



218 North Lee Street, Suite 310
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 549-5811

www.HistoricAlexandriaFoundation.org
HistoricAlexandriaFoundation@gmail.com

April 18, 2021

Board of Architectural Review
City of Alexandria
301 King St., Room 2400
Alexandria, VA 22314

By email

c/o Lia Niebauer at lia.niebauer@alexandriava.gov

Re: April 21, 2021 Hearing, Docket Items 8 & 9 — BAR #2021-0098 OHAD; BAR # 2021-0081 OHAD (119 S. Fairfax Street).

Dear Chair Roberts and Members of the Board:

As you know, the Historic Alexandria Foundation (“HAF”) was formed in 1954 “to preserve, protect and restore structures and sites of historic or architectural interest in and associated with the City of Alexandria, Virginia, to preserve antiquities, and generally to foster and promote interest in Alexandria’s historic heritage.” In furtherance of this mission, we are vitally concerned with the proper administration of the Zoning Ordinance and Board of Architectural Review consideration of demolition and construction projects in the Old and Historic District. Your review of such projects is essential to the preservation of the historic fabric of our unique and historic City.

HAF is both an owner of real estate in the Old and Historic Alexandria District (410 South Washington Street), and the holder of preservation easements on numerous properties in close proximity to the development proposed by this application, including among others 229-231 S. Pitt Street, 207 Prince Street, 210 Duke Street, 301 S. St. Asaph Street, 811 Prince Street, and 601 Duke Street. Moreover, our membership includes property owners throughout the City of Alexandria including those in close proximity to the proposed project.

HAF takes particular interest in the property at 119 S. Fairfax Street and the immediate surrounding properties. In 1965, we awarded the adjoining property to the north, 117 South Fairfax Street, Plaque Number 51-E-117 as part of our Early Building

Board of Architectural Review

April 18, 2021

City of Alexandria

Page 2

Survey Program. This was one of the earliest plaques awarded; the program began in 1965 to identify important early historic resources during the era of urban renewal. The plaque program is one of HAF's major programs for promoting historic preservation as it carries out its charitable mission.

The next year, in 1966, we awarded Plaque Number 51-E-121 to the house adjoining to the south, 121 S. Fairfax Street. Finally, following much needed restoration work at 119 S. Fairfax Street itself, the property was awarded Plaque Number 51-E-119 in 1977. There are six plaqued buildings on the west side of the 100 Block of South Fairfax Street, one of the most visible blocks in the heart of Old Town.

We are greatly concerned that in performing its review of the proposed demolition and construction project the Staff appears to give no consideration to the effect of the proposed project on the surrounding historic properties.

The COVID-19 emergency imposes serious barriers to independent historical research needed for historic properties to fully respond to proposed demolition and construction projects like the one before the Board. Nonetheless, HAF can offer the following information not contained in the Staff Report. More could doubtless be said about these important structures and their contribution to the Old and Historic District.

The immediate adjacent property to the north of the proposed project, 117 S. Fairfax Street, is one of the earliest federal houses in Alexandria.

In September 1784 Robert Lyle offered to rent a "new Brick House with eight rooms, Store, Kitchen and Cellar under the whole.... Nicholas Hannah advertised the opening of his coffee house here in December 1786...." -- Ethelyn Cox, *Historic Alexandria Virginia Street by Street* (1976)

In the late 19th Century, but at any rate before 1902, a two-room addition was added to the rear ell at 117 S. Fairfax Street. (*Compare* 1902 Sanborn Map *with* 1891 Sanborn Map, both attached.) After being broken up into a boarding house in the mid-20th century, 117 S. Fairfax was restored in 1968. At that time, archeological work was done of several early privies on the property. Because of the clay soil underlying the house at 117 S. Fairfax Street, the house is fragile, and it has suffered serious injury in the past from neighboring pile driving and construction resulting in visible cracks and settling of its masonry.

The property to the south of the project, 121 S. Fairfax, has a similar early history. On the earliest Sanborn maps, it is noted as a Confectioners or Bakery, being an example of the historical pattern in Old Town of merchants living above their shops. The rear of all

Board of Architectural Review

April 18, 2021

City of Alexandria

Page 3

these buildings display their heritage — a feature that is rapidly becoming scarce to public view because of extensive in-fill development.

When the Gadsby's Arcade was built in the 1970s, it provided a widely accessible pedestrian view of the rear of the properties at 117-121 S. Fairfax Street, in particular the historic rooflines and fabric of the buildings that demolition and encapsulation, as well as excessive new construction, will destroy forever.

In light of these considerations, a focusing of the effect of the impact of the proposed project on the historic district and the contributing resources that will be affected by the project, we disagree with the Staff's recommendation on several grounds.

Regarding the Demolition criteria, Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(B)(1), we believe that the removal of the existing historic fabric and the capsulation and blocking of the public view of the rear of 119 S. Fairfax itself is not in the public interest. Moreover, the proposed construction work is likely to cause long-term damage to the adjacent property at 117 S. Fairfax, which is also to the detriment of the public interest. We further believe that properly applied, Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(B)(3) militates against the proposed demolition. The structure is certainly of sufficiently old and historic texture and material such that the demolition will destroy fabric that cannot be replaced. As to the criteria of Alex Zon. Ord. § 10-105(B)(5), it seems clear to us that "retention of the building or structure help preserve and protect an historic place or area of historic interest in the city." As noted above, 117 S. Fairfax, 119 S. Fairfax and 121 S. Fairfax are a core of the Old and Historic District, recognized in our Early Building Survey and deserving of the strongest protection the City can afford.

As to the proposed new construction, contrary to the Staff Report, we believe that proper consideration of the criteria should lead to the denial of the proposal. We do not believe that the "Overall architectural design, form, style and structure, including, but not limited to, the height, mass and scale of buildings or structures," Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(2)(a), are consistent with your charge to protect the Old and Historic District area surroundings, Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(1). The plans do not adequately retain and protect the original historic features and materials of the building and its surroundings, Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(2)(b). Moreover, the "[d]esign and arrangement of buildings and structures on the site; and the impact upon the historic setting, streetscape or environs," Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(2)(c), are negative. The texture, material and color, and the extent of the new architectural features are not historically appropriate and may be damaging to the adjacent existing structures, Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(2)(d). And when you consider "[t]he relation of the features in sections_10-105(A)(2)(a) through (d) to similar features of the preexisting building or structure ... and to buildings and structures in the immediate surroundings, Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(2)(e), we believe you must conclude that the proposed project falls short.

Board of Architectural Review

April 18, 2021

City of Alexandria

Page 4

The project will not “preserve or protect historic places and areas of historic interest in the city,” Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(2)(e). Indeed, the proposed “skyway” between the main house and the proposed addition seems reasonably calculated to cause long-term harm to the historically important structure at 117 S. Fairfax Street. The project will neither “promote the general welfare of the city and all citizens by the preservation and protection of historic interest in the city,” Alex Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(2)(i), or “promote the general welfare by maintaining and increasing real estate values, generating business, creating new positions, attracting tourists, students, writers, historians, artists and artisans, attracting new residents, encouraging study and interest in American history, stimulating interest and study in architecture and design, educating citizens in American culture and heritage and making the city a more attractive and desirable place in which to live,” Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(2)(j).

In short, because the project threatens to cause actual harm to the adjacent historic property, and would have a negative impact on the historic neighborhood, we disagree with the Staff Report and oppose the project.

We do note, however, that if you do approve the project in some form, our strong agreement with the proposed condition number 1 requiring archeological work on the site. As noted above, the neighboring property at 117 S. Fairfax Street contained more than one privy yielding substantial ceramic and other artifacts. There is every reason to expect similar findings at 119 S. Fairfax Street.

Thank you for your consideration of our statement.

Respectfully submitted,

Historic Alexandria Foundation

By: /s/ Gail C. Rothrock
Chair, Advocacy Committee

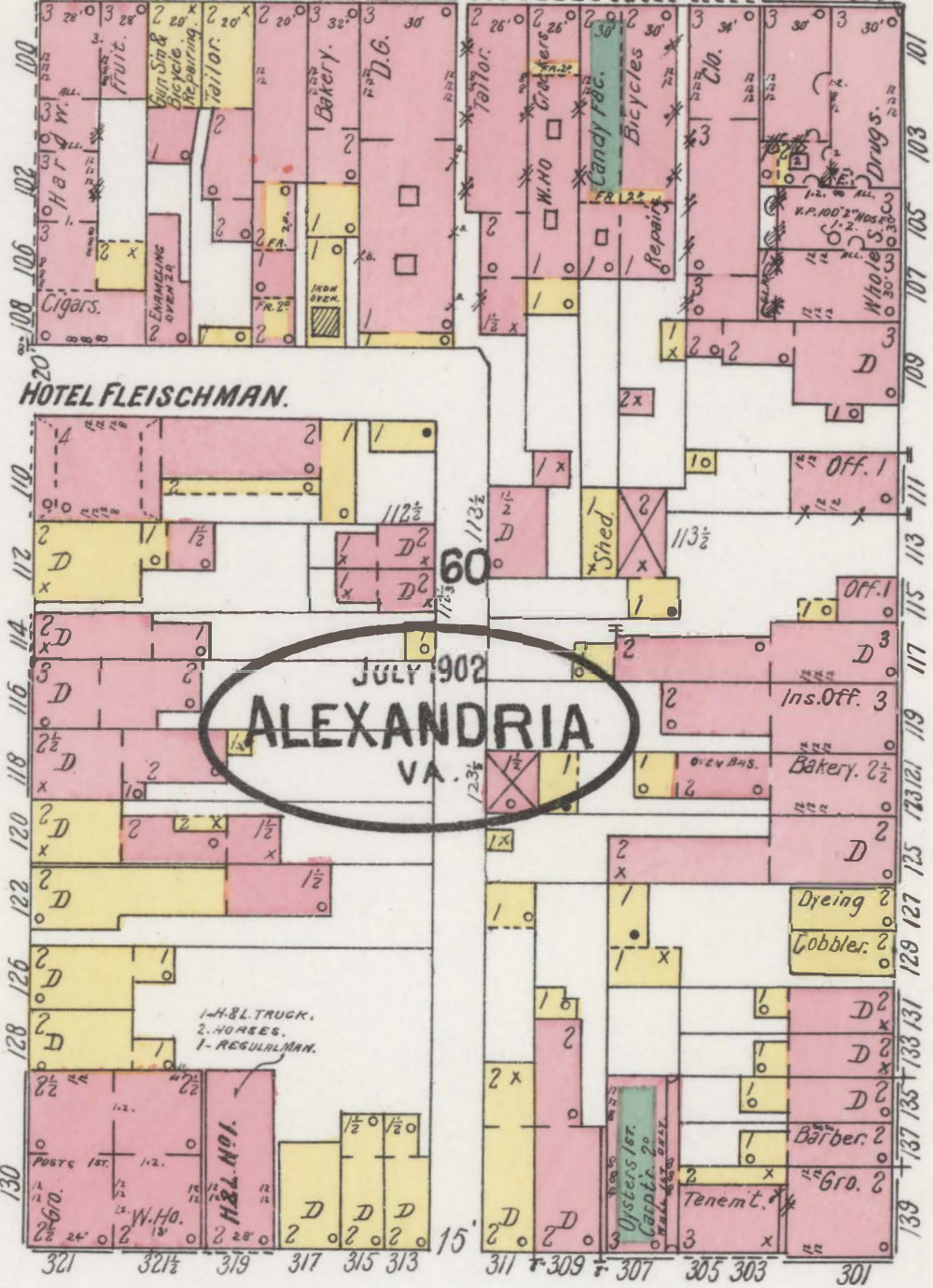
32.4'

27.3'

66'

66'

328 326 324 322 320 318 316 (312) (310) (308) (306) 304 302 300



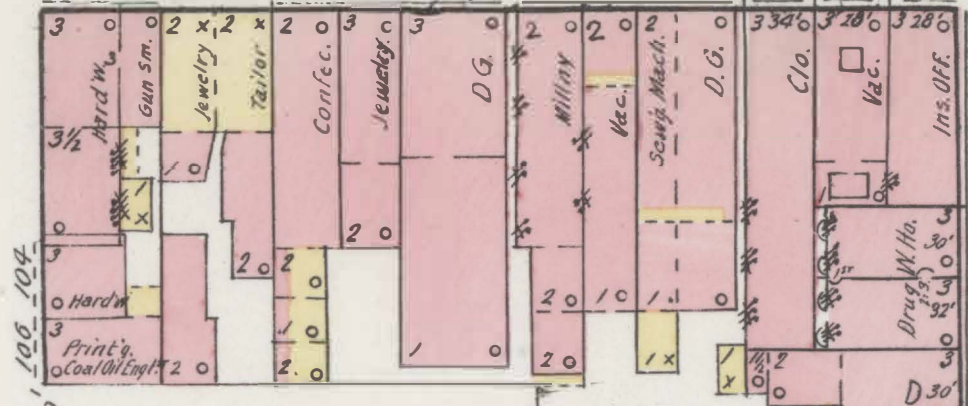
29.5'

32.4'

66'

328 326 324 322 320 318 316 312 310 308 306 304 302 300

66'
10



106 104
20

110
112

116 114
118

120

122

128 126

150

JULY 1891
ALEXANDRIA
VA.

321 319 317 315 313 15 311 309 307 303

107 105 117 115 119 117 121 119 127 123 121 127 123 129 127 131 129 133 131 135 133 131 129

NO. 11.

Quote from the Alexandria City Charter, submitted by Yvonne Callahan.

Sec. 2.03 - Powers relating to public works, utilities and properties.

In addition to the powers granted by other sections of this charter the city shall have power:

(a)

To lay out, open, extend, widen, narrow, establish or change the grade, or close, vacate, abandon, construct, pave, curb, gutter, grade, regrade, adorn with shade trees, otherwise improve, maintain, repair, clean and light streets, including limited access or express highways, alleys, bridges, viaducts, subways and underpasses, and make and improve walkways upon streets and improve and pave alleys within the city; and the city shall have the same power and authority over any street, alley or other public place ceded or conveyed to the city or dedicated or devoted to public use as over other streets, alleys and other public places; provided, further, that whenever any ground shall have been opened to and used by the public as a street or alley for ten years it shall be considered as dedicated to the public and the city shall have the same authority and jurisdiction over and right and interest therein as it has over other streets.