

1201 East Abingdon Drive Renovation and Addition

Board of Architectural Review – Certificate of Appropriateness

16 April 2025

Melissa Butler Kuennen, Resident

As an Architect who practiced for 40 years and designed hundreds of multifamily units in historic districts as renovations / additions or as new development, I am greatly concerned about the appropriateness of design of this development.

The issue is Context.

Is the development designed **in context** with the **Old Town North Urban Design Guidelines**?

NO – the OTN guidelines promote building design excellence that is “**context-sensitive**”, rather than a change in massing, scale and visibility that overwhelms the neighborhood.

NO – the development **bears no relation** to the **Neighborhood Precedents**, because of the **change in color** and use of **multi-story piers** on the façade.

NO – the addition creates a “**monolithic façade** without relief.” The guidelines recommend it either step back above the 3rd story, have **building breaks or setbacks** or incrementally **alter the depth of the façade along the street** “with 20-25% of the total street frontage setback 2-10 feet from the property line.”

Is the development designed **in context** with the **Old and Historic district** to memorialize the **George Washington Parkway** entrance to the city?

NO – this development is NOT **compatible** with the **massing, materials or scale** of the architectural setting and parkway environment. Regardless of the massing of the previously approved existing building – at least it used materials that were **contextual** in their impact on the neighborhood.

NO - the development does NOT safeguard the **identity** of the **George Washington Memorial Parkway** by creating an entrance to the city that **memorializes** the **historical, cultural and traditional** character of the city.



NO - The development **purposefully exaggerates** its size and visibility from the **GW Parkway** – this would be obvious if a **rendering** had been provided.

NO - The building materials do nothing to **complement** the neighborhood – by changing the red brick to a **lighter grey color** its **visibility will overwhelm drivers** as they approach Old Town.

The existing building is already the **only building between **Slaters Lane** and **First Street** that is **visible** behind the tree-lined border of the **GW Parkway**.**

NO – fencing for residential buildings in this zoning district is not to exceed 3 ft. 6 inches in height. Yet the courtyard will have a six-foot-high privacy fence, where only brick gateway entrances are shown as precedent.

Is the development **in context** to the **existing neighborhood**?

*The major tenet of new design in **historic districts** across the nation that is **universally** understood is that the design should **complement** the neighborhood, not detract from it.*



Proposed facade for GW Parkway



525 and 425 Montgomery Street – former industrial/commercial sites



Surprisingly, this design **imitates new buildings and additions that come out of review by the city of Alexandria - with its multi-story masonry piers and change of material in between – yet this is wholly inappropriate for its location and site.**

NO - The **context** of the neighborhood of **East Abingdon Drive** is its presence along a leafy green lawned **Parkway** surrounded by smaller scale townhouses of varying hues of red brick, not a dense urban neighborhood previously composed of industrial buildings.

NO - The addition is designed to be visibly **distinct** from the original building - which utilizes a more harmonious color palette – and does not **complement** the neighborhood. As the architect pointed out on March 5th, **the addition “needs a presence, needs to stand out.”** This idea is better suited to another project and is cited as **inappropriate design** in the zoning regulations.

NO - The use of **vertical piers** violates the requirement for **“traditional solid-void relationships”** and creates the illusion of **greater height** rather than adapting residential scale floor-to-floor heights to **complement** the neighborhood.

NO – the use of the front façade as a “screen” stretches the width of the actual building to include the projecting balconies, which again is out of **context** with the design and scale of the neighborhood.

NO – the **existing two-story piers** remain at the 1st floor of the original building – Are they double height amenity spaces? Or are they 2 story townhouses with inappropriate commercial storefronts?

1201 East Abingdon Drive Renovation and Addition

Board of Architectural Review – Certificate of Appropriateness BAR2025 – 00035 and 00036

21 May 2025

Melissa Butler Kuennen, Resident of OTN, Retired Architect

My comments of 26 April (attached) remain due to the minimal response by the applicant with this May submission; all the issues of **context** remain.

It is disappointing to see that the applicant finds it difficult to comply with Alexandria's zoning regulations for buildings within the **Old and Historic District**. They indicate the **precedents** they have picked – commercial buildings from 30 and 40 years ago – give them leverage to create a similar design – yet the building use and neighborhood are **not comparable nor relevant**.

The applicant has provided the most minimal change possible in response to the comments made by members of the BAR in April, and still nothing has been accomplished to address the issues of **scale**, **verticality** and **appearance** that were raised.

The minimally altered design has done nothing to relate the addition more closely to the **context** of its neighborhood and position in the **Old Town North SAP** and the **Old and Historic District**:

1. The **scale** remains **overwhelming** to the neighborhood - there was no effort made to break down the scale of the building.

Whereas the **existing** building's façade along Abingdon was, in fact, divided into thirds to partially address the OTN Urban Design Guidelines to break up the massing, but the applicant continues to provide a monolithic design, now with only slight recesses at each end.

2. There is no change in design to minimize the **verticality** objected to by the BAR – the piers remain, though in a darker color, and the black background remains. And the glass and dark brick “reveal” at the sides, though now narrower, still illustrates the verticality of the addition.

Why are the vertical piers still used when they were clearly called out as **inappropriate** by several members of the BAR? It is purely a design feature used in neighborhoods that were **formerly industrial**, not a green lawned neighborhood of 2 to 4 story residential buildings.

The applicant can surely use other creative design elements to indicate the residential use of the building.

Most importantly, the use of vertical piers violates the **requirement for “traditional solid-void relationships”** rather than showing the residential floor-to-floor heights used throughout the neighborhood.

3. The **appearance** of this development still purposefully **exaggerates its width**, now with slight recesses at each end, but still curving around to include the projecting balconies on each side.

The addition's massing would be far more acceptable without this design feature and might appear slightly less overwhelming to drivers on the Parkway.



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May 19, 2025

Andrew Scott (Chair)
Robert Bentley (Bud) Adams
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Alexandria Board of Architectural Review
Alexandria City Hall
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By e-mail

Re: BAR #2025-00035 & 2025-00036 - OHAD, Permit to Demolish/Capsulate (partial) and Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations 1201 East Abingdon Drive

Dear Chairman Scott and BAR members:

We are writing to note our objections to the application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for the alterations proposed to 1201 East Abingdon Drive, which will impose a large new façade directly on the George Washington Memorial Parkway without complying with the mandatory provisions of the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance's special Washington Street Standards. Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(a)(3). Those standards were adopted to protect the Landmark district by prohibiting precisely the type of intrusive new structure on the Memorial Parkway proposed here. The Ordinance is drafted to prevent the unfortunate deviations in the past that the applicant has drawn on as inspiration in this application. The planned addition at the northern gateway to Historic Alexandria explicitly seeks to draw attention to itself and not blend into the background. Millions of visitors to Alexandria and Mt. Vernon — the terminus of the Parkway — will see this structure as their first visual experience of our City. We therefore request that you deny the current application and call for a re-study of the plans.

Board of Architectural Review
City of Alexandria
May 19, 2025
Page 2

As you know, 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 in the two Historic Districts, the proper functioning and observance of the process and jurisdiction of the Board of Architectural Review (“BAR”), and the preservation of the historic fabric of our City.

Moreover, since HAF is an owner of real estate on Washington Street (410 South Washington Street), we are directly impacted and concerned with the proper application of the Washington Street Standards that are mandated by the City Ordinance and the City’s 1929 agreement with the Federal Government.

HAF noted its concerns with this project during the initial concept review on July 6, 2023, and a review of the record of that hearing shows that the Board did not endorse or approve the scale or façade proposal presented. See *Video Record 7/6/2023* (available at https://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=57&clip_id=5959, visited May 19, 2025). Reviewing this new intrusion on the view from the Parkway, many members of the Board expressly called upon the applicant to search for a design that would blend better with Old Town and preserve the important entry point into Alexandria embodied in the Parkway.

When, at the BAR Hearing on March 5, 2025, the applicant presented revised plans to accentuate and draw even more attention to the proposed addition, once again, a number of BAR members properly expressed their reservations to the imposing new façade, its impact on the views from the Parkway, and its failure to appropriately blend with Old Town Alexandria. See *Video Record 3/5/2025* (available at https://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=57&clip_id=6462, visited May 19, 2025). As a result of these comments, the applicant requested and received a deferral to reconsider its plans.

For the April 16th BAR hearing, the Applicant refiled its application with minimally revised plans which continued to propose the massive and attention-grabbing façade on the Parkway. In response, a local resident, Melissa Butler Kuennen, provided the Board with a detailed technical critique for your consideration. Ms. Kuennen’s comments noted her experience as “an Architect who practiced for 40 years and designed hundreds of multifamily units in historic districts as renovations/additions or as new development.” See Additional Materials (available at <https://alexandria.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=14040750&GUID=1F32FF3D-37B2-4C05-950C-CB00BD773C36>, visited May 19, 2025). We at HAF commend her insightful comments again to your attention. Once again, concerns were clearly expressed by Board members about the attention-grabbing addition proposed, and the applicant again sought a deferral to revise its plans. See *Video Record 4/16/2023* (available at

Board of Architectural Review
City of Alexandria
May 19, 2025
Page 3

https://alexandria.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=57&clip_id=6501, visited May 19, 2025)

Unfortunately, the latest modest revisions proposed by the applicant continue to ignore the serious concerns that have been raised about the impact of the new addition on the gateway to Alexandria. It continues with a massive façade that fails to meet the requirements of the Washington Street Standards mandated by Alex. Zon Ord. § 10-105(a)(3).



Excerpt from Application Presentation at Slide 06.¹

The BAR Staff Reports associated with all of these reviews correctly note that approval requires conformity with the Washington Street Standards set forth in the Ordinance at Alex. Zon. Ord. § 105(A)(3). Indeed, each report quotes those standards verbatim. Missing from all of those Staff Reports, however, is any reference to materials in the record showing how the application complies with each of those mandatory requirements. While the applicant has variously stated that it has complied with the standards, the materials it has filed show the opposite is the case. And the Staff's agreement provides no factual evidence or analysis for the Board to rely on in fulfilling its obligatory mandate to separately apply each and every one of requirements set forth in Alex. Zon. Ord. § 10-105(A)(3)(a).

¹ Regrettably, the Applicant's revised application does not present a full view of the new plan from the George Washington Memorial Parkway, choosing instead to show oblique renderings obscured by depictions of seasonal vegetation which serves to minimize the depiction of the full impact of the proposed new structure as seen from the Parkway. See Applicant Slides at 7. Prior Application materials for earlier proposals provided a less obstructed front elevation for BAR consideration.

Board of Architectural Review
City of Alexandria
May 19, 2025
Page 4

As an example of the objectionable design methodology employed in this project, the applicant has repeatedly relied on inappropriate design precedents as points of reference to support its application. These include buildings that are not within the historic districts or subject to BAR review and approval, *See, e.g., Applicant's July 6, 2023 Slide #5* (citing 1240 N. Pitt Street, and 1166 N. Pitt Street); *id. Slide #23* ("Precedent Images Recent Old Town North Developments"); Applicant's March 5, 2025 Slide #10 (same as 2023 Slide #5).

Worse, in its latest presentation, the Applicant has relied on the designs of buildings which directly caused the adoption of the Washington Street Standards and which could not be approved under those Standards once adopted. *See* Peter H. Smith, The George Washington Memorial Parkway—A statement of Policy on Memorial Character by the Old and Historic District Board of Architectural Review, Historic Alexandria Quarterly at 7 (Sum. 1999)(citing 901 N. Washington Street as inappropriate under Washington Street Standards)(copy attached); *compare Applicant May 21st Slide #10*. The repeated invocation of 909 N. Washington Street — built in 1989 before the Washington Street Standards were adopted is another example of designing to the wrong standard. *Id.* Indeed, the existing property under consideration — along with its since removed mansard roof — has been directly cited as a design that would not be approvable under the Washington Street Standards. Smith, *supra* at 7.

The Washington Street Standards make repeated and deliberate reference to the necessity of new construction along the Parkway to draw upon the architectural features of the **historic** properties on Washington Street. And by "historic" the Ordinance is referring first and foremost to the historic buildings George Washington was familiar with: *e.g.*, Christ Church, Lloyd's Row, the Dulaney House, and the Alexandria Academy building which is owned and maintained by HAF. *See* Smith, *supra* at 3. Industrial style buildings of the 21st Century are simply not a reference point that is contemplated under the Ordinance and unfortunately the applicant has drawn extensively on the wrong design vocabulary for this Landmark district.

We do not believe that the application before you satisfies any of the Washington Street Standards required by Alex. Zon. Ord. § 105(A)(3), and the absence of any review of these individual requirements in the application materials or the Staff Reports makes clear that is the case. We therefore urge you to reject this application.

HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA FOUNDATION

Board of Architectural Review
City of Alexandria
May 19, 2025
Page 5

Thank you for your consideration of our statement.

Respectfully submitted,

Historic Alexandria Foundation
By:

/s/ Gail Rothrock

Chair, HAF Advocacy Committee

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cc.

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Attachment

Historic Alexandria Quarterly (Sum. 1999)

Historic Alexandria Quarterly



Summer 1999



Gunston Hall Apartments, 900 block of S. Washington Street.

The George Washington Memorial Parkway-- A Statement of Policy on Memorial Character by the Old and Historic Alexandria District Board of Architectural Review

by
Peter H. Smith

The George Washington Memorial Parkway is treasured by those who use it, as it has been called one of the nation's most beautiful roadways. This road is not without controversy, however, as buildings along the Parkway, specifically in Alexandria, at times have threatened its memorial character.

The most recent controversy involves a proposed office building in the north end of Old Town that has been designed for construction in place of the current Old Colony Inn. The original design elicited negative reaction from local citizenry and the Old and Historic Alexandria District of Board of Architectural Review (BAR). On recommendation from the BAR, the design was scaled back and has received conceptual approval by the BAR. Currently, the

application for the Development Special Use Permit, which is required for the large-scale building, has been recommended for denial by the Planning Commission. City Council makes the final decision regarding the permit application, which is scheduled to be heard by Council on September 18, 1999.

In 1928 the U.S. Congress authorized the creation of a "suitable memorial highway" leading from Memorial Bridge to George Washington's Mount Vernon.¹ The George Washington Memorial Parkway was constructed by the federal government as a memorial to Washington on the bicentennial of his birth in 1932. The authorizing legislation did not set any parameters to the memorial highway other than defining its purpose as a memorial road for visitors to

Mount Vernon. As a result, the practical definition of the roadway was left largely in the hands of the original highway's engineers and landscape architects.

As the road and its attendant supporting facilities were designed, the architects and engineers envisioned a roadway that would provide a pastoral, inspirational, and patriotic automobile route from the nation's capital to Mount Vernon. The goal was to create a scene that would arouse a contemplative mood to encourage reflection on George Washington and his importance and significance to our nation.

The George Washington Memorial Parkway was designed to go along Washington Street, the main street of Alexandria. In order to blend the Washington Street section of the Parkway with the desired character of the entire Parkway project, the federal government, acting through the Bureau of Public Roads, entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the City of Alexandria in 1929.² The agreement provided that the city would undertake certain zoning measures to ensure that building activity along the Parkway would be "of such character and of such types of building as will be in keeping with the dignity, purpose and memorial character of said highway." While this noble goal was agreed to by both the federal government and the City of Alexandria, there has never been a written operating definition of conditions that would apply to a building that protects the memorial character of the Parkway.

This lack of a clear policy has created controversy throughout the years. In an attempt to abate the controversy and decrease the confusion, a firm set of parameters and guidelines have been established by the Old and Historic Alexandria District Board of

Architectural Review. The BAR is the local city body which reviews and approves designs for buildings along Washington Street. This article is based on this organization's Statement of Policy on the definition of keeping with the Parkway's memorial character. This statement is meant to supplement the BAR's adopted *Design Guidelines*³ for Washington Street. The policy statement provides background information for buildings that have been erected on the Parkway since 1932 and derives design principles for proposed new buildings that could be erected on Washington Street in the future.

In the original developmental plans for the Parkway it appears the designers divided the roadway from Memorial Bridge to the entrance of Mount Vernon into three sections: from the bridge to the memorial circle in Alexandria, paved with asphalt; the section that traverses Alexandria as Washington Street, paved with brick; and the southern boundary of Alexandria to Mount Vernon, which was paved in concrete. This construct allowed the designers to respond to the different site and environmental conditions found in each of the three areas.⁴

The Bureau of Public Roads in the Department of Agriculture was responsible for the development of the Parkway, but there was one segment of the sectioned roadway where the agency's engineers and landscape architects were not autonomous, and that was within the boundaries of the constructed City of Alexandria. The alignment of the route passed directly through the City of Alexandria along Washington Street as it does today. The geography posed somewhat of a challenge because Alexandria was primarily an industrial city in the 1930s, and the passage of the Parkway through the urban areas of the city did not befit the goal of a quiet and

reflective parkway. The urban nature of the city was fundamentally at odds with the pastoral setting of the Parkway, and the designers had little influence over the landscape within the Alexandria street grid. The project designers were placated, however, by a few conditions and qualifications that existed.

First, because there were extant buildings in Alexandria that were associated with the life of George Washington, the new Parkway was automatically given an historically accurate character. For example, Christ Church, the Alexandria Academy, the Dulaney House, and the Carlyle House were buildings which Washington knew and/or visited during his lifetime, and which were on or near the proposed parkway. Thus, the physical preservation of structures associated with Washington was of paramount importance to routing the Parkway through the urban fabric of Alexandria, and the designers recognized that.

Second, the designers knew the memorial character of the Parkway in the city would be maintained because future buildings constructed along Washington Street would have an architectural quality that would contribute to the memorial character. The document which proposed this concept was the 1929 Memorandum of Agreement. This agreement gave the federal government a perpetual easement, or control of property, over Washington Street, and was viewed as the chief instrument to guaranteeing that only the construction of "residential or business development of such character and of such types of building as will be in keeping with the dignity, purpose and memorial character" of the Parkway would be permitted.

Third, the distinction between the pastoral and romantic Parkway and the rigid grid of the

Alexandria street system was reconciled by the design of memorial circles at the north and south ends of the Alexandria grid. These circles served as a physical transition to and from the undeveloped pastoral areas of the Parkway to the highly constructed city. In the end, however, only the memorial circle at the north end of the city grid was actually constructed. It is not known why the memorial circle on the south end was not constructed. It is possible that a roundabout at the south end of the city at Hunting Creek may not have been deemed necessary for two reasons: in this area in the 1930s there was more of a gradual and natural transition from the deliberate urban grid to the curvaceous and quiet Parkway because at the time there was no development south of Green Street. Another possibility is the thought that visitors heading northbound, and consequently away from Mt. Vernon, did not have as much of a need to maintain a sense of contemplative reverence since they would be going away from, and not toward, the object of veneration.

Evidence suggests that the City of Alexandria was cooperative with the design and goal of the Parkway, as even before the completion of the Parkway in 1932 city officials had begun routinely referring for comment to the federal government city building permits involving projects which fronted on Washington Street. Initially such permits were referred to the Department of Agriculture. Gradually, the National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (NCPPC) received the permits, and finally the National Park Service was the agency responsible for commenting on the building permits. This confusing process involved these different government organizations as a result of the federal government reorganizing its planning and preservation functions.

After construction of the Parkway was

completed, during the mid to late-30s and into the early 1940s there was a strong burst of residential construction activity in Alexandria and the surrounding metropolitan area, as the federal government launched massive programs to first combat the Great Depression, and later to increase military power with the imminent threat of World War II. Virtually without exception, the participating federal agencies applauded the construction of residential apartment complexes adjacent to the Parkway in Alexandria.

Some of these complexes consisted of extremely large buildings, such as the Mason Hall Apartments on West Abingdon Drive and Hunting Terrace at Washington and South Columbus Streets. Others were smaller and reflected the garden apartment movement, like the Williamsburg Apartments at Washington and Green Streets.



Gunston Hall Apartments, 900 block of S. Washington Street

Despite the variance in size and slight differences in architectural style, all of these complexes shared a common construction vocabulary of a red brick finish with punched window openings. The red brick finish is an important design concept because this style became the ideal architectural characteristic of Washington Street buildings.

While it gave enthusiastic support to the

architectural style of much of the residential construction along Washington Street, the federal government was considerably less sanguine regarding commercial buildings and the advertising signs which had begun to crop up along Washington Street. The National Park Service was so concerned with the commercial character of Washington Street that following World War II officials proposed the construction of an elevated freeway along the waterfront of Alexandria in order to divert Mount Vernon-bound traffic away from Washington Street, which was considered to have lost its semblance of memorial character.



603 S. Washington Street.

Furthermore, the National Park Service considered condemning property along Washington Street that did not meet the desired memorial nature of the Parkway. Either one of these proposals would have been disruptive to the city and would have seriously affected the economic base of Alexandria. In response to these proposals, Alexandria's City Council enacted the third local historic district ordinance in the nation in 1946.⁵ One of its chief purposes was "the preservation of the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Highway" as a means of protecting the city's tax base and also to placate the federal government. While construction proposals along Washington Street still continued to be referred to the National Park Service for comment, it was now the city's Board of Architectural Review that assumed the major burden of protecting the memorial

character of the Parkway after 1946.

At the same time that the Park Service became concerned about the lack of memorial character on Washington Street, the pastoral setting of the Parkway north of Four Mile Run, too, had been inalterably transformed by the federal government with the expansion of what would become National Airport. The airport was constructed immediately adjacent to the ruins of Abingdon, the estate where Eleanor "Nellie" Custis, the adopted daughter of George Washington, was born and which burned to the ground in 1930. The original designers of the Parkway considered Abingdon to be an important component to the sense of reverence along the road to Mount Vernon. During Parkway construction, a scenic overlook was created at the site of the Abingdon ruins that allowed "pilgrims," as Mount Vernon-bound travelers were called, on their way to the "shrine" to view a physical site that pertained to Washington's life. The scenic overlook also provided a sweeping panoramic vista of the broad expanse of the Potomac River to the southeast, which served to remind the viewer of the importance of this waterway to the 18th century world of Washington.

During the 1939 construction of National Airport, however, the Parkway was re-routed slightly to the west, and portions of the original Parkway became a roadway internal to the airport itself. As a result, the important symbolic overlook of Abingdon was abandoned. Today, the foundation has been stabilized and remains in the Ronald Reagan National Airport complex between two new parking garages. The site is accessible to visitors and features interpretive signage, but its significance to the Parkway has been overlooked by airport developers.

Directly to the south of the Abingdon ruins,

the Bureau of Public Roads, the very agency responsible for the design and construction of the Parkway, constructed an office and road testing facility on a 54 acre site in 1936. This facility consisted of a U-shaped collection of Georgian Revival style brick buildings that strongly resembled a college campus. At that time, the Parkway passed immediately to the east of the facility on the side closest to the Potomac River. A glimpse of the facility drew comparisons to the reconstructed Governor's Palace at Colonial Williamsburg or the Wren Building at the College of William and Mary. By designing this facility, the Bureau of Public Roads clearly established the preferred theme for the architectural treatment of new construction along the Parkway--buildings of the aesthetically pleasing Georgian Revival style. Indeed, the design of the complex was approved by the Commission of Fine Arts, which praised its architectural treatment.

When the airport was constructed a few years later and the Parkway relocated westward, the orientation of the complex lost its significance because a motorist's view was now of the backs of the buildings, and the colonial flavor of the facility could not be viewed and appreciated. The complex is still extant today, and it serves as a maintenance support facility for Ronald Reagan National Airport. Its original context has been lost completely, and the facility is located amidst the airport surface parking lots and garages.

Moving the Parkway westward during airport construction counteracted an important design element of the original Parkway. One of the principal reasons of keeping the original Parkway alignment eastward and nearer the River from a design standpoint was to avoid the visual intrusion of the Potomac Yard, a railroad classification facility constructed in 1906 which stretched from the area of the

Fourteenth Street Bridge (or Long Bridge) well into the City of Alexandria. By the time the Parkway's construction was proposed, Potomac Yard was reportedly the largest railroad classification facility in the country.⁶ The rail yard created not only a visual blight but also an audible intrusion for travelers in their pre-air conditioning automobiles, and the original designers proposed a thick growth of trees on the west side of the Parkway in an attempt to mitigate these negative effects. Thus, the construction of the airport disrupted much of the original design intention of the Parkway when the roadway had to be relocated westward of its original alignment and immediately adjacent to Potomac Yard.

The memorial character of the Parkway has been substantially eroded in other sections as well, specifically to the north of Alexandria, with the construction of highway bridges, office buildings, and parking garages, many of which were built by and for federal government agencies in the last 20 years. For example, the highway bridges that carry the Fourteenth Street Bridge and I-395 over the Parkway do not in any way resonate with the memorial character of the roadway; the structures of METRO immediately adjacent to the Parkway likewise make no concession to the memorial landscape of the Parkway nor to the natural palette of materials used for structures along the Parkway; similarly, Crystal City, the massive office and residential complex adjacent to the Parkway and directly west of the airport, thwarts any contemplative nature. In addition, the prefabricated metal industrial buildings at the maintenance facility constructed by the National Park Service, which is adjacent to the Parkway and directly west of the airport, can hardly be deemed compatible with the memorial character of the Parkway.

As evidenced by the aforementioned

government sponsored projects, the interest of the federal government in protecting the Parkway has waxed and waned since the 1929 agreement with Alexandria. Its interest has often been tied to the personal predilections of the various administrators of the government agencies charged with enforcing the agreement. By contrast, the City of Alexandria has generally proved consistent in its attempts to maintain the vision of a designated memorial Parkway along one of its principal commercial arteries. Through both governmental action and the intense scrutiny of citizen activists, there has been a strong preference for buildings designed in a Colonial Revival style. While this style has been interpreted loosely at times, it normally consists of constructed red brick buildings with doorways framed by pediment surrounds,



First Union at 330 N. Washington Street.

multi-light punched wood windows, and often wood rooftop cupolas.

There have been, however, some noticeable lapses in the city's original embrace of the 1929 agreement, most of which are readily visible at the south end of the Parkway in Alexandria. Gerrymandering of the boundaries of the historic district in 1970

permitted the construction of the Humro office buildings in the 1100 block of South Washington Street (built in 1983), as well as the Porto Vecchio complex (1979). Because both projects were constructed outside the historic district, the Board of Architectural Review did not have jurisdiction to review the designs. Following the construction of these buildings, the boundaries of the historic district were returned to their former points in 1984 and now once more encompass the land where these structures exist. Both the current Zoning Ordinance and the *Design Guidelines* of the Board of Architectural Review would preclude their approval if these designs were proposed today.

There are a number of other buildings on Washington Street which were approved in the past by the Board of Architectural Review that today are considered to detract from the memorial character of the Parkway. These buildings include: the Harris Building at 1201 East Abingdon Drive, which has ribbon windows, an overly large mansard penthouse, and surface parking exiting directly onto the Parkway; the Jefferson Building at 901 North Washington Street, the only overtly modernistic building fronting on Washington Street;



Jefferson Building at 901 N. Washington Street.

and the United Fruit and Vegetable Growers building at 727 North Washington Street with

its ground floor interior parking exiting directly onto Washington Street. These buildings were approved because the BAR was not using the protective guidelines that are used today.

In the attempt to ensure that the memorial character of the Parkway is perpetuated, the City of Alexandria's Zoning Ordinance has mandated design standards for the construction of new buildings on Washington Street since 1990. These standards are even stricter than those applied elsewhere in the historic district. In the last several years there have been a number of new buildings constructed on Washington Street, and all have met the high design standards required by the Zoning Ordinance and the *Design Guidelines*.

Some building designs that have not been approved by the Board of Architectural Review because its members did not think they contributed to the memorial character of the Parkway have been built anyway due to approval by City Council on appeal of the Board decision. This was the case with the Atrium Building at 215 South Washington Street, which uses Colonial Revival detailing on a gargantuan scale coupled with a two story mansard roof. Another example is the building at 300 North Washington Street, which consists of seven stories in height and visually overwhelms its section of the street. Its approval was the result of ineffective height restrictions in the Zoning Ordinance. Since its approval and construction, the height limit along all of Washington Street has been considerably reduced to a maximum height of 50 feet, or approximately four stories.

This review of the history of the George Washington Memorial Parkway on Washington Street shows there is no single standard of what constitutes the Parkway's

memorial character. However, several principles can be derived from original goals and the styles and guidelines that have worked in the past, which should be used as aids and examples for defining memorial character of the Parkway as it passes along Washington Street:

1. Preservation of Historic Properties

Of utmost importance is the physical preservation of all properties actually associated with the life of George Washington or his family. This principal is in concert with the City of Alexandria's goal to preserve historic and architecturally important buildings along Washington Street. Consequently, the preservation and interpretation of these buildings binds together the purpose of the Parkway with Washington Street.

2. The Memory Test

The principal overriding design objective for new construction on Washington Street is to create buildings which are not overt visual intrusions on the established cityscape. Such buildings must be predominately background buildings that do not seek to make a strong impact on the Washington Street vista. This includes ensuring that these buildings are not visually jarring in scale, mass, materials, or color. The intention of the memory test lies in the concept that by the time one traverses the Parkway and enters Mount Vernon, the principal memory of buildings in Alexandria will be of the surviving historic buildings associated with Washington and not of modern constructs.

3. Red Brick with Punched Windows

As demonstrated by this article, due to the lack of a clear policy in the past there is no single architectural building style that is mandated for Washington Street in order to maintain the memorial character of the

Parkway. There are highly regarded examples of historic architectural merit that range from late 18th-century wood frame Federal style townhouses to high style center hall Georgian buildings to a limestone Art Deco style office building constructed in 1930. The designs of these buildings vary, and as a result it should be noted that mere replication of Federal or Georgian style buildings on an exaggerated scale for late 20th-century use is not normally considered to contribute to the architectural patrimony of Washington Street. There should be serious design consideration for Washington Street buildings so that all proposed buildings are not automatically Federal style replicas.

The most common building type on Washington Street, and therefore the one most likely to meet the memory test described in the second principal, is a building which visually expresses the historic red brick in a traditional load bearing manner. In other words, the red brick must be of structural masonry construction that appears to actually bear the load or weight of the building. On Washington Street windows for this building type grew from small Georgian style multi-pane sashes to proportionally larger openings.



700 S. Washington Street.

This trend evolved as improvements were made in glazing technology, and it is reflected in window openings found in buildings of the

Chicago School or Beaux Arts style. In each instance the windows are surrounded by masonry and appear to be "punched" through a solid load bearing masonry wall. By contrast, ribbon windows (a continuous horizontal band of windows) and glass curtain walls that are found on modern office buildings are not appropriate treatments along Washington Street.

The historical treatment of building facades along Washington Street has established a materials palette largely consisting of red brick with surface modulation that includes vertically punched windows which are proportionally appropriate. These traditional building treatments, in addition to a quietude of facade treatment rather than an exuberance of surface ornamentation, give a sense of timeless solidity to construction along the Parkway and a sense of connection to the building materials of Washington's lifetime. In this way, the memorial character of the Parkway can best be maintained, which, as most will agree, is a unique and important historical gift from Alexandria to its residents and visitors.

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About the Author

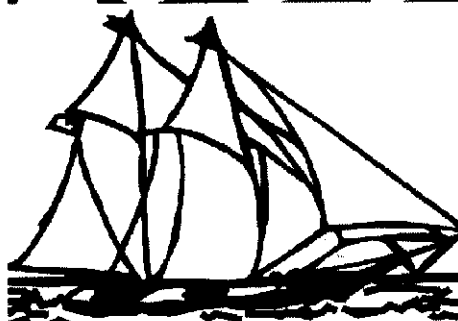
Peter H. Smith is the Principal Staff for the Boards of Architectural Review in the Department of Planning and Zoning. He has a Ph.D. in American Studies from George Washington University. Mr. Smith has written previously for the *Historic Alexandria Quarterly*.

This issue of the Historic Alexandria is sponsored Mr. and Mrs. Oscar P. Ryder

End Notes

All photographs are courtesy of the Department of Planning and Zoning.

1. United States Congress, May 23, 1928, "An Act to authorize and direct the survey, construction and maintenance of a memorial highway to connect Mount Vernon, in the State of Virginia, with the Arlington Memorial Bridge across the Potomac River at Washington."
2. Memorandum of Agreement between City Council of the City of Alexandria and the United States of America, represented by the Secretary of Agriculture, June 20, 1929, Council Chamber, City Hall.
3. City of Alexandria Design Guidelines, Chapter 7 "Washington Street Guidelines," pp 1-10. Adopted by the Boards of Architectural Review, May 25, 1993.
4. EDAW, Inc. for the National Park Service, Cultural Landscape Report, Mount Vernon Memorial Highway, 8 vols., ca. 1985.
5. Ordinance No. 470 to amend Chapter 28, of The Code of the City of Alexandria, Virginia. Sec. 33 "Certificate of appropriateness; its purpose," August 13, 1946.
6. Cox, Al, Historic Structure Report, An Analysis of the Alexandria Union Station, City of Alexandria, Department of Transportation and Environmental Services, 1995, p. 25.



Previous Issues of the
Historic Alexandria Quarterly:

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Alexandria's 250th Anniversary Calendar of Events

August, 1999

August 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29

Mount Vernon Chamber Series. Free. The Lyceum. 3:00 pm.
703/838-4994, 703/799-8229.

August 2 and 9

Waterfront Park Concerts. Free. Waterfront Park. 7:00 pm.
703/883-4686.

August 4, 11 and 18

Lunch Bunch Concerts. Free. Market Square. 12:15 pm.
703/883-4686.

August 4

through September 6

The Art League's "The American Landscape Show." Opening reception on August 8. The Art League Gallery, Torpedo Factory Art Center. 703/683-1780.

August 5, 12 and 19

Music at Twilight Concerts. Free. Fort Ward Park. 7:00 pm.
703/883-4686.

August 6

through September 28

"George Washington: Profile of a Patriot." New exhibit featuring 19th-century prints of Washington, including *Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Emanuel Leutze and other famous, stirring images of the nation's first President. Traveling exhibit from the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. The Lyceum. 703/799-8229.

August 6 and 20

Colonial Games. Children are invited to learn how to play 18th century games. Suggested donation of \$1 per child. Carlyle House. 10:00 am-Noon. 703/549-2997.

August 6 and 20

Alexandria Citizens Band Concert. Free. Market Square. 7:30 pm. 703/838-4844, 703/883-4686.

August 7

The Friendship Firehouse Festival. Displays and demonstrations on fire safety and rescue operations. Children will receive balloons, fire hats and birthday cake. Free. The Friendship Firehouse. 10:00 am-3:00 pm. 703/838-3814, 703/883-4686.

August 7

Alexandria Archaeology "Dig Days." Help archaeologists excavate a site. \$5 per person. Reservations required. 10:00 am and 1:30 pm. 703/838-4399.

August 8

Production of "1776," benefit event for the Alexandria 250th Anniversary Celebration. \$20 per person. Little Theatre of Alexandria, 600 Wolfe Street. 8:00 pm. 703/838-4554.

August 11

Alexandria 250th Anniversary Music Series. Come dance the Lindy! Second Story, Worldbeat, blues and swing music. Free. Landmark Mall Food Court. 6:00 pm-9:00 pm. 703/941-2582.

August 13

Alexandria Harmonizers Concert. Free. Market Square. 7:30 pm. 703/838-4844, 703/883-4686.

August 14

Irish Festival. Music, dancing, vendors and food. Free. Waterfront Park. Noon-6:00 pm. 703/838-4844.

August 21

Victorian Tea. 19th-century parlor games and tea for young ladies and their dolls. \$20. The Lyceum. 2:00 pm. 703/838-4994.

August 21

American Indian Festival. Music, dancing, vendors and food. Free admission. Market Square. Noon-6:00 pm. 703/838-4844, 703/883-4686.

August 21

Library Card Protest Commemorative. On August 21, 1939, five young African-American men from Alexandria staged a peaceful protest for library cards in the city's Queen Street (Barrett) Library. Honor the courage of these young men on the 60th anniversary of this protest which led the City to build the Robert Robinson Library for African-American citizens in 1940. Alexandria Black History Resource Center. 2:00 pm. 703/838-4356.

August 24

through September 19

"WIRED" exhibit. Potomac Craftsmen Gallery, Torpedo Factory Art Center. 703/548-0935.

August 29

through September 25

"250 Years of Alexandria Faces: Historic and Contemporary Portraits." Free. The Athenaeum, 201 Prince Street. Wed-Fri, 11:00 am-3:00 pm; Sat, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm; Sun, 1:00 pm-4:00 pm. 703/548-0035.

Office of Historic Alexandria

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