

**ISSUE:** Certificate of Appropriateness for Alterations

**APPLICANT:** Old Town #1 LLC

**LOCATION:** Old and Historic Alexandria District  
815 King Street

**ZONE:** KR/King Street Retail

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

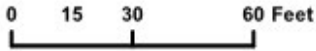
Staff recommends denial of the request to paint unpainted masonry

**GENERAL NOTES TO THE APPLICANT**

1. **APPEAL OF DECISION:** In accordance with the Zoning Ordinance, if the Board of Architectural Review denies or approves an application in whole or in part, the applicant or opponent may appeal the Board's decision to City Council on or before 14 days after the decision of the Board.
2. **COMPLIANCE WITH BAR POLICIES:** All materials must comply with the BAR's adopted policies unless otherwise specifically approved.
3. **BUILDING PERMITS:** Most projects approved by the Board of Architectural Review require the issuance of one or more construction permits by Department of Code Administration (including signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Administration, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-746-4200 for further information.
4. **ISSUANCE OF CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS AND PERMITS TO DEMOLISH:** Applicants must obtain a copy of the Certificate of Appropriateness or Permit to Demolish PRIOR to applying for a building permit. Contact BAR Staff, Room 2100, City Hall, 703-746-3833, or [preservation@alexandriava.gov](mailto:preservation@alexandriava.gov) for further information.
5. **EXPIRATION OF APPROVALS NOTE:** In accordance with Sections 10-106(B), 10-206(B) and 10-307 of the Zoning Ordinance, any Board of Architectural Review approval will expire 12 months from the date of issuance if the work is not commenced and diligently and substantially pursued by the end of that 12-month period.
6. **HISTORIC PROPERTY TAX CREDITS:** Applicants performing extensive, certified rehabilitations of historic properties may separately be eligible for state and/or federal tax credits. Consult with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR) prior to initiating any work to determine whether the proposed project may qualify for such credits.



**BAR #2020-00588**  
**815 King Street**



## **I. APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL**

The applicant proposes to paint the brick portions of the building Oyster White to be similar in color to the limestone details.

### Site context

The front of the building is directly adjacent to King Street and, because of the height of the building relative to neighboring properties, all sides of the property are visible from public streets.

## **II. HISTORY**

The six-story brick building at 815 King Street was designed by architect Mathew Lepley and was constructed in 1941 as the Rupley Building by D.E. Bayliss Contractor and named after Arthur Rupley, a Northern Virginia real estate magnate. Clad in brick with Indiana limestone features, the building has a steel structural frame with masonry exterior walls and boasted of modern technology such as elevators, fire protection, and individual air conditioning units when it was completed. The building was designed to have retail at the ground level with offices above. When it opened, the building was characterized as “the largest of its kind north of Richmond.” When it officially opened the *Alexandria Gazette* editorialized that the “near-skyscraper” was a “notable addition” to the city.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years the building has been converted from the office use to long term residential units and maintains two retail spaces on the ground floor.

### Previous BAR Approvals

A series of BAR cases are associated with this property, mostly related to signage and light fixtures related to the ground floor retail spaces.

## **III. ANALYSIS**

The applicant is proposing to paint the existing unpainted yellow brick at the exterior of the building an Oyster White color (Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> “Office Building Soon Will Be Fully Occupied,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 30, 1941, pg. 10.



815 KING STREET  
Revision 7-3-2020 | Scheme 1



Brick



PPG10-05 Oyster White

**Figure 1: View of 815 King Street with proposed paint color**

The BAR has always been very concerned about the painting of previously unpainted masonry and the Zoning Ordinance specifically prohibits this without BAR approval. Section 10-209(B)(4) of the Zoning Ordinance states: “The painting of a masonry building which was unpainted prior to such painting shall be considered to be the removal of an exterior feature having historic and/or architectural significance requiring a certificate of appropriateness.” The *Design Guidelines* further state that “painting a previously unpainted masonry surface, no matter what color, requires review and approval of a certificate of appropriateness by the Boards. Additionally, the Boards strongly discourage the painting of a previously unpainted masonry surface.”

The brick used on this building is yellow in color as opposed to the red brick used on older structures throughout the historic district. This yellow brick was popular during the 1940s and can be seen elsewhere in the district on buildings of a similar vintage. Along with the limestone details at the first-floor storefront and the 5<sup>th</sup> floor cornice, the yellow brick is a hallmark of Art Deco architecture. This building is a prominent example of this architectural style in the historic district and its preservation is critical to maintaining the diversity of design that adds to the richness and character of the district. Painting the brick on this building would remove an important defining feature of this building, damaging its architectural integrity.

In addition to the aesthetic concerns related to the painting of this building, there is the potential for damage to the building. Brick is a porous material that absorbs and releases moisture. The application of paint to the exterior surface of the brick can prevent the brick from releasing

moisture that is absorbed through precipitation or condensation. Without the ability to dry, this moisture can cause degradation of the bricks themselves. This can result in ongoing maintenance needs or the loss of historic materials (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Type of damage that can be associated with water damage to historic brick

For these reasons staff recommends denial of the request to paint the masonry building.

**STAFF**

William Conkey, AIA, Historic Preservation Architect, Planning & Zoning  
Tony LaColla, AICP, Land Use Services Division Chief, Planning & Zoning

**IV. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS**

Legend: C- code requirement R- recommendation S- suggestion F- finding

**Zoning**

F-1 The proposed exterior masonry painting complies with zoning.

**Code Administration**

No comments received

**Transportation and Environmental Services**

No comments received

**Alexandria Archaeology**

F-1 No archaeological oversight will be necessary for this undertaking.

V. ATTACHMENTS

*1 – Application Materials*

*2 – Supplemental Materials*