

Old Town Civic Association
P.O. Box 1213
Alexandria Virginia 22313

February 2, 2022

Subject: OTCA Comments regarding Docket Items #8 & 9, cases BAR2020-00076 & 00077 for Campagna Center demolition and alterations

Dear Chairman Spencer and Members of the Board of Architectural Review:

We write to ask that you consider denying portions of the alterations proposed to the Campagna Center building at 418 S. Washington Street.

We see no issues with the Campagna Center's proposals that are necessary for their operational improvements, like installing a taller door to the sidewalk level on S. Washington Street, or installing additional windows and doors along the north and south elevation, or extending the bottom of the ground floor windows closer to the sidewalk level along S. Washington Street and along the sides of the building to bring in more natural sunlight into renovated ground floor spaces.

However, we hold that many of the proposed changes to the exterior unnecessarily remove historic fabric or are inappropriate on this 1888 structure that should be completed with more sensitivity to historic fabric that should be retained.

Windows

The building contains either original or historic windows, or a combination, that should be retained and repaired. Viewing the buildings windows from the exterior reveals that the existing windows include in various locations historic wavy glass still remaining in historic sashes and transoms installed into clean, tight window jambs that are all proposed to be removed with the windows replaced. Observation from the exterior revealed historic window sashes and transom frames with mortise, tenon, and wood peg construction, along with glass of varying degrees of waviness in transom frames and sashes as would occur in historic windows that have been retained and repaired over time.

Given Campagna's desire to increase window insulating value, exterior storm windows can be installed at much reduced cost, would create at least the insulation value of a modern double pane window, can include Low E coatings, offers an additional seal over the current windows. With good thin aluminum framed storm windows, Campagna's future maintenance may be limited to painting the jamb if left exposed, in addition to the wood sill proposed to be retained and that will need periodic repainting. Replacing these historic windows would also likely result in reduced glass light area as new wood windows will be thicker, made with newer, fast growth wood is generally weaker than the wood used on the presently installed windows, in addition to metal cladding.

This change to retain the existing windows and install quality storm windows on the upper two floors could result in great savings for Campagna Center. In contrast, replacing windows wholesale with the quality replacement windows that Campagna Center is proposing will generally result in a repayment period on the order of 75 years, with no improved performance over quality storm windows, and likely future replacement, since modern windows are not constructed to allow maintenance.

Lastly, regarding the rear windows and doors that are proposed to be removed and infilled with metal panels, the rear center upper windows and at least a portion of the rear door opening should be retained. There is no compelling operational need to eliminate these windows. Architectural plans show bathrooms to be installed behind those windows. Those bathrooms could greatly benefit from having natural light in these spaces rather than only artificial light. Interior or exterior storms with opaque glass (and safety rated as necessary) could be installed that would provide light, eliminate open views, and retain the existing historic fabric and opening.

Front Entrance surround

The front entrance door surround, jamb, molding with scroll work across the top, and transom window frames with wavy glass are all original to the 136 year old structure and should be retained and restored. The only change that is evident to have occurred over the last 136 years is that two center doors along with sidelights were seemingly replaced by two wider fixed doors in place of the original sidelights, and the double front doors replaced by a single door. Even in conducting the door replacement, previous renovators retained and reused the original chamfered edged posts that were cut below the transom and shifted inward to separate the narrower replacement door. The Board should require that these posts be relocated to their original positions to separate replacement side lights and windows that are appropriate to this feature and the structure, with wood panels on the lower half and glass on the upper half. Carpenters will then have to mill extension pieces to install under the historic door surround to achieve the desire to lower the door sill by approximately two feet.

Additionally, this historic door system is supported by one large carved block of granite that should also be retained and reused in place. The granite door sill should be carefully removed, then reinstalled at the new desired lower elevation to support the taller doors and sidelights requested.

Exterior Brick care

We applaud Campagna's proposal to complete repointing of the exterior brick walls where needed, but ask that Campagna not repaint the exterior brick. We have admired the appearance of the brick over recent years as time and we believe previous Campagna cleaning has left the brick increasingly exposed for view. While it would be best if Campagna could remove the remaining paint as part of this cleanup, and as shown in historic photographs and in the proposed plans, in no case should this brick that the applicant identifies as soft be painted, trapping inevitable moisture from transpiring out of the brick.

Leaving the brick in the current 'whitewash' appearance, or removing the brick will bring the exterior more in keeping with the spirit and intent of the Zoning Ordinance and Old and Historic District Design Guidelines that state the following:

- a. Regarding painting masonry, Zoning Ordinance Article 10 (Section 10-209(B)(4)) states that "...painting shall be considered to be the removal of an exterior feature having historic and/or architectural significance..."
- b. The BAR *Design Guidelines* further state "the Boards strongly discourage the painting of a previously unpainted masonry surface."

Leaving the original red brick of this rather large building exposed either partially or fully will add a richness and patina to the buildings appearance and reveal details that add much unique visual interest to the historic fabric in the historic district and S. Washington Street.

Roof sheathing

The very large roof of the Campagna Center is proposed to be replaced, with little or no discussion regarding the material proposed. The applicant's drawings label only "new roof" and the only discussion in the staff report noting that the roof will be replaced. This is a large roof and component of this building. The roof sheathing should be replaced with materials that are compatible with the 1888 date of construction of the structure, such as shingles of slate or metal, or standing seam metal, rather than the fiberglass shingles that are not discussed but we assume are proposed.

Trees near the rear property lines

While outside BAR purview, we wanted to ask that Campagna consider retaining the current cedars that provide a degree of visual screening of the large expanse of asphalt paved parking, or replant similar trees along the properties edge. It seems Campagna would gain little, if any space for parking, by removing the very narrow strip of cedars along the edge of the parking lot and property line.

Outside of this BAR application, Old Town Civic Association is willing and able to help install trees along the sidewalks in this vicinity and in opportune locations within this block to help assuage any changes.

Old Town Civic Association members very much appreciate the Campagna Center organization, their valuable work, and that Campagna has decided to stay in their current location at 418 S. Washington Street, rather than selling the building for potential conversion to residential condominiums.

We ask that the Board:

1. Require retention of the historic windows and the front door system.
2. Prevent repainting of the exterior brick.
3. Require that the roof be sheathed in material appropriate to this circa 1888 structure.

Sincerely,

Stephen Milone
President, Old Town Civic Association









