

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 15, 2025

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE
BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

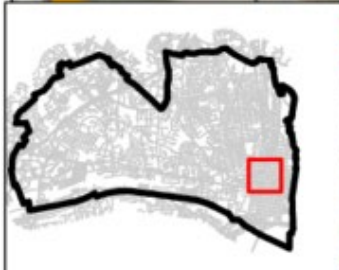
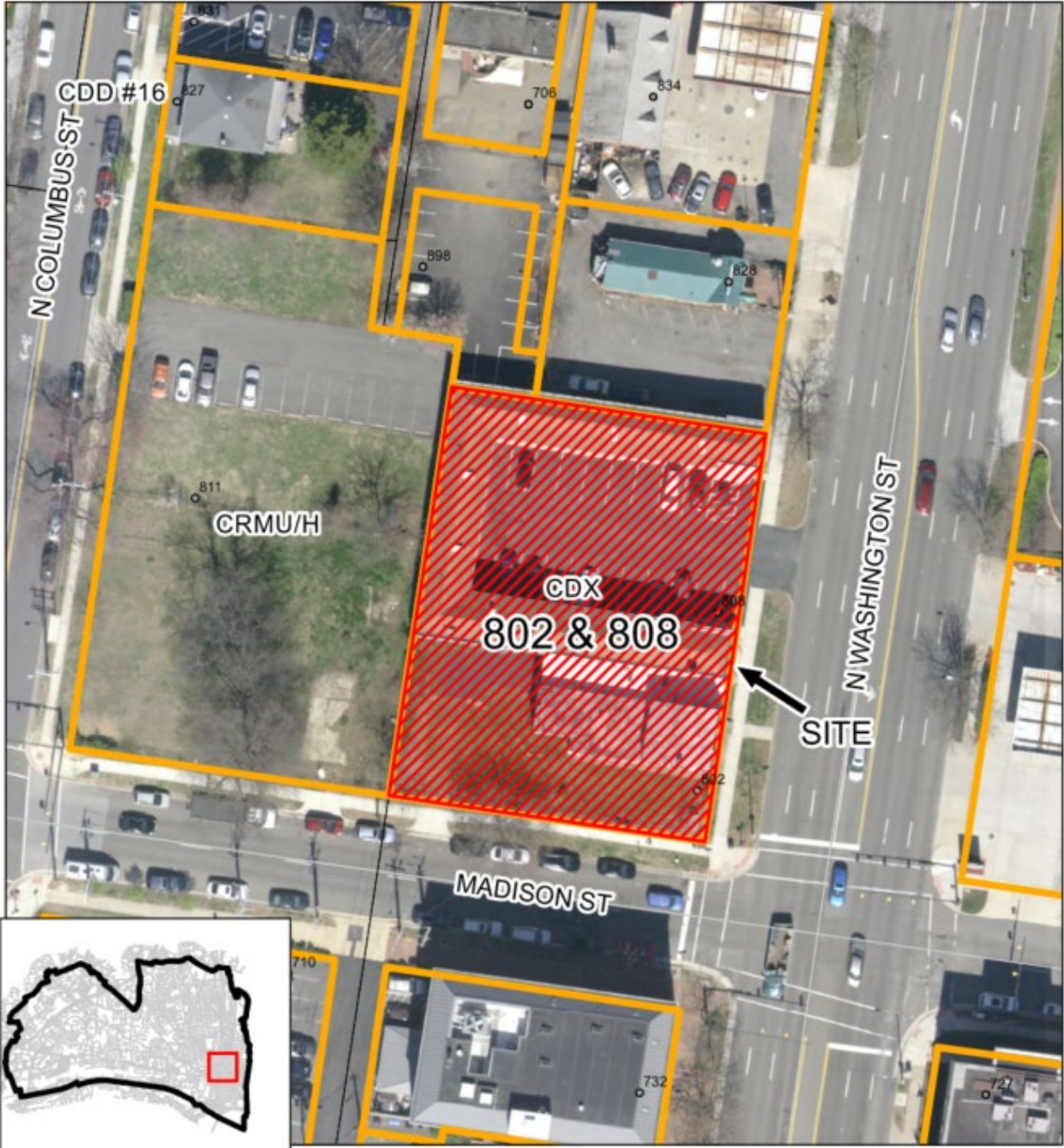
FROM: HISTORIC PRESERVATION STAFF

SUBJECT: CONCEPT REVIEW OF 802-808 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET
BAR CASE # 2024-00460

I. SUMMARY

The applicant is requesting BAR Concept Review for the development of the property at 802-808 North Washington Street into a multi-unit residential building.

The Concept Review Policy was adopted in May 2001 and amended and restated in 2016 (attached). Concept Review is an optional, informal process at the beginning of a Development Special Use Permit (DSUP) application whereby the BAR provides the applicant, staff, Planning Commission, and City Council with comments relating to the overall appropriateness of a project's height, scale, mass, and general architectural character. These comments are not binding on the BAR or the applicant. The Board takes no formal action at the Concept Review stage but will provide comments and may endorse the direction of a project's design by a straw vote. If the Board believes that a building height or mass, or area proposed for construction is not appropriate and would not be supported in the future, the applicant and staff should be advised as soon as possible. This early step in the development review process is intended to minimize future architectural design conflicts between what is shown to the community and City Council during the DSUP approval and what the Board later finds architecturally appropriate under the criteria in Chapter 10 of the Zoning Ordinance and the BAR's adopted *Design Guidelines*.



BAR#2024-00460
802 & 808 N Washington Street



0 25 50 100 Feet

II. SITE CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Site Context

The project site is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of North Washington Street and Madison Street. The new construction portion of the building fronts onto North Washington Street with the historic townhome located at the south end of the site. The west elevation of the building is visible from Montgomery Street through the courtyard located between this building and the previously approved project at 805 North Columbus Street. The north elevation of the building is visible from North Washington Street, meaning that all sides of the building are visible from a public right of way.

History

The three-story Second Empire style brick townhouse located at 802 North Washington Street was originally constructed by the McCauley family siblings in **1901** as a freestanding dwelling. The original owners had purchased several adjacent lots. The building features dark-red hard-fired brick with thin “butter” joints and a polychrome slate clad mansard roof. The south elevation features an original two-story, open wood porch along the length of the rear ell. The BAR approved a Permit to Demolish for relocation of this historic building on June 17, 2015 (BAR Case #2015-00153).

The remainder of the project site was dominated by the Towne Motel, located at 808 North Washington Street. The motel was a two-story brick faced structure in a U-shape plan around a central parking area. The motel consisted of 26 units and a small office and was constructed in the Colonial Revival style conveyed by the multi-paned windows, hipped roof, two story loggia, and small dormer vents. The motel was designed by respected local architect Joseph Saunders and constructed circa 1954-1955. The BAR approved a Permit to Demolish for the existing motel on June 17, 2015 (BAR Case #2015-00153).

On June 21, 2017, the BAR approved the Certificate of Appropriateness (BAR 2017-00099) for the redevelopment of this site into a new hotel including the relocation of the historic townhome at the southern end of the site. Pursuant to these approvals, the Towne Motel was razed and the townhome relocated to another portion of the site. Construction began on the new hotel with below grade construction nearly completed and the townhome returned to its final location. Issues with the project forced construction to stop at that point and since that time no progress has been made on the partially completed project.

III. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

A new project team is requesting a Concept Review for a proposal to begin construction on the site again with a new design for a multi-unit residential development project in place of the previously approved hotel use. As much of the below grade work has been completed, the building envelope for the new proposal will be largely the same as the previously proposed design, however a new design for the building is now being proposed. It should be noted that the proposed multi-family building for this site is being proposed in the context of the previously approved and currently under construction multi-unit development immediately to the west of the project site at 805 North Columbus Street.

IV. STAFF ANALYSIS

As a reminder, the BAR's purview in this concept review work session is limited to endorsing the project and providing feedback on its height, scale, mass, and general architectural character. The applicant will ultimately return to the Board for approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for architectural details, finishes, and colors after City Council approval of the DSUP.

The proposed design is an asymmetrical composition of a five-story, three bay wide masonry mass separated from a four-story, five bay wide masonry mass by a metal panel clad vertical central section (Figure 1). This metal clad section extends above the four-story section to create an "L" shaped element. At the base of the central section is located the main building entrance, clearly denoted by a projecting metal canopy and full height glass storefront. As a sort of hyphen between the new construction and the historic townhouse to remain, the design includes a three-story metal clad section with recessed balconies and glass railings. At the rear of these balconies are located a full height glazed wall.

The five-story masonry massing is composed of the classic base-middle-top sections with a horizontal band between the first and second floor windows. The windows at the second, third, and fourth floors are gathered into three vertical bays. The middle bay features projecting balconies with a custom decorative metal handrail and full height glass doors. A ground floor entry stoop is included in this middle bay as well. Flanking this middle bay are groupings of two windows inside a recessed brick section. As shown in the submission materials, this brick recess will be highly detailed, creating a distinct decorative brick section that is reminiscent of historic brick detailing while remaining clearly modern. The top section of this massing includes three two window groupings above a horizontal band and a decorative cornice. While the windows in this area align with the windows below, they lack the brick recess, giving them more of a vertical proportion that is consistent with upper-level windows on historic structures.

The four-story masonry massing uses much of the same language as the five-story section but locates the cornice above the fourth floor windows. The second, third, and fourth floor windows are similarly gathered into two bay sections with projecting balconies and ground floor entry stoops at the second and fourth bay.

The metal clad "L" shaped section utilizes a window pattern that is derived from the window configuration on the lower levels. Instead of the double hung windows with masonry pier found in the masonry sections, the windows in this area are in three parts with the center section aligned with the masonry piers below.

The south elevation of the proposed building facing Madison Street is simple, featuring a series of aligned punched windows similar in size to those facing Washington Street. The west elevation of the building faces a courtyard between this building and the multi-unit residential building at 805 N Columbus Street (Figure 2). The southern end of this elevation will be the most visible section of this elevation because of its proximity to Madison Street. This rear elevation is a simpler composition featuring stacked projecting balconies and punched windows. The southernmost section of this elevation will include a brick clad portion, while the remainder will be clad in cement panel boards.



Figure 1: View of Washington Street facing elevation



Figure 2: View of south and west elevation

Under both the previously approved design, there was little modification to the historic townhome proposed with the exception of the connection to the north elevation. Under the current proposal the applicant is proposing the introduction of a roof deck to the rear ell at the historic townhome. This roof deck is shown on the submitted plans (Figure 3) but not on the renderings so it is unclear how it will be constructed. Staff recommends that the applicant return with details showing how the roof deck will be integrated into the historic building for feedback from the BAR.

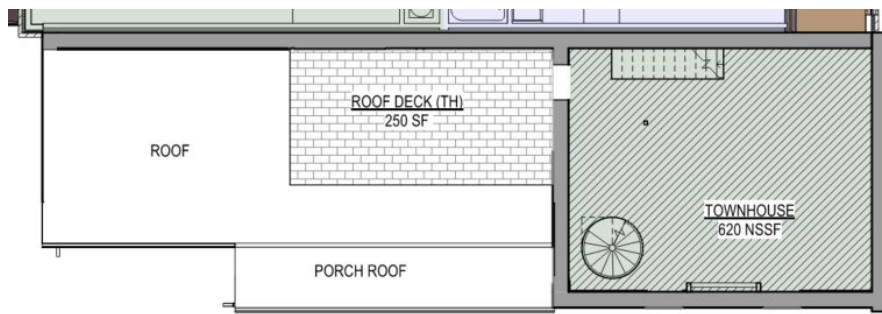


Figure 3: Plan showing proposed roof deck at historic townhome

Washington Street Standards

Standards to Consider for a Certificate of Appropriateness on Washington Street

In addition to the general BAR standards outlined in section 10-105 of the Zoning Ordinance, and the Board's *Design Guidelines*, the Board must also find that the Additional Standards for Washington Street are met. A project located on Washington Street is subject to a higher level of scrutiny and design to ensure that the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway is protected and maintained as required in the City's 1929 agreement with the federal government.

Staff's comments as to how the Standards are satisfied or need further study are found below each Standard.

Washington Street Standards

Alexandria Zoning Ordinance Sec. 10-105(A)(3): Additional standards—Washington Street.

(a) In addition to the standards set forth in section 10-105(A)(2), the following standards shall apply to the construction of new buildings and structures and to the construction of additions to buildings or structures on lots fronting on both sides of Washington Street from the southern city limit line north to the northern city limit line:

(1) Construction shall be compatible with and similar to the traditional building character, particularly including mass, scale, design and style, found on Washington Street on commercial or residential buildings of historic architectural merit.

i. Elements of design consistent with historic buildings which are found on the street shall be emphasized.

The design derives inspiration from other large scale historic buildings on Washington Street for its design, including the historic George Mason Hotel, now the Hotel Heron. The defined base-middle-top and grouping of windows into bays displayed in the proposed design is reminiscent of these buildings. Also, the brick detailing and custom metalwork are similar to details found throughout the historic district.

ii. New buildings and additions to existing buildings shall not, by their style, size, location or other characteristics, detract from, overwhelm, or otherwise intrude upon historic buildings which are found on the street.

The breakdown of the new portion of the building into an asymmetrical composition prevents it from overwhelming the historic fabric that remains. The proposed design for the project will allow the historic townhouse to remain visually prominent. Further, the project includes rehabilitating and reusing the historic townhouse which has been vacant and boarded up for many years. The design includes a hyphen between the new construction and the historic townhouse to allow it to continue to be read separately from the new construction. Staff finds that this hyphen is somewhat visually heavy and encourages the applicant to explore ways in which it could be less prominent.

iii. The design of new buildings and additions to existing buildings shall be complementary to historic buildings which are found on the street.

The use of a high level of brick detailing and the delineation of a clearly defined base-middle-top are consistent with buildings on Washington Street and throughout the historic district. Staff suggests that the applicant continue to refine the articulation of the west elevation as it is visible from Madison Street, so that while it may be simpler than the Washington Street facing elevation, it is equally compatible with nearby historic buildings.

- iv. *The massing of new buildings or additions to existing buildings adjacent to historic buildings which are found on the street shall closely reflect and be proportional to the massing of the adjacent historic buildings.*

The proposed mass does not overwhelm the existing historic townhouse and the proposed massing for the new construction portion of the building is consistent with the nearby historic fabric. The Board should note that in this area of North Washington Street there is little remaining historic fabric in place.

- v. *New buildings and additions to existing buildings which are larger than historic buildings which are found on the street shall be designed to look separate and shall not give the impression of collectively being more massive than such historic buildings. This design shall be accomplished through differing historic architectural designs, facades, setbacks, roof lines and styles. Buildings should appear from the public right-of-way to have a footprint no larger than 100 feet by 80 feet. For larger projects, it is desirable that the historic pattern of mid-block alleys be preserved or replicated.*

While the proposed building is larger than many typical historic buildings, the breakdown of the massing gives the impression of a building that is comfortably integrated into its surroundings. Rather than attempting to create the impression of completely separate buildings, the proposed design is clearly a single building integrated into the streetscape.

- vi. *Applications for projects over 3,000 square feet, or for projects located within 66 feet of land used or zoned for residential uses, shall include a building massing study. Such study shall include all existing and proposed buildings and building additions in the six block area as follows: the block face containing the project, the block face opposite, the two adjacent block faces to the north and the two adjacent block faces to the south.*

The submission includes massing studies showing the other larger buildings on the surrounding blocks of North Washington Street.

- vii. *The massing and proportions of new buildings or additions to existing buildings designed in an historic style found elsewhere in along Washington Street shall be consistent with the massing and proportions of that style.*

The breakdown of the massing into components that do not imitate historic buildings but reduce the overall impression of the size of the building is consistent with other large-scale buildings along Washington Street. The overall proportions of the scheme are appropriate.

- viii. *New or untried approaches to design which result in new buildings or additions to existing buildings that have no historical basis in Alexandria or that are not consistent with an historic style in scale, massing and detailing, are not appropriate.*

The proposed design uses classical elements such as groupings of windows into bays, the creation of a strong base-middle-top, and refined brick detailing that are found throughout the historic district. The use of a hyphen to connect between historic and modern portions of buildings is found elsewhere in the district and is similarly used here. While the use of metal panels is not typically found in the historic district, their use in this application will help to separate the two more traditional masses in a way which is not unusual.

- (2) *Facades of a building generally shall express the 20- to 40-foot bay width typically found on early 19th century commercial buildings characteristic of the Old and Historic Alexandria District, or the 15- to 20-foot bay width typically found on townhouses characteristic of the Old and Historic Alexandria District. Techniques to express such typical bay width shall include changes in material, articulation of the wall surfaces, changes in fenestration patterns, varying roof heights, and physical breaks, vertical as well as horizontal, within the massing.*

The widths of the building components and the individual bays is consistent with those found on buildings throughout the historic district.

- (3) *Building materials characteristic of buildings having historic architectural merit within the district shall be utilized. The texture, tone and color of such materials shall display a level of variety, quality and richness at least equal to that found abundantly in the historic setting.*

The use of a highly detailed brick on the proposed design is consistent with buildings in the historic district. The applicant is proposing two alternate color options for the building. While staff does not have a preference for either of these options, staff recommends that as the design progresses, the applicant use materials with an inherent texture and color that are compatible with nearby buildings.

- (4) *Construction shall reflect the traditional fenestration patterns found within the Old and Historic Alexandria District. Traditional solid-void relationships exhibited within the district's streetscapes (i.e., ratio of window and door openings to solid wall) shall be used in building facades, including first floor facades.*

The proposed fenestration generally utilizes traditional solid-void relationships within a load-bearing masonry construction form. The masonry sections clearly display the hierarchy of wall openings found in historic buildings.

- (5) *Construction shall display a level of ornamentation, detail and use of quality materials consistent with buildings having historic architectural merit found within the district. In*

replicative building construction (i.e., masonry bearing wall by a veneer system), the proper thicknesses of materials shall be expressed particularly through the use of sufficient reveals around wall openings.

High-quality materials and appropriate detailing, consistent with materials and details found on buildings of architectural merit, are used throughout the project.

- (b) No fewer than 45 days prior to filing an application for a certificate of appropriateness, an applicant who proposes construction which is subject to this section 10-105(A)(3), shall meet with the director to discuss the application of these standards to the proposed development; provided, that this requirement for a preapplication conference shall apply only to the construction of 10,000 or more square feet of gross building area, including but not limited to the area in any above-ground parking structure.*
- (c) No application for a certificate of appropriateness which is subject to this section 10-105(A)(3) shall be approved by the Old and Historic Alexandria District board of architectural review, unless it makes a written finding that the proposed construction complies with the standards in section 10-105(A)(3)(a).*
- (d) The director may appeal to city council a decision of the Old and Historic Alexandria District board of architectural review granting or denying an application for a certificate of appropriateness subject to this section 10-105(A)(3), which right of appeal shall be in addition to any other appeal provided by law.*
- (e) The standards set out in section 10-105(A)(3)(a) shall also apply in any proceedings before any other governmental or advisory board, commission or agency of the city relating to the use, development or redevelopment of land, buildings or structures within the area subject to this section 10-105(A)(3).*
- (f) To the extent that any other provisions of this ordinance are inconsistent with the provisions of this section 10-105(A)(3), the provisions of this section shall be controlling.*
- (g) The director shall adopt regulations and guidelines pertaining to the submission, review and approval or disapproval of applications subject to this section 10-105(A)(3).*
- (h) Any building or addition to an existing building which fails to comply with the provisions of this paragraph shall be presumed to be incompatible with the historic district and Washington Street standards, and the applicant shall have the burden of overcoming such presumption by clear and convincing evidence.*
- (i) The applicant for a special use permit for an increase in density above that permitted by right shall have the burden of proving that the proposed building or addition to an existing building provides clearly demonstrable benefits to the historic character of Washington Street, and, by virtue of the project's uses, architecture and site layout and design, materially advances the pedestrian-friendly environment along Washington Street.*

V. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds that the proposed design is compatible with the standards set forth in the Zoning Ordinance for the historic district and for the more restrictive requirements for buildings facing Washington Street. The height and scale of the proposed design is consistent with the previously proposed design for this site and as such staff finds them to be appropriate for this portion of North Washington Street. Regarding the general architectural character, staff finds that the proposed breakdown of the massing into two separate brick sections separated by a more simple metal panel

clad hyphen to be an appropriate response to the challenges of the site and to the architectural character of Washington Street.

As the design progresses the applicant should continue to develop the design with some of the following factors:

- The hyphen connecting the new portion to the historic townhome is heavier than in previous designs and does not seem to relate to the townhome. The applicant should explore options for this portion of the building.
- Staff encourages the use of ground floor unit entries to enliven the sidewalk. The applicant should continue to develop these elements with a view towards reflecting similar components found in the historic district.
- The submission includes a high level of articulation in the brick detailing. The applicant should continue to develop the detailing of the metal-clad portions of the building.
- The visibility of the west elevation is limited because of the oblique angle from which it is viewed, but staff recommends that the applicant continue to explore ways in which this area can be as visually interesting as other areas while still remaining a secondary elevation.

Staff recommends that the BAR endorse the proposed design for height, mass, scale, and general architectural character and ask the applicant to continue to develop the details for the design in anticipation of the return to the BAR for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

STAFF

William Conkey, AIA, Historic Preservation Architect

Tony LaColla, AICP, Land Use Services Division Chief, Planning & Zoning

VII. ATTACHMENTS

BAR Concept Review Submission