 is the Potomac River Height District controlled by the design requirements in the Zoning Ordinance.*

SOURCE: Old Town Small Area Plan

traditional vernacular architecture found along the waterfront.

The building height limit in District #3 is 30 feet. This may be increased to a height of 50 feet with the approval of a Special Use Permit (SUP) by City Council.

The Board usually does not review conceptual design plans. The Board strongly prefers to review complete design submissions. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to meet with B.A.R. Staff as early as possible during the design development stage to review proposals and zoning requirements.

## REQUIREMENTS

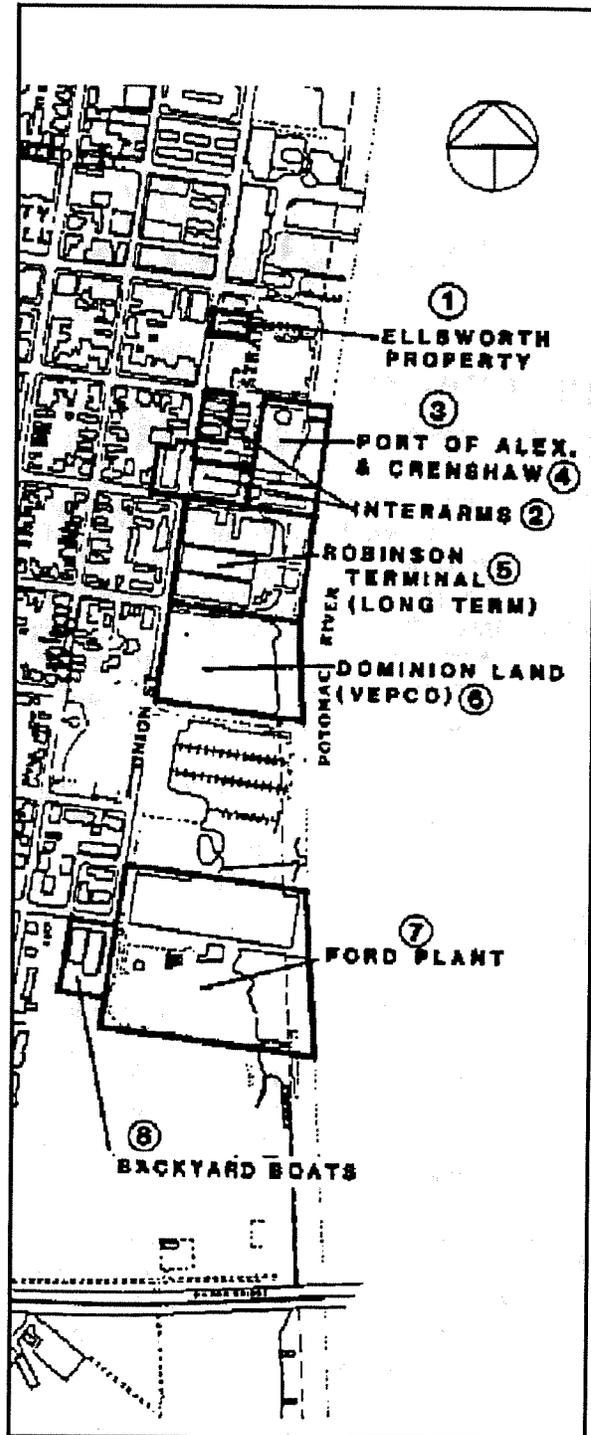
- All applications for new construction, additions and alterations must comply with the requirements of the zoning regulations prior to consideration by the Board of Architectural Review. The specific requirements may be obtained from the Zoning Administrator (Telephone: 703/838-4688)
- New construction must conform to the requirements of the Old Town Small Area Plan chapter of the Master Plan.

### Height, Mass and Bulk Requirements

- Building height is limited to 30 feet above the average finished grade. However, building heights may be increased to a maximum of 50 feet with the approval of a Special Use Permit (SUP) based on the following criteria (§6-404(B)(3)(a-e) of the Zoning Ordinance):

(a) The degree to which imaginative and creative architectural solutions advance recreational access to and enjoyment of the historic waterfront from public streets and other public areas. Buildings should be in harmony with existing buildings of genuine architectural merit to be found in the historic district.

(b) The degree to which the basic 30 feet height is maintained at the street faces and the waterfront face of the proposed building or buildings. To provide



*Potential development sites in Height District #3.*

SOURCE: Old Town Small Area Plan

a transition, building heights over this basic height level should be set back from the street faces and waterfront faces.

(c) The degree to which the height, mass and bulk of the proposed construction are compatible with and reflect the traditional height, mass, and bulk of buildings and structures displayed within the streetscapes of the historic districts.

(d) The degree to which imaginative and creative architectural solutions enhance views and vistas from public streets and other public-access areas along the historic waterfront. The waterfront faces of the buildings, in particular, should be designed and integrated so as to enhance pedestrian enjoyment of the waterfront, and the quality and character of the historic waterfront, as a totality, when viewed from passing vessels.

(e) The degree to which the use or uses of the proposed building or buildings are compatible with historical waterfront-related uses in the City of Alexandria.

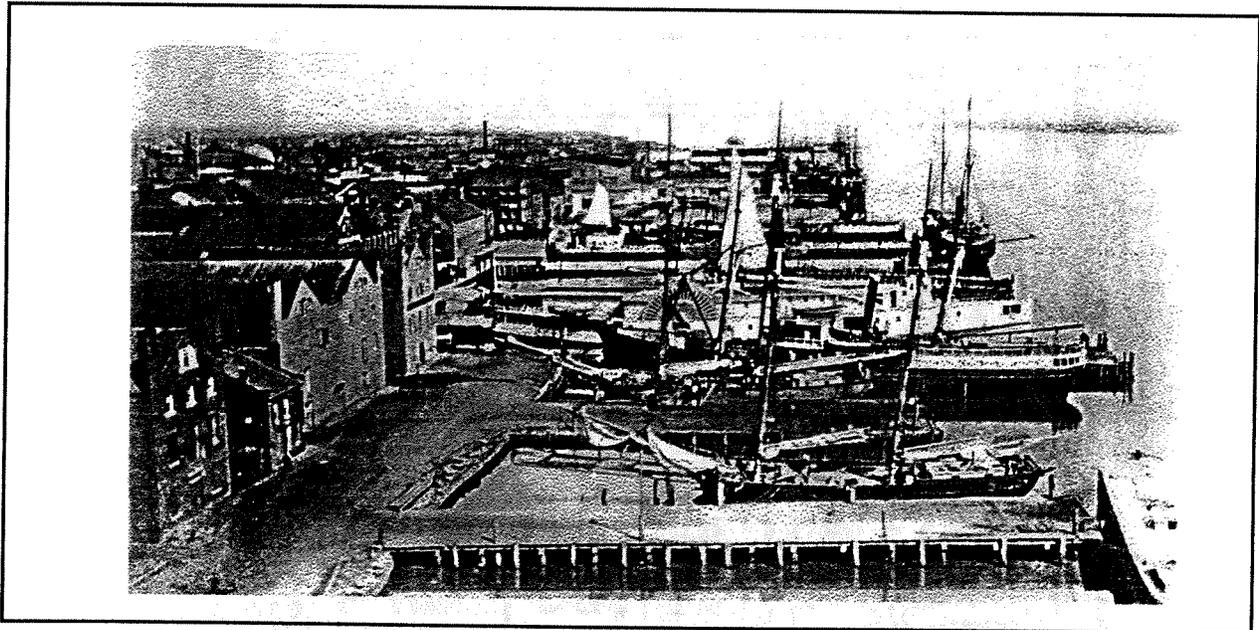
#### Special Use Permits Requirements

Applications for Special Use Permits (SUP) may be obtained from the Department of Planning and Community Development (Room 2100, City Hall, 301 King Street, Telephone: 703/838-4688). SUP applications for increased height must be approved prior to the approval of a design for a proposed building by the Board of Architectural Review.

- Conceptual development plans for Special Use Permits must include the information required for a preliminary site plan (See § 11-506 of the Zoning Ordinance) including preliminary architectural renderings of each facade.

#### Site Plan Requirements

- New commercial building projects over 3,000 square feet in area or which are closer than 66 feet to land used or zoned residential require the approval of a Site Plan by the Planning Commission. The site plan must be prepared by a professional engineer or land surveyor and must include building massing studies. (See §11-400 of the Zoning Ordinance). Information on Site Plan requirements may be obtained from the Site Plan Coordinator, Department of Transportation



*1865 view of the waterfront.*

SOURCE: Alexandria Library, Lloyd House Archives

and Environmental Services, Room 4130, City Hall (Telephone: 703/838-4318).

- New construction which requires the approval of a Site Plan must comply with the provisions of the Alexandria Archaeological Protection Procedure (§ 11-411 of the Zoning Ordinance). The specific requirements may be obtained from the City Archaeologist, Alexandria Archaeology, 105 North Union Street, 3rd Floor. (Telephone: (703/838-4399).

Certificate Of Appropriateness Requirements

- The following design guideline requirements take precedence over any other considerations for approval of a certificate of appropriateness (§10-105 (4)(e) of the Zoning Ordinance).

- Additional criteria for approval of a certificate of appropriateness (§10-105 (4)(a-d) of the Zoning Ordinance):

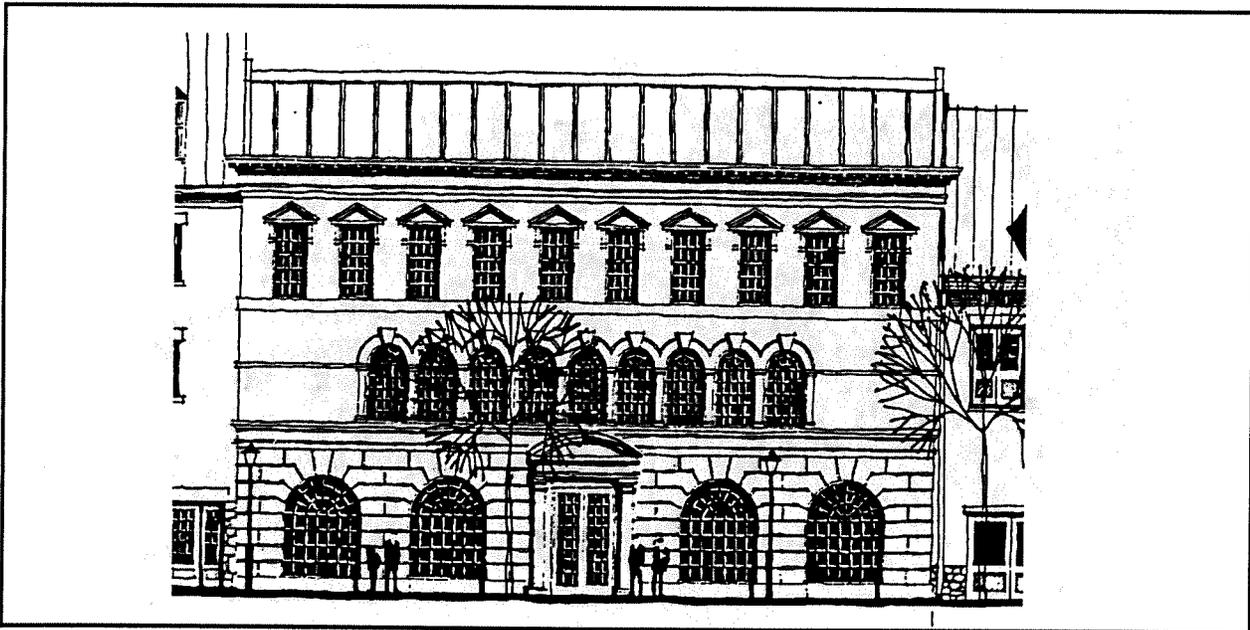
(a) The degree to which facades of a proposed building or buildings are generally in alignment with the existing street edges and express the 20-to 30-foot bay width typically found within the historic district. Techniques to express such typ-

ical bay width should include changes in materials; articulation of the wall surfaces; changes in fenestration patterns; varying roof heights; and physical breaks within the massing. Large expanses of unbroken or repetitive facades are disfavored.

(b) The degree to which building materials characteristic of buildings having architectural merit within the historic district are utilized. The texture, tone and color of such materials should display a level of variety, quality and richness at least equal to that found abundantly in the historic setting. The use of synthetic or imitative materials is disfavored.

(c) The degree to which new construction reflects the traditional fenestration patterns found within the historic district. Traditional solid-void relationships (i.e., masonry bearing wall by a veneer system) should be used in building facades which are directly related to historic streetscapes.

(d) The degree to which new construction on the waterfront reflects the existing or traditional building character suit-



*Design for a new office building approved as meeting required design criteria.*

SOURCE: 108-110 South Union Street, BAR Case #88-15, rust, orling & neale, architects

able to the waterfront. "High style" or highly ornamented buildings are disfavored. Also disfavored are metal warehouses and nondescript warehouse-type structures.

#### Other Requirements

- Construction of new buildings, additions and alterations must meet the requirements of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- Construction of new commercial, retail and multi-family buildings must meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (§512.0 of the USBC).
- Construction of a new building requires the issuance of a building permit by Code Enforcement.
- Tree removal for new construction requires prior approval of the City Arborist.

- New construction must include parking. The requirements vary depending upon the size of the building. For residential projects, parking is required for both single and multi-family construction (See Article 8 of the Zoning Ordinance).

- **Vision Clearance.**

There is a citywide requirement that buildings on corner lots must maintain a vision clearance at the corner for purposes of transportation safety. In such instances, structures may be no higher than 42" (3' 6") above the curb. There is also a general policy to maintain the average front building line in the historic district. The Zoning Ordinance gives the Board of Architectural Review the power to waive this requirement as well as other yard requirements within the vision clearance area where the maintenance of the building line is aesthetically important.

#### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

New construction may affect archaeological resources. With its rich history, the City of Alexandria is particularly concerned about its archaeological heritage. Archaeological resources in the historic districts are great in number and highly diverse in materials. They often consist of ceramic and glass fragments in the backyards of historic properties; however, archaeological resources are also brick-lined shafts in yards and basements; brick kilns; foundations, footings, postholes and builders trenches of non-extant buildings; landscape features such as walkways and gardens; and even American Indian artifacts which pre-date colonial Alexandria. The waterfront blocks contain distinct archaeological resources. Since many of the blocks were created by filling in the Potomac River they have a variety of maritime resources such as wharves, shipways, submerged vessels and portions of vessels. Often these clues to the City's past appear to be unimportant debris, yet when the artifacts and building remains are excavated and recorded systematically, they provide the only knowledge of lost Alexandria.

Every application to the B.A.R. which potentially involves ground disturbance is reviewed by the City Archaeologist to determine whether significant archaeological resources may still survive on the property. Therefore, the potential for additional requirements to protect archaeological resources exist with any project that involves ground disturbing activities.

The applicant can speed along the archaeological review process by requesting a Preliminary Archaeological Assessment from Alexandria Archaeology at the earliest date. Call (703) 838-4399, Tuesday through Saturday. Alexandria Archaeology is located on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

- **RESIDENTIAL ZONES**

In residential zones, new construction that involve ground disturbing activities is reviewed by City archaeologists. In most cases, the applicant is required to notify Alexandria Archaeology before ground disturbance, so that a City archaeologist may monitor this work and record significant finds. However, when a property has a high potential for containing significant archaeological resources, a City archaeologist may request permission to excavate test samples in the affected area before the project begins.

- **COMMERCIAL ZONES**

In commercial zones and residential projects involving the construction of three or more houses, the ground disturbing activities associated with new construction may necessitate compliance with the Alexandria Archaeological Protection Procedure (§ 11-411 of the Zoning Ordinance). The specific requirements may be obtained from the City Archaeologist. Occasionally, compliance in such projects may require the property owner to contract with an independent archaeologist to document conditions before and during construction. Property owners should contact the City Archaeologist as early as possible so that there are no project delays.

• General Zoning Requirements, W-1 Zone:

Single-Family Residential Buildings:

Rear, side and front yard:

The Zoning Ordinance requires that in certain instances townhouses must be a minimum distance from a property line.

Open space:

A minimum of 300 square feet of open space is required.

Cluster developments:

Cluster developments are permitted with the approval of a Special Use Permit. The applicable yard requirements can be waived or modified.

Multi-Family Residential Uses:

There are no setback requirements for such structures in the W-1 Zone. A minimum of 300 square feet of open space is required.

Commercial Uses:

There are no set back requirements for new construction unless the property abuts a residential zone. In such an instance, a zone transition setback is required. This setback requirement is set forth in the Zoning Ordinance (§7-900).

- Each project in the W-1 Zone must provide an open space walkway or bikeway adjacent to the Potomac River (See §5-508 of the Zoning Ordinance).
- No office or residential use is permitted on the ground floor of a building in the W-1 Zone. However, restaurant or retail use is permitted on the ground floor. This requirement is not applicable to projects which have an approved Site Plan (See §5-509 of the Zoning Ordinance).
- New construction on lots which involve land disturbance of 2,500 square feet or more of land area must comply with the requirements of the Chesapeake Bay Protection Ordinance.

**GUIDELINES**

- Applicants should consult Chapter 2, Building Alterations, regarding guidelines for specific elements of a proposed new building. For example, the chapter provides information on compatible window treatments and building materials.

• Development Form.

The Board strongly discourages mews type residential projects which are inward looking and do not contribute to street life.

• Style

No single architectural style is mandated. However, there is strong preference on the part of the Board for buildings which reflect the traditional architectural styles found in the historic district. Designs generally should complement and reflect the architectural heritage of the City. For example, abstraction of historic design elements is preferred to a building design which introduces elements that have no historical basis in the districts. However, direct copying of buildings is discouraged.

• Required Bay Width

The expression of the required bay width may be made by changes in materials, articulation of the wall surfaces, changes in fenestration, varying roof heights and/or physical breaks within the building mass. For example, window patterns and changes in materials can be used to delineate the expression of a bay.

• Height

The historical height of waterfront structures is 40 to 45 feet. New buildings in the waterfront area should reflect this historical relationship. The height of the first floor should be approximately 12-15 feet to reflect the traditional configuration of waterfront buildings.

• Width

The traditional width of buildings along the waterfront varies widely, but generally ranges from 35 to 100 feet. New buildings should generally reflect this traditional size.

- Siting

There should be little or no setback from the principal street or other lot lines.

- Parking

Parking should be provided in or behind a new structure. Parking lots to the side of a building and open to the street disrupt the traditional street wall and are strongly discouraged. Additional information is provided in the Parking section of Chapter 2, Building Alterations.

- Fenestration

The fenestration pattern, that is the relationship of solid to void, such as walls and windows, should be compatible with the historic fenestration patterns along the waterfront. There should be a large ratio of void to solid on the first floor of the structures (i.e., large windows). However, curtain wall buildings which express very large areas of void are discouraged. First floor retail uses should have large paned storefront windows.

- Roof

The roof form should reflect the traditional roof form patterns found in the waterfront area. For example, gable roofs should be oriented perpendicular to the River.

Roofing materials should reflect the traditional use of metal and slate in the historic districts. Additional information is provided in the Roofing section of Chapter 2, Building Alterations.

- Spacing Between Buildings

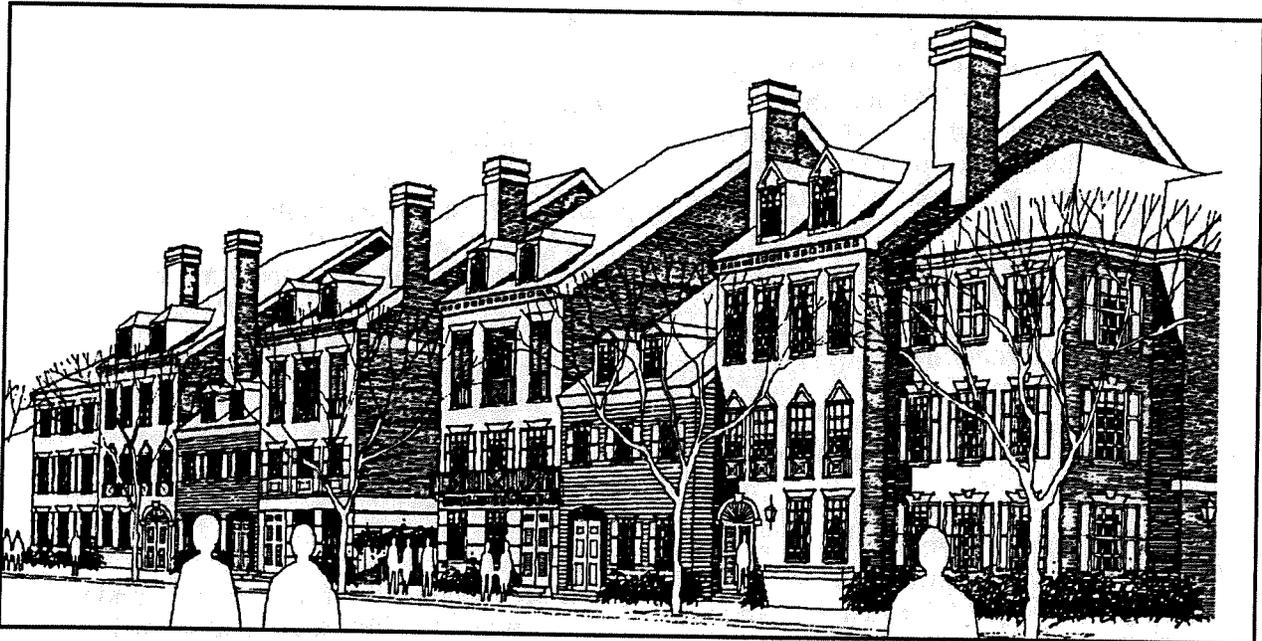
The traditional spacing between buildings along the waterfront varies widely, from virtually zero to several dozen feet. It is generally preferred that new buildings reflect the pattern of spacing between buildings evident along the blockface in order to maintain a consistent rhythm.

- Architectural Detailing

Although historic warehouse structures along the waterfront were utilitarian buildings, they generally display more architectural embellishment than contemporary commercial buildings. Architectural detailing such as cornices, lintels, arches, and chimneys should, therefore, express the traditional quality and quantity of architectural detailing found on historic structures along the waterfront.

- Materials

The predominant building materials for buildings in the historic waterfront area are



*Perspective view of Union Street elevation of Harborside development project.*

Source: 400 South Union Street, BAR Case #89-83, Michael & Michael, Architects

stone and brick. Stucco coatings were very rarely used in the historic waterfront area. The building materials for new structures should reflect these traditional materials.

- **Building Orientation**

The front entrances of new buildings should be oriented to the principal street frontage and be clearly articulated. Entrances for new commercial, retail and multi-family construction must meet the requirements for accessibility for persons with disabilities established by the ADA and the Virginia USBC.

- **Color**

The color proposed for new buildings should be compatible with that in use on historic buildings in the districts. The B.A.R. Staff has developed a *Color Chart of Historically Accurate Paint Colors in the Old and Historic Alexandria District and the Parker-Gray District* which can be consulted to help determine appropriate colors which reflect the historic heritage of the City.

## **APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

In order to properly evaluate the appropriateness of a design for new construction, the Board of Architectural Review requires that an accurate depiction of the design be presented. Most designs for new construction presented to the Board of Architectural Review are prepared by professional designers; however, a professionally prepared submission is not mandatory. Applicants, however, should be aware that drawings sealed by an architect or engineer licensed in Virginia may be required by the Code Enforcement Bureau prior to the issuance of a building permit for new construction.

**All applications for approval of new construction must contain the following information:**

### **Alexandria Business License**

Proof of a valid Alexandria Business License is required at the time of application for contractors, subcontractors, architects and designers.

### **Photograph of Existing Conditions**

Clear photographs of the site and the surrounding properties are required for reference.

### **Plot Plan/Site Plan**

A plot or site plan accurately showing the location and dimensions of new construction or additions including property lines, accessory structures, fences and gradelines is required. A roof plan showing water drainage and location of mechanical units should also be included.

### **Drawings**

Drawings accurately representing all elevations of the proposed structure indicating materials and overall dimensions, including height, are required. In addition, a drawing showing the contextual relationship of the proposed structure to existing adjacent buildings is required. The location of such ancillary items as HVAC units, heat pumps, roof guards, fire hose connections, utility meters and risers should be noted on the drawings. The drawings should have a minimum scale of  $3/32" = 1'$ , however, larger scale drawings may be required. At least one set must meet the maximum permit size of  $24" \times 36"$ . Additional copies of the required drawings may be reduced if they are clearly legible.

### **Floor Area Ratio and Open Space Calculations**

Applicants must provide accurate F.A.R. and open space calculations for new construction or additions. Forms for these calculations are available at the time of application.

### **Materials**

The materials to be used for the structure must be specified and delineated on the drawings. Actual samples may be provided, if appropriate.

### **Color**

The proposed color of the structure and trim-work must be indicated and actual color samples provided.

## **RELATED SECTIONS**

Introduction  
Guide to the B.A.R. Process  
Use of the Design Guidelines  
History of the physical development of the historic districts  
Chapter 1 - Signs  
Chapter 2 - Building Alterations  
    Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities  
    Accessory Structures  
    Awnings  
    Chimneys & Flues  
    Decks  
    Exterior and Storm Doors  
    Dormers  
    Roof Drainage Systems  
    Electrical and Gas Service  
    Exhaust and Supply Fans  
    Fences , Garden Walls & Gates  
    HVAC Systems  
    Exterior Lighting  
    Paint Colors  
    Parking  
        Driveways and Paving  
    Planters  
    Porches  
    Roofing Materials  
    Security Devices  
    Shutters  
    Siding Materials  
    Skylights  
    Solar Collectors  
    Exterior Staircases  
    Stoops, Steps and Railings  
    Windows  
        Storm Windows  
Chapter 3 - Building Accessories  
    ATM Machines  
    Satellite Antennas  
    Street Furniture  
    Vending Machines  
Chapter 4 Demolition of Existing Structures

NOTE: Illustrations are provided for information only. Applications for certificates of appropriateness are reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis.

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF  
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW, 5/25/93