

Development Special Use Permit #2015-0004, Transportation Management Plan SUP #2015-0124 802 and 808 North Washington Street - The Towne Motel

DSUP2015-0004

Additional Materials

Poul Hertel <poulh@erols.com>

Tue 1/5/2016 10:07 AM

To: PlanComm <PlanComm@alexandriava.gov>;

2 attachments (1012 KB)

image002.emz; understanding the wash st stds.pdf;

RE: Item 8

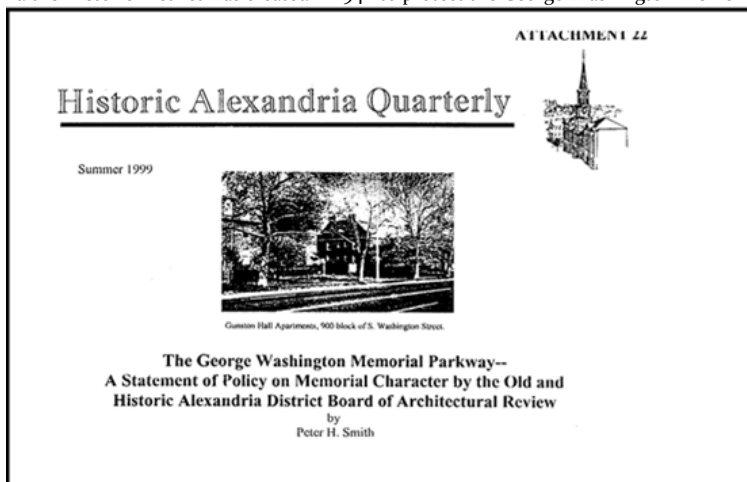
Development Special Use Permit #2015-0004, Transportation Management Plan SUP #2015-0124 802 and 808 North Washington Street - The Towne Motel

Dear Chairman Mary Lyman and members of the Planning Commission:

Please find enclosed the attachment that hopefully will give a better understanding of what the Standards are all about. The points were taken from then-City Manager Phil Sunderland's memo, which was forwarded to the City Council. For reference purposes;

**In the 1929 Memorandum of Agreement between the City and the Federal Government routing the George Washington Memorial Parkway through Alexandria, the City agreed to restrict Washington Street to "residential and business development of such character and of such types of building as will be in keeping with the dignity, purpose and memorial character of said highway."**

And the Historic District was created in 1946 to protect the George Washington Memorial Parkway as described by Peter Smith;



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.<sup>5</sup> One of its chief purposes was "the preservation of the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Highway"

Some have implied that there is wiggle room in the Washington Street Standards, since it was really only intended to cover the core and not the northern end of Washington Street. Not only is this not true, but as the Sunderland Memo points out on page 4, the Task Force was specifically created as a result of buildings that were either built or proposed for the northern end.

**The Task Force concluded that the controversy generated by recent proposals for the Parkway Center at the Old Colony site and the Saul Center at the Mastercraft site indicates that the Standards and Guidelines do not adequately mandate what interested civic organizations and the public consider appropriate building and site design on Washington Street.**

Others claim that existing buildings in the adjacent area would not meet the standards today, such as Potomac Crossing. Although it is true that they would not meet the standards, there is no proposal to hold the new developments to the densities of older developments. The Task Force tried dealing with new and bigger development and recognized the tradeoff, but they believed it was necessary in order to prevent monolithic-looking buildings looming over the Parkway.

Sincerely

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## TO ALL

Hopefully, this brief will provide a sense of why and how the current Washington Street Standards, came to be enacted in the year 2000. After some rather unpleasant conflicts regarding development on Washington Street, (which afflicted the northern end in particular), the City Council created a task Force that would convey a clarification on interpreting the 1929 agreement between the City and the Federal Government for protection of the George Washington Memorial Parkway as it transverses the City. The Task Force came up with specific recommendations that the City Council subsequently adopted in the form of the ordinance known as the Washington Street Standards.

These are best understood as being derived from a task force request that the City Attorney incorporate elements from a paper submitted by the National Park Services (*included*). The revisions to the ordinance that were adopted can be summarized as follows:

- ♦ New construction shall be compatible with the character of historically significant buildings on Washington Street (instead of within the Old and Historic Alexandria District in general).
- ♦ Design elements must be consistent with historically significant buildings on Washington Street.
- ♦ New buildings shall be complementary to and shall not detract from/overwhelm/intrude upon historically significant buildings on Washington Street.
- ♦ Massing of new buildings/additions must closely reflect and be proportional to adjacent historic buildings.
- ♦ New construction larger than historic buildings on the street must be designed to not look more massive than the historic buildings. From the public right of way, buildings should appear to have a footprint no larger than 100 feet by 80 feet. It is desirable that large projects preserve or replicate mid-block alleys.
- ♦ Applications for projects larger than 3000 square feet or within 66 feet of residential use/zoning must include a massing study covering a minimum of six blocks.
- ♦ Massing and proportions of new buildings designed in a given historic architectural style must be consistent with the massing and proportions of that style.
- ♦ New or untried design approaches that have no historical basis in Alexandria or that are not consistent with the scale, massing and detailing of an historic style are not appropriate.
- ♦ Traditional fenestration patterns and solid/void relationships must be used on all facades visible from any public right of way, including the first floor.
- ♦ An applicant for a special use permit for an increase in density must bear the burden of proving that the proposed building/addition clearly benefits the historic nature and pedestrian-friendly environment of Washington Street.

**ATTACHMENT 8****What is the "Memorial Character" of  
the George Washington Memorial Parkway?**

The George Washington Memorial Parkway serves as a memorial to our nation's first president. While the National Park Service has not attempted to precisely define the term, several guiding principles should be considered in evaluating what "memorial character" means. The principles outlined below represent those which have a desirable application to Washington Street in Alexandria:

- Inconsistent existing developments notwithstanding, and recognizing that the parkway has different "looks" depending upon where you are (north of the airport, through the city, south to Mt. Vernon, for example), there should be a public impression that Washington Street is connected in some way (physically, thematically, or in some other positive way) with the parkway.
- Use of streetscapes is a desirable connecting link with the natural characteristics of the parkway.
- There should be an emphasis on those elements of structural design which are consistent with historic buildings which remain on the street.
- New buildings should not, by their style, size, location or other characteristics, detract from, overwhelm, or otherwise intrude upon historic buildings which remain on the street.
- New buildings should be complementary to the historic structures in their design.
- It is desirable that buildings be designed to look separate and not give the impression of collectively being one massive unit. This can be accomplished through differing architectural designs, facades, setbacks and stylings.

Additional miscellaneous factors for consideration are:

- The Washington Street Guidelines are workable as long as the structures aren't spread out over too large an area or distance. The Guidelines also may not be appropriate when applied to larger buildings.

Facades of a building generally shall express the 20- to 40-foot bay width typically found on early 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings characteristic of the Old and Historic Alexandria District. Techniques to express such typical bay width shall include changes in materials; articulation of the wall surfaces; changes in fenestration patterns; varying roof heights; and physical breaks, vertical as well as horizontal, within the massing. *[Page 5 of Guidelines at sec. (2) under "Additional requirements for approval of a certificate of appropriateness."]*

- A gateway into the city exists when entering from the north (memorial circle area in front of the Colony Inn) but there is nothing similar when approaching from the south. Perhaps such a concept is worthy of consideration though it is recognized that this may be complicated due to plans for the new Wilson Bridge.
- Some historic communities in Washington, D.C. (Woodley Park and/or Cleveland Park) have had an "overlay zone" created which reduces the maximum allowable FAR and imposes other restrictions for a specified distance (100' ?) on either side of impacted streets. *[Specific details not currently available].*

Michael D. Wilson  
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George Washington Memorial Parkway