

# City of Alexandria, Virginia

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** JANUARY 18, 2013

**TO:** CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE  
PARKER-GRAY DISTRICT BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

**FROM:** AL COX, FAIA, HISTORIC PRESERVATION MANAGER

**SUBJECT:** CONCEPT REVIEW OF 813 PRINCESS STREET, BAR CASE #2012-0415

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### **I. SUMMARY**

#### Concept Review

The material now before the Board is part of a BAR *Concept Review* for the three unit townhouse project proposed at the parcel now addressed as 813 Princess Street. The Concept Review Policy was adopted by the two Boards of Architectural review in May 2000 (attached). Concept Review is an informal process at the beginning of a Development Special Use Permit (DSUP) application whereby the BAR provides the applicant, staff, the Planning Commission and the City Council with comments relating to the overall appropriateness of a project's height, scale, mass and general architectural character. The Board takes no formal action at the Concept Review stage but if, for instance, the Board believes that a building height or material is not appropriate and would not be supported in the future, the applicant and staff need to know that 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*.

The drawings in the applicant's present package have significantly more detail than is typical for a Concept Review and this amount of detail is more commonly what is provided for the BAR's initial review of a Certificate of Appropriateness application. Therefore, it is important for the Board to express any concerns and to provide general design comments now but the applicant must remember that the details, materials, textures and colors, etc. are subject to further architectural refinements when the Board formally reviews the Certificate of Appropriateness following City Council approval of the DSUP.

#### Standards to Consider for a Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff has included below the scope and standards described in the Zoning Ordinance which must be considered by the Parker-Gray Board during an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness for new construction. However, these are for reference only and are not intended to bind the Board during the Concept Review phase.

(1) *Scope of review.* The Parker-Gray District board of architectural review or the city council on appeal shall limit its review to exterior features subject to public view and shall determine the compatibility of proposed construction, reconstruction, alteration, restoration of buildings or structures within the Parker-Gray District based upon compatibility with other buildings or structures on the same block face, the block face across the public street, or the immediate surrounding area within the district.

(2) *Standards.* The board of architectural review, or the city council on appeal, shall consider the following in passing upon the appropriateness of proposals within the Parker-Gray District:

- (a) For new buildings and additions to existing buildings:
  - (1) Height of the roofline along the street or public way;
  - (2) Scale and mass of the building on the site;
  - (3) Placement of the building on the site;
  - (4) Material, texture and color;
  - (5) Architectural style where there is a predominant style on the block face; and
  - (6) Architectural details, including signs, subject to public view from the public street or public way.

During Concept Review, only items (2)(a) 1, 2, 3, and 5 are pertinent. Items 4 and 6 regarding details, materials and color will be discussed more fully following DSUP approval.

### **III. STAFF ANALYSIS**

#### *Initial Proposal and Site Context*

The applicant has been meeting with Planning & Zoning staff for several months. The original submission featured several high-style, five bay, center hall, attached Georgian townhouses. This building form is historically used for taverns in Alexandria, such as Gadsby's Tavern, and staff believed that this prototype was not architecturally appropriate for this portion of Old Town. The applicant has, therefore, responded with a carefully balanced design composition that reflects a range of historic architectural styles found in the immediate neighborhood. The site is located within the Parker-Gray District but is also within a few blocks of the Old and Historic Alexandria District and there is no visually distinguishable boundary between the two districts. The applicant, therefore, looked east to the existing historic houses along North Columbus Street, south to Cameron Street and along North Alfred Street for inspiration. Staff also noted that the context of this particular site allowed for some flexibility since the immediate context features a range of building types (townhouses, freestanding houses and commercial buildings), a range of architectural styles (1950s, brick townhouses, late Victorian townhouses, 1970s garage-front townhouses and a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century commercial building), and a range of heights and scales, from one-story to three stories in height. In addition, two adjacent corners currently contain parking lots that serve commercial properties on North Washington Street and today would not be permitted by the zoning ordinance. Like the present application, it is expected that one of these other parking lots may be similarly redeveloped in the near future.

Current Proposal

The current submission is for three townhouse units fronting on North Alfred Street, each with a different architectural vocabulary based on historic styles found throughout the neighborhood. The northernmost townhouse is a three-bay, three-story, side gable, brick townhouse in a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Greek Revival style. The middle townhouse has two main blocks and reads as a two-and-one-half-story late 19<sup>th</sup> century Richardson Romanesque townhouse with a recessed arched entry and arched windows. The southern townhouse at the corner of North Alfred and is a two-story, beige brick unit with a pronounced rooftop balustrade in an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Beaux-Arts style and deftly turns the corner onto Princess Street with a similarly detailed fences and balconies.

The BAR's *Design Guidelines* only require that new buildings be compatible with nearby buildings of historic merit and do not mandate the use of historic styles for new construction but do state that where new buildings recall historic buildings, that the architectural details used throughout the building should be consistent with that same style and that the building should not be a slavish replica of any particular building in the district. While the present proposal is very well studied and the stylistic details are consistent on each, these buildings are a composite of others in the neighborhood and do not appear to copy any specific house.

Analysis of Plans

Staff finds that the proposed new construction is in keeping with the scale or character of Princess and North Alfred Streets and the overall neighborhood and believes that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the adjacent contributing resource at 809 Princess Street. The proposed new construction is oriented to face the public road and sited along the front property lines to provide rear public alley access to the lots. This site placement allows for the new houses to be compatible with their surrounding properties and assist in maintaining the neighborhood's existing streetscape. Although by numbers this development is only three units, the design team has visually broken up the street façade with recessions and projections which are more typical of the narrow widths of nearby historic townhouses. As mentioned above, this portion of the district contains a collection of historic and contemporary buildings. Staff supports the design team's choice not to replicate any particular building style within the district, rather provide an appropriate composite from buildings found within the district. Finally, Staff finds that the height and scale of the buildings are consistent with the adjacent buildings as well as the historic buildings within the neighborhood. It is recommended that the design team continue to work with staff on refining the materials and architectural details prior to a Certificate of Appropriateness submission.

Next Steps

Finally, staff reminds the applicant that the following modifications and waivers will need to be granted by the BAR before the Certificate of Appropriateness may be approved:

1. Waiver of the rooftop HVAC screening requirement, and
2. If the proposed fences exceed 6' in height, Waiver of Fence Height Requirement.

**IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Board find that the concept design for the proposed development is appropriate with respect to the scale, mass and general architectural character of the Parker-Gray Historic District with the following consideration when the applicant returns for a Certificate of Appropriateness:

That the design team will work with staff on refining the materials and architectural details on the townhouses prior to resubmission for Certificate of Appropriateness.

**ATTACHMENTS**

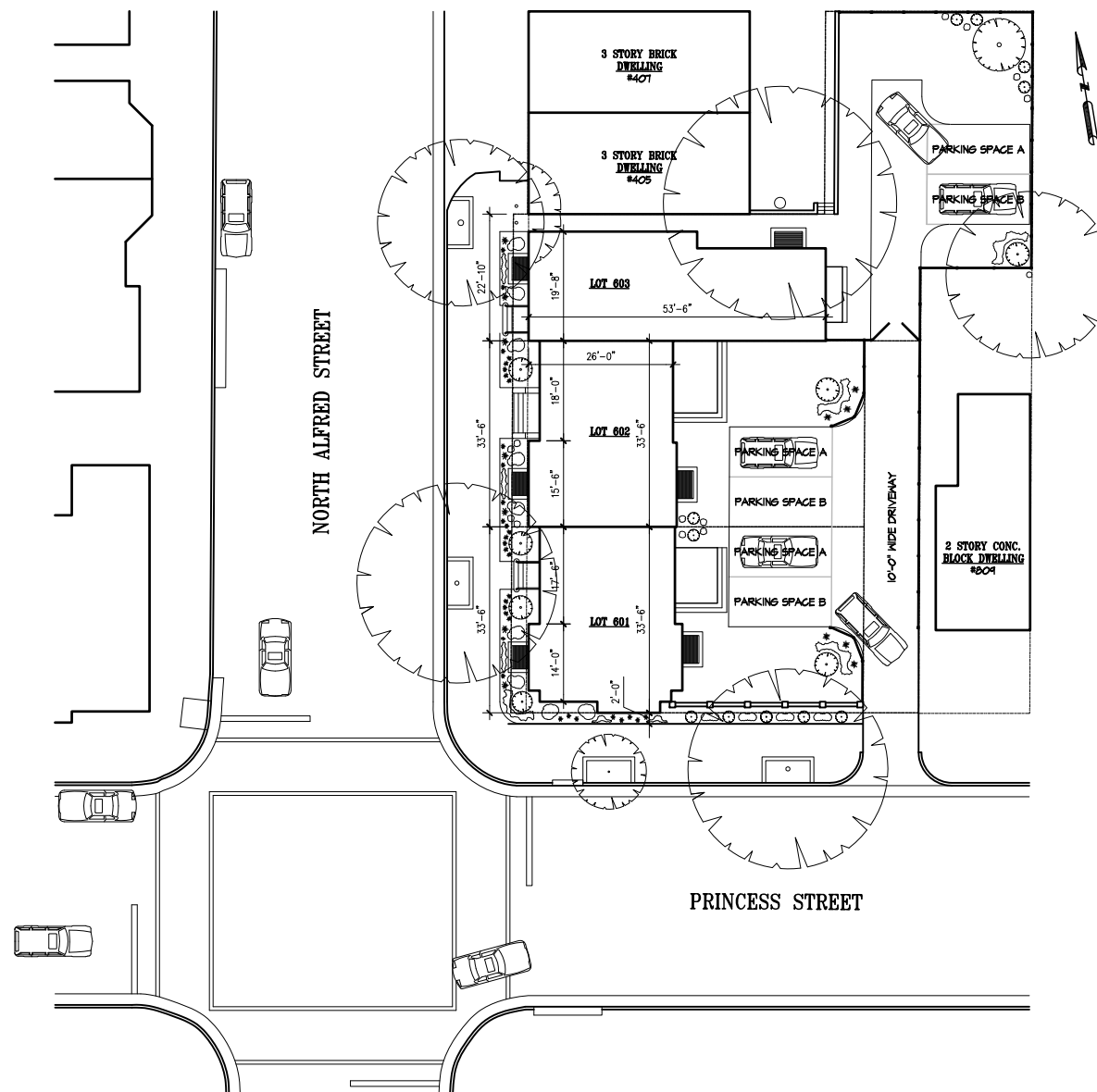
*1 – Supporting Materials*

*2 – BAR Conceptual Review Policy, 5/3/00*

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA  
 BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW OLD & HISTORIC DISTRICT  
 PLAN SUBMITTAL



GENERAL SITE ANALYSIS	
<b>LOT INFO</b>	
MAP #: 0064.02-07-09	
TOTAL LOT AREA:	8,158 SQ. FT.
ZONE:	CL
FAR:	.75
OPEN SPACE:	40%
<b>ASSUMING BY-RIGHT DEVELOPMENT</b>	
TOWNHOUSE MIN. LOT AREA: 1,980 SQ. FT. LOT AREA	
TOTAL YIELD:	3 UNITS
<b>SETBACKS</b>	
FRONT YARD:	20'-0"
SIDE YARD:	1:3, MIN. OF 8'-0"
REAR YARD:	1:1, MIN. OF 8'-0"
MAX. BUILDING HEIGHT:	35'-0"
MIN. LOT WIDTH:	18'-0" (INTERIOR) 26'-0" (END) 38'-0" (CORNER)



**1** PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT  
 Z1 SCALE: 1/32" = 1'-0"

CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED  
 CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

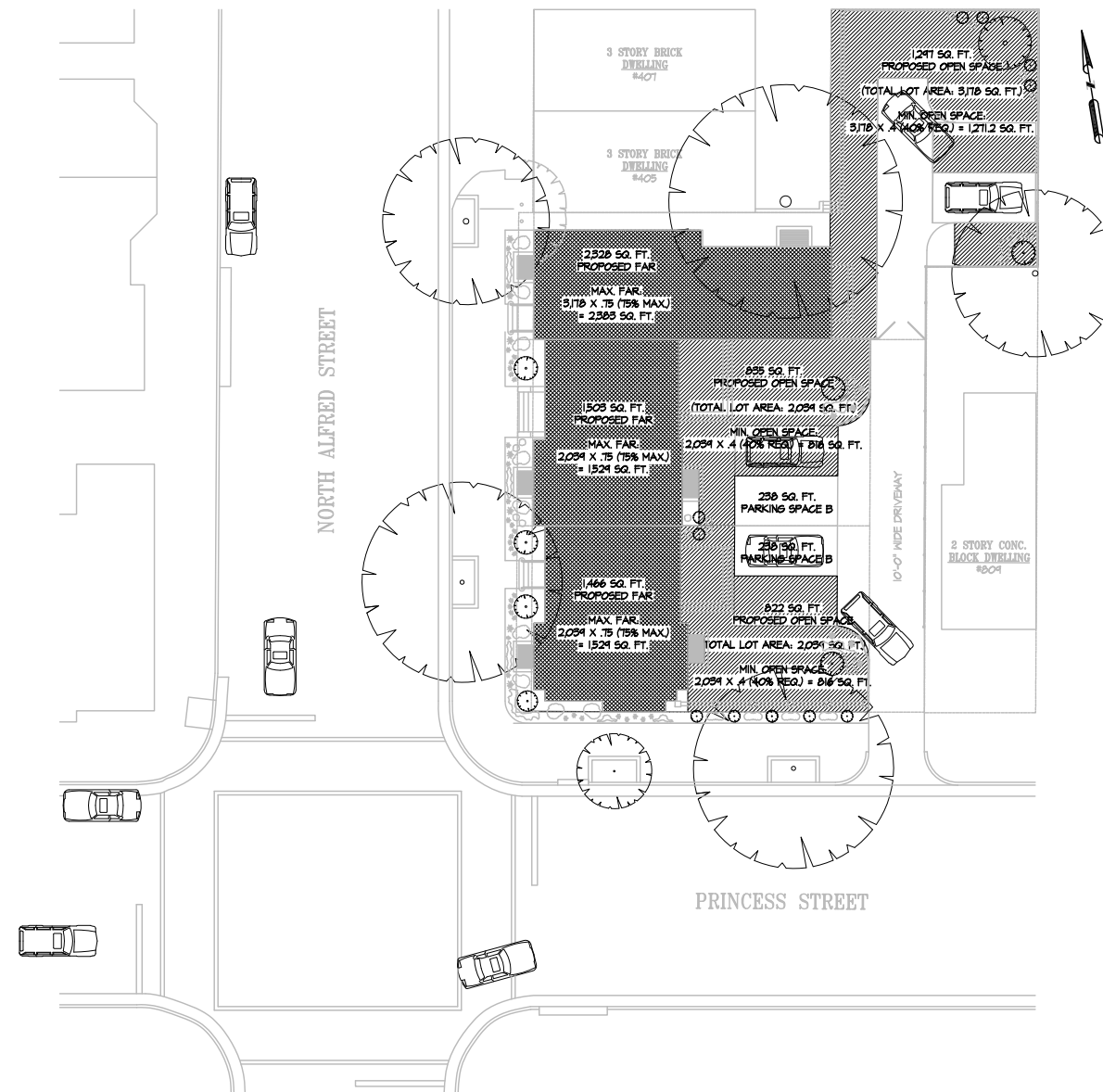
PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT

SHEET NUMBER

Z1

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INDIVIDUAL LOT ANALYSIS	
<b>LOT 603 - TOWNHOUSE</b>	
MIN. LOT AREA:	1,980 SQ. FT. LOT AREA
PROPOSED LOT AREA:	3,178 SQ. FT.
ALLOWABLE FAR:	3,178 x .75 = 2,383 SQ. FT.
PROPOSED FAR:	2,328 SQ. FT.
REQUIRED OPEN SPACE:	3,178 x .40 = 1,271.2 SQ. FT.
PROPOSED OPEN SPACE:	1,297 SQ. FT.
<b>LOT 602 - TOWNHOUSE</b>	
MIN. LOT AREA:	1,980 SQ. FT. LOT AREA
PROPOSED LOT AREA:	2,039 SQ. FT.
ALLOWABLE FAR:	2,039 x .75 = 1,529 SQ. FT.
PROPOSED FAR:	1,503 SQ. FT.
REQUIRED OPEN SPACE:	2,039 x .40 = 816 SQ. FT.
PROPOSED OPEN SPACE:	835 SQ. FT.
<b>LOT 601 - TOWNHOUSE</b>	
MIN. LOT AREA:	1,980 SQ. FT. LOT AREA
PROPOSED LOT AREA:	2,039 SQ. FT.
ALLOWABLE FAR:	2,039 x .75 = 1,529 SQ. FT.
PROPOSED FAR:	1,466 SQ. FT.
REQUIRED OPEN SPACE:	2,039 x .40 = 816 SQ. FT.
PROPOSED OPEN SPACE:	822 SQ. FT.



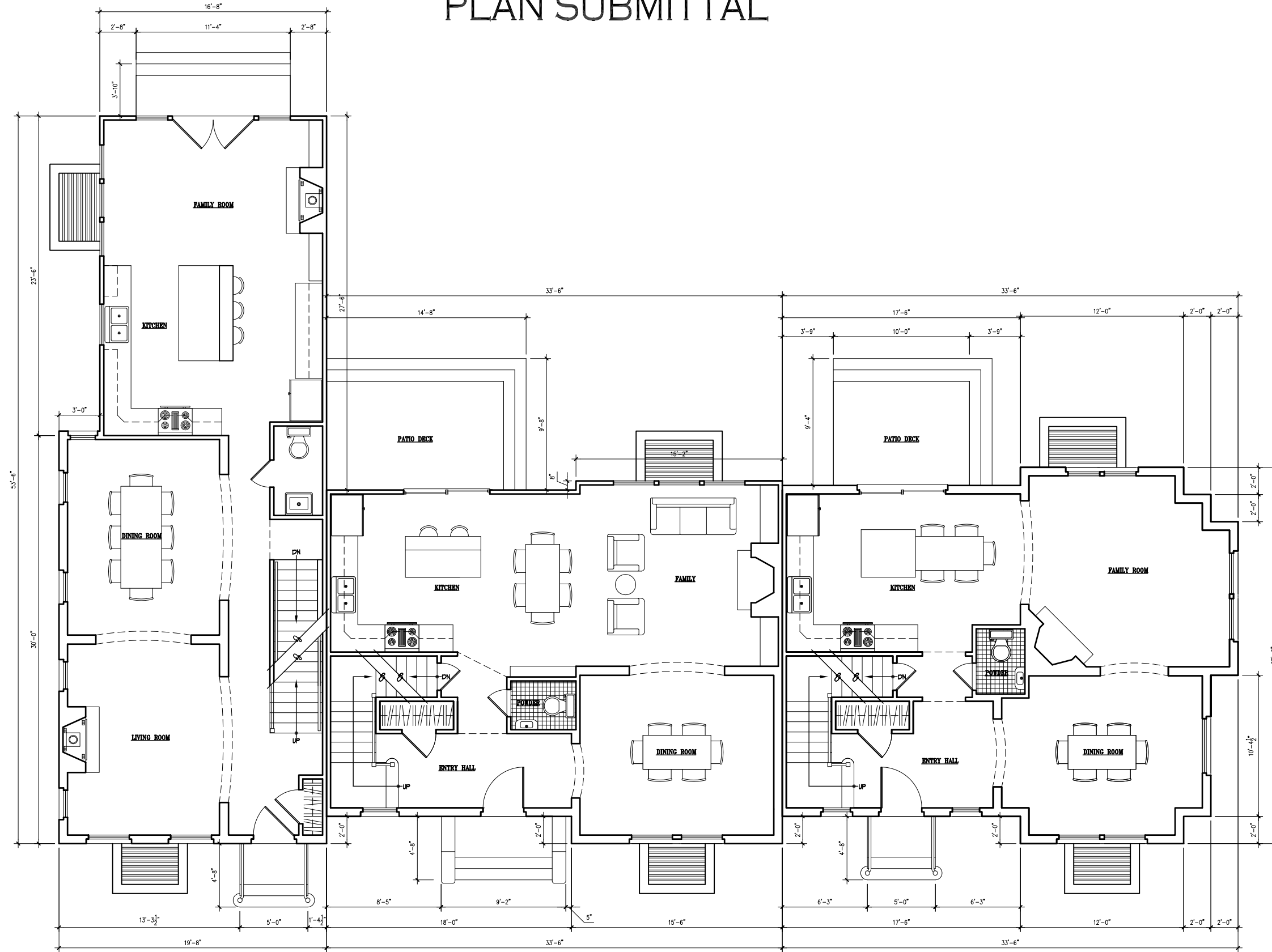
**1** OPEN SPACE / F.A.R. DIAGRAM  
 Z2 SCALE: 1/32" = 1'-0"

CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED  
 CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314  
 F.A.R. AND OPEN SPACE DIAGRAMS

SHEET NUMBER

Z2

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**1** FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
 A1 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED  
 CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

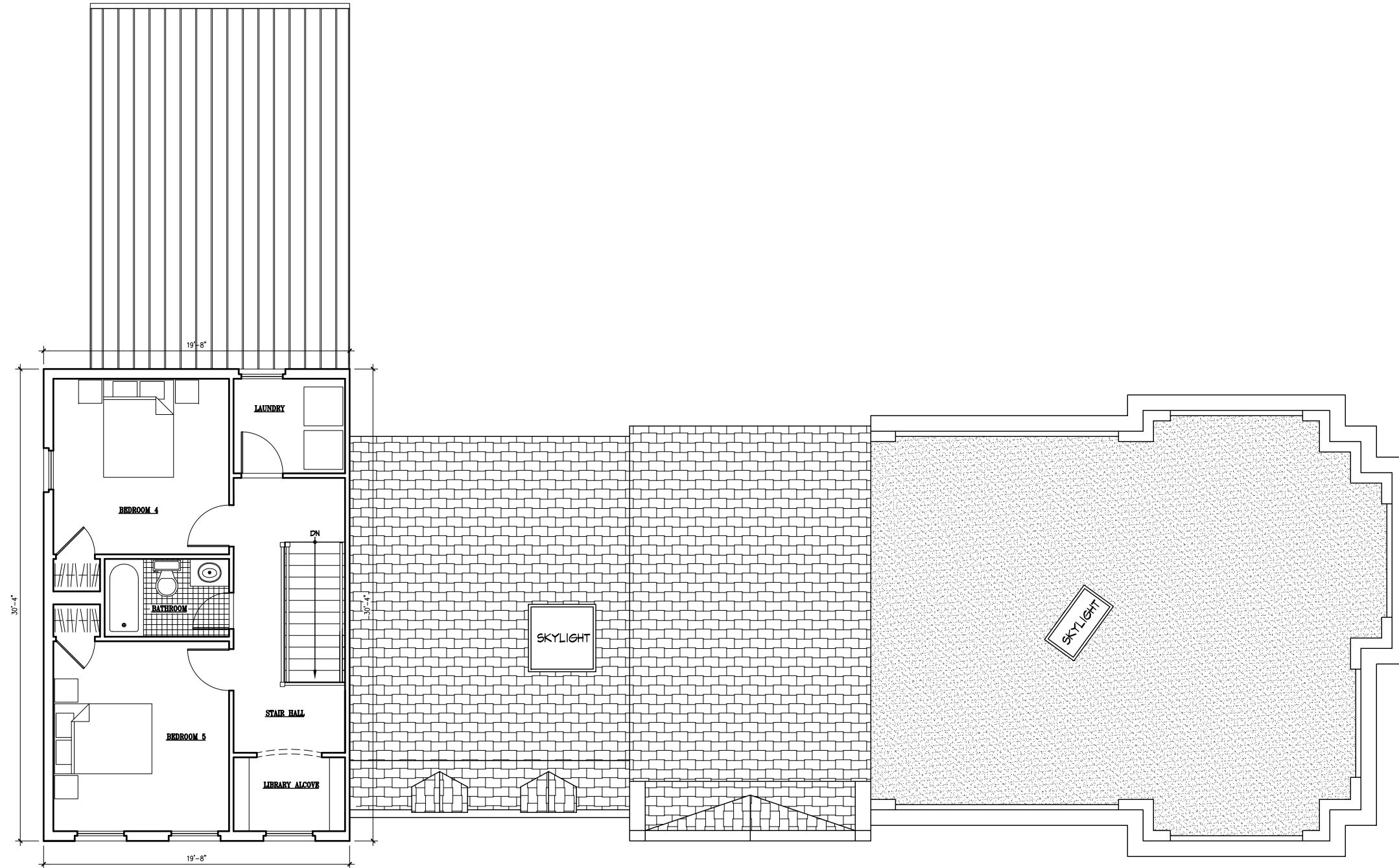
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SHEET NUMBER

A1



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**CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED**  
 CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

**THIRD FLOOR PLAN**

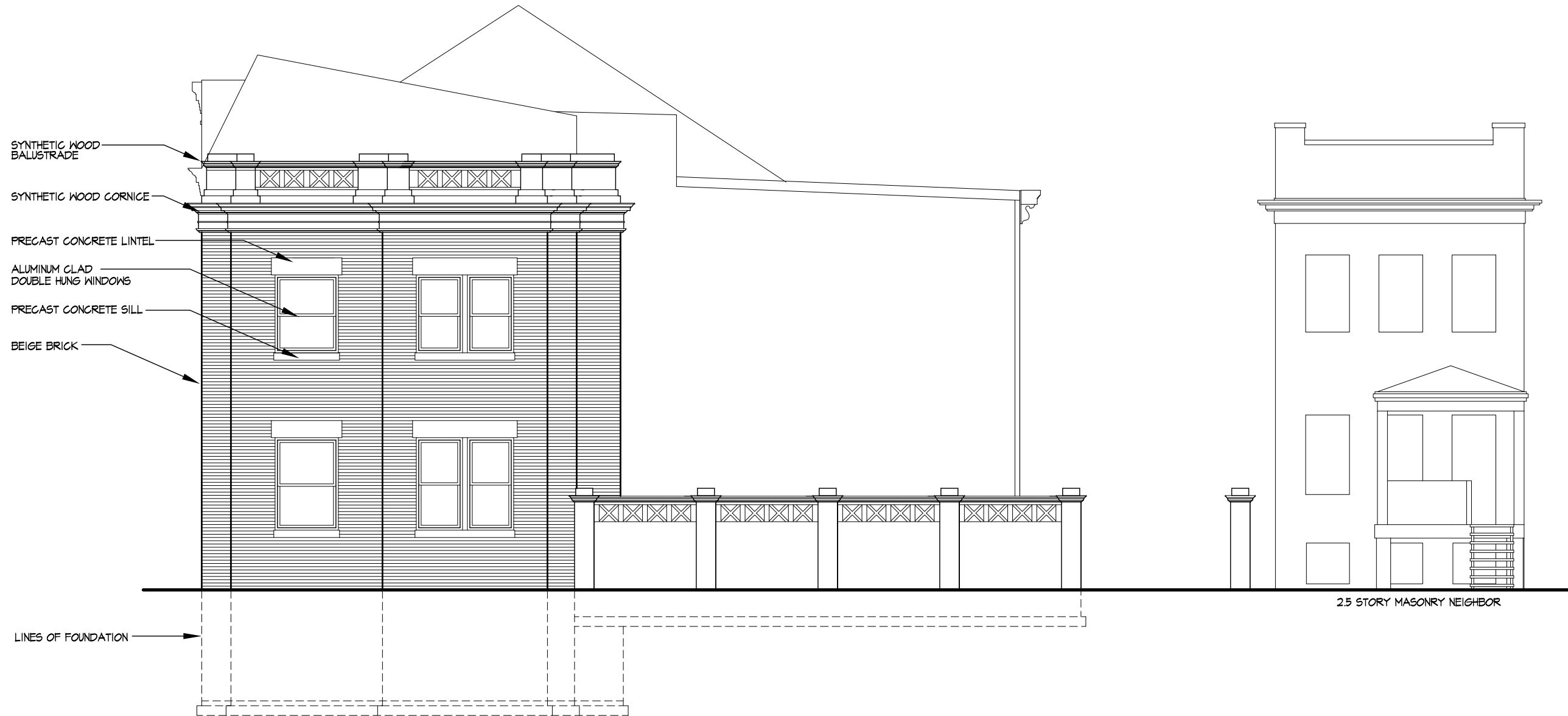
**1 THIRD FLOOR PLAN**  
 A3 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

SHEET NUMBER

**A3**



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CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED  
 CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

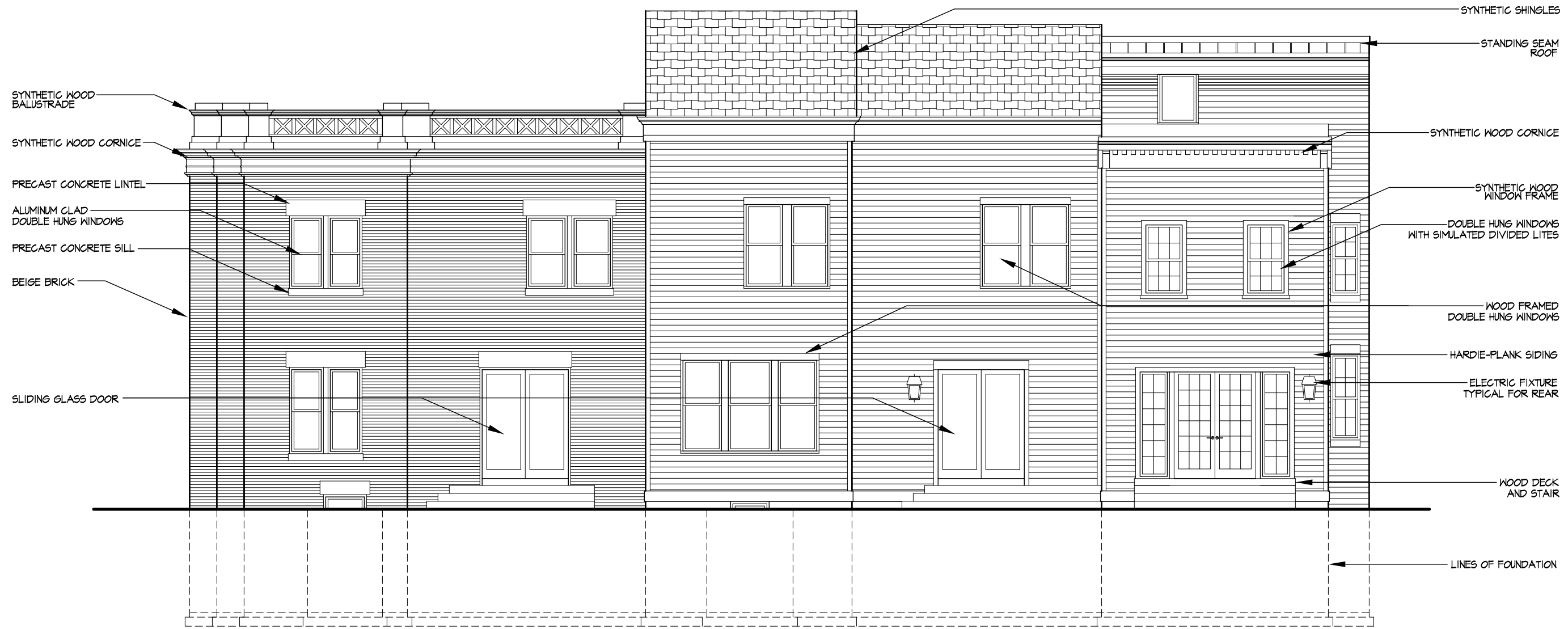
PRINCESS STREET ELEVATION

**1** PRINCESS STREET ELEVATION  
 A5 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

SHEET NUMBER

A5

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**CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED**  
 CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

**REAR ELEVATION**

**1 REAR ELEVATION**  
 A6 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

SHEET NUMBER

**A6**

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OUTLINE OF NEIGHBOR

WOOD FRAMED  
 DOUBLE HUNG WINDOWS

BRICK FACADE

HARDIE-PLANK SIDING

SYNTHETIC WOOD  
 WINDOW FRAME

DOUBLE HUNG WINDOWS  
 WITH SIMULATED DIVIDED LITES

IRON HANDRAIL

**CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED**

CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

**ALLEY ELEVATION**

**1 ALLEY ELEVATION**  
 A7 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

SHEET NUMBER

**A7**

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CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED  
CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

ALFRED STREET ELEVATION

SHEET NUMBER

A8

1 ALFRED STREET STREETSCAPE  
A8 SCALE: 3/32" = 1'-0"

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**1 BIRD'S EYE VIEW**  
 A9 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"



**2 BIRD'S EYE VIEW NO TREES**  
 A9 SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

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**1 CORNER VIEW**  
 A10 SCALE: N.T.S.



**2 CORNER VIEW NO TREES**  
 10 SCALE: N.T.S.

**CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED**  
 CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

**PERSPECTIVES**

SHEET NUMBER

**A10**

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**1** PRINCESS STREET VIEW  
 A11 SCALE: N.T.S.



**2** PRINCESS STREET VIEW NO TREES  
 11 SCALE: N.T.S.

**CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED**  
 CORNER OF PRINCESS AND ALFRED ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

**PERSPECTIVES**

SHEET NUMBER

**A11**

## **BAR Concept Review**

5/3/00

Since 1988, the Alexandria Zoning Ordinance has expressly required the height, mass and scale of buildings or structures to be a factor used by the Board of Architectural Review in passing on the appropriateness of proposed construction. The Board has since that time -- by unwritten policy -- reviewed projects requiring Planning Commission review of a new building or significant additions under what has been called Conceptual Review. Applicants requesting conceptual review are docketed for public hearing at a regular session of the Board. In this review, the Board determines whether the scale, mass and architectural character of a proposal is appropriate within the historic district. The Board determines in this preliminary review whether the size and architectural style of the building is generally appropriate in relation to its surroundings. For projects on Washington Street or within the Potomac River Vicinity the Board also makes a formal finding of compliance with the additional standards listed in the Zoning Ordinance, to the extent that this is possible without final architectural details.

Detailed design elements: colors, signs, window details, etc. are deferred for restudy and final approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness if, and when, the project is approved by Planning Commission or City Council. The applicant thus avoids spending substantial additional money for design fees to develop architectural details and the Board does not spend time reviewing the details of a project which may not receive approval of, or which may be modified by, Planning Commission or City Council. The applicant is also able to determine early in the review process whether the BAR feels the building envelope is appropriate and can verify the project proforma prior to a large expenditure of professional fees.

Staff then forwards the Board's findings regarding the appropriateness of a proposed project's scale and mass in the staff report to Planning Commission and, in the case of a Development Special Use Permit, to City Council. However, no Certificate of Appropriateness is granted until after the project receives zoning approval by Planning Commission or Council, responds to any revisions required by these other bodies and the applicant returns to the Board for approval of the final design details. However, if a project requires major zoning modifications, staff routes projects to the Planning Commission first based on the presumption that if a project is not legally buildable, then the BAR should not be spending time on design review.

It has been recommended by the Washington Street Task Force that the Board cease the practice of Conceptual Review. While some Board members have been uncomfortable with appearing to approve a project without full knowledge of the architectural detailing, staff believes that there are some significant advantages to the community, the applicant and the Board in continuing Conceptual Review.

If a project is taken to Planning Commission and City Council for approval first, then detailed illustrative drawings of the building will have been presented to citizen associations, City staff, Planning Commission and City Council who will rely on these representations in their approval. For projects in the Potomac River Vicinity or on Washington Street, the Planning Commission and City Council will necessarily become the bodies required to make a finding of compliance

with the additional standards before the project may proceed. In addition, a project of any size requires approval of a Preliminary Site Plan, which involves numerous detailed engineering drawings of the building site. In effect, the entire building will have been designed in some detail and these drawings will form the basis for neighborhood and Council approvals. Design revision by the BAR may require re-approval by all of these groups. Further, the applicant will have invested tens of thousands of dollars in attorney, engineer and architects fees and will be very reluctant to make meaningful changes to the building design. Finally, there would be no benefit for the BAR to deny final approval of a project when the applicant can appeal to City Council -- who would already have approved the project.

Unfortunately, attorneys frequently represent before the Planning Commission and Council that projects which have received only concept review have been approved by the BAR. In addition, citizens may not be aware of the BAR public hearing or assume the BAR will deny a request and are then upset that the building envelope has been approved before they have had an opportunity to comment on the size of the project.

Therefore, the Washington Street Task Force has recommended abolishing conceptual review by the BAR and substituting a joint, informational work session of the Planning Commission and BAR for all new buildings within a block of Washington Street. While this proposal has some merit and would allow FAR and traffic impacts to be discussed at the same time that the interrelated subject of building mass and scale is being reviewed, it also has the potential to dilute any real discussions on design because of the practical amount of time this will consume and the difficulty of gathering two boards together for a presentation with public comment. Concept review for major projects today frequently extends over two or three BAR meetings. BAR members often request that certain elements be restudied or simply want to revisit the site and reflect on the applicant's presentation or public comments received. On the other hand, the number of potential development projects requiring this joint review is relatively small, perhaps twice per year.

Staff recommends that the Board continue the practice of conceptual review but incorporate it as a formal step in the BAR's Certificate of Appropriateness process for relevant projects throughout the historic districts. The Board would be required to make a formal finding of appropriateness of the scale, mass and architectural character of any new building prior to its review by Planning Commission and Council. The expanded Washington Street standards recommended by the Task Force will provide additional guidance from City Council regarding community expectations for this street. A written policy should also be established so that the BAR, applicants, Council and the public understand exactly what is (and is not) being approved in conceptual review and why. Staff believes that the BAR is the most qualified body to review and comment on design issues and should avoid being drawn into work sessions where traffic, density and use are the primary concerns.

## **CONCEPTUAL BAR APPROVAL POLICY**

1. BAR concept approval is required in the following cases:
  - a. The proposal requires an SUP for additional density or height;
  - b. The proposal requires Planning Commission review for a new building;
  - c. Staff determines that the proposal requires preliminary review because the design would be a principal determining factor in the ultimate approval by other bodies.
  - d. The only exception to the above will be when the zoning approval needed by the Planning Commission or Council is so uncertain and so critical to the basic format of the proposal, that, in staff's opinion, changes to the application are likely and review by the BAR would have to be repeated.
  
2. In a case before it for conceptual approval, the BAR shall make findings on the following issues:
  - a. Appropriateness of scale, mass and general architectural character;
  - b. Additional standards where applicable (such as Washington Street or the Potomac River Vicinity) have been met.