

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 10, 2018

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR & MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: VICE MAYOR JUSTIN WILSON & COUNCILMAN PAUL SMEDBERG

SUBJECT: BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW CONSOLIDATION

After an effort to expand the City's Old and Historic District to include what is now Parker-Gray was rejected in 1984, City Council moved to create a separate Parker-Gray District. Due to limitations under the City Charter, a separate panel within the existing Board of Architectural Review was created to review applications within the district. Following General Assembly action to amend the Charter, City Council appointed the first Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review (BAR) in 1986¹.

With distinctly different guidelines the two Boards of Architectural Review are empowered to review applications and weigh approval of Certificates of Appropriateness and Permits to Demolish.²

The two Boards of Architectural Review are comprised of 7 members appointed by City Council, with two seats reserved for architects³.

In 2013, the City Council adopted a package of reforms to the guidelines applied within the Parker-Gray Historic District⁴. The reforms were the result of significant community input and were designed to reduce the regulatory footprint for property owners in the district. One of the impacts of these changes has been to shift many requests to the administrative approval process, significantly reducing the workload of the Parker-Gray BAR.

Today, the Old and Historic District BAR meets twice a month, and the Parker-Gray BAR meets once a month. With the reduced caseload, the Parker-Gray BAR has seen its meetings shrink accordingly, dropping to a 45 minute average among the past 12 months,

¹ "The Parker-Gray District: Examining a Local Historic District a Generation Later." Catherine K. Miliaras. The Alexandria Chronicle. Spring 2015

(https://alexandriahistorical.org/Resources/Documents/The_Chronicle/2015_Sp1_Chronicle.pdf)

² Section 10-205/Section 10-105. "City of Alexandria Zoning Code"

³ Section 10-204/Section 10-204. "City of Alexandria Zoning Code"

⁴ Text Amendment 2013-0007/Ordinance 4832

(<https://alexandria.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1478942&GUID=C5E8CD04-9BEC-42DF-AE3B-8B2D6D004F85>)

with 4 meetings shorter than 1 hour⁵ and 2 meetings cancelled due to a lack of agenda items.

While the meetings have become shorter, staffing the separate boards is an impact on City resources and the reduced frequency of meetings delays the disposition of requests for property owners who do have business before the Board. Many communities across the country have a single review board that administers multiple districts.

We believe that the City should consider consolidation of the Old and Historic and Parker-Gray Boards of Architectural Review.

A consolidated Board of Architectural Review would:

- 1) Apply the distinct guidelines of each district⁶, and preserve the character and unique architectural and historic essence of each district.
- 2) More efficiently use City staff time required to staff two boards, and reduce the number of evening meetings
- 3) Reduce time of review for property owners by providing a committee which meets more frequently

We believe that City Council should exercise its authority⁷ to initiate a Text Amendment to provide for a new Alexandria Historic Districts Board of Architectural Review consisting of a total of 7 members, including:

- 1) One member residing in each of the two existing districts
- 2) Two architects
- 3) Three citizens at large

The City Manager shall consider and recommend a transition plan for the consolidation considering different scenarios that may reduce displacement of existing members and take advantage of current or planned attrition on either body.

Cc: Mark Jinks, City Manager; Karl Moritz, Director of Planning and Zoning; Mary Lyman, Chair of the Alexandria Planning Commission; Purvi Irwin, Chair of the Parker-Gray Board of Architectural Review; Christina Kelley, Chair of the Old and Historic District Board of Architectural Review; Gloria Sitton, Clerk of Council

⁵ 3/2017: 0 minutes; 4/2017: 4 minutes; 5/2017: 68 minutes; 6/2017: 31 minutes; 7/2017: 79 minutes; 9/2017: 74 minutes; 10/2017: 106 minutes; 11/2017: 35 minutes; 12/2017: 39 minutes; 1/2018: 42 minutes; 2/2018: 71 minutes; 3/2018: 0 minutes

⁶ E-Mail Correspondence; Deputy City Attorney. April 4, 2018.

⁷ Section 11-802. "City of Alexandria Zoning Code"