



HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD

Courthouse Plaza One 2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 700 Arlington, VA 22201
TEL 703.228.3830 FAX 703.228.3834 www.arlingtonva.us

March 15, 2022

Honorable Katie Cristol, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Clarendon Sector Plan Update RTA – treatment of Joyce Motors building

Dear Ms. Cristol and Members of the County Board

The Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board strongly supports the motion passed by the Planning Commission urging staff to incorporate a recommendation in the 2022 Clarendon Sector Plan Update for full frontage preservation in situ for Joyce Motors, a building ranked Essential in the county's Historic Resources Inventory (HRI).

Once extremely common, only six of these porcelain-enameled, boxlike service stations remained in Arlington by the late-Twentieth Century. The Texaco Service Station No. 131, built in 1949 and now known as Joyce Motors, is the lone surviving example.

Joyce Motors/Texaco Service Station No. 131 is significant because of the role it played in our culture's increasing dependence on the automobile, the commercial development of Clarendon, and the growth of the subdivisions and suburbs of Arlington County, which were reached by automobile. It is an excellent and rare example of the porcelain-enameled, boxlike service station and has the distinction of being the last remaining intact, in situ example in Arlington County.

This, and the fact that the building is part and parcel of the vernacular structures which continue to exist and characterize Arlington's old downtown Clarendon business district, is why Joyce Motors was afforded HRI-Essential status by the County Board, the highest-level category of historic protection. The Joyce building is one of only ten such commercial properties to receive the Essential designation in the county.

The HRI, which was adopted by the County Board in 2011, following a multi-year survey to identify historically significant properties countywide, created six categories in order of significance and urgency: Essential, Important, Notable, Minor, Altered and no longer historically significant, and Demolished.

Point #4 of the Phase 1 HRI Goals and Policy Objectives adopted by the County Board on October 18, 2011 states in full:

4. PROMOTE THE PRESERVATION OF THE ESSENTIAL HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN THE HRI.

- *The County will strive to protect all Essential properties and will use all available tools to ensure their continued stewardship and preservation.*
- *The County will actively collaborate with owners of Essential properties to preserve the buildings historical and material integrity to the maximum extent possible.*
- *The County will require that new development proposals affecting all Essential properties be reviewed by the HALRB.*
- *The County will actively promote TDR's in exchange for building preservation. However, a TDR received from an historic site for the purposes of historic preservation by a receiving site plan that proposes demolition of a listed historic resource is strongly discouraged unless the combined community benefits derived from the sending and receiving sites are determined by the County Board to outweigh the loss of the receiving site's historic resource and address valuable County initiatives.*
- *The County will appropriately weigh the impact on Essential properties when awarding bonus density to development proposals.*
- *The County will actively encourage owners of Essential properties to take maximum advantage of available financial incentives (e.g. Federal and state rehabilitation tax credits, preservation easements, County real estate tax exemption for rehabilitation).*
- *The County will encourage owners of essential properties to take advantage of available zoning tools (e.g. site plans and use permits, TDR, local historic district designation).*
- *The County will pursue local historic district designation with all Essential properties where owner consent is present, and will give designation priority to those Essential properties threatened with demolition.*

The intent with respect to HRI-Essential properties is clear: the County Board committed to move heaven and earth to protect them, and in many cases it has. Other HRI-Essential commercial buildings in Clarendon have received varying degrees of protection and still stand, reused and much beloved. They include the Fisher Post Office, the Dan Kain Building now Lyon Hall restaurant, Odd Fellows Hall now Liberty Tavern, the Old Dominion Building now the Leadership Institute, the G.H. Rucker Building now Don Tito's and Spider Kelly's restaurants, the Engravers Building now incorporated into the new development across from Whole Foods, and the old Woolworth Building, most recently the Clarendon Ballroom.

Most of the other remaining commercial buildings from old Clarendon that are housing businesses that create the vitality that so defines Clarendon are also protected as HRI-Important, the second-highest category of significance.

Given this background, the lack of protection now contemplated in the Clarendon Sector Plan Update staff draft for the HRI-Essential Joyce Motors building is not supportable.

That is why the Planning Commission voted to recommended full frontage, in-situ protection for the building, and why the HALRB so strongly endorses that motion.

It is a fact that there has been very little, if any, effort by the county to negotiate with the Joyce Motors owner to save the building. The owner proposes to demolish the building and use some of the porcelain enamel panels in the corner of its new multi-story building, and calls that façade protection. That is not façade protection by any standard architectural definition, and it's completely inappropriate for a building of this recognized historical significance.

The county staff rationalizes the owner's position by suggesting that the building is not in the right place, and that the small parking lot in front interferes with the county's build to the street policy. That rationale was well-disabused in the Planning Commission debate on the Joyce motion by the example of several small, street-side open spaces created by new developments in Clarendon, including the corner of Wilson and Highland, where the new building was set back to create a small community space for public benefit. The bike share that now occupies part of that space is testimony to the need to have such places where we have block-long, high rise development being planned.

The owner of Joyce Motors says the building must come down because it's run-down. That is the nature of historic buildings. They get repaired and reused, and contribute to the community, as we know in Clarendon. The owner says the parking lot is a hazardous waste site. Irrespective of what happens with this property, the parking lot is going away and the owner presumably will deal with whatever hazardous materials are there. These are not sufficient excuses to demolish the building.

The Joyce Motors building frontage, protected in its current location, with a small public space replacing the parking lot in front of it is an appropriate compromise that will save the essence of the Joyce building while allowing the planned future development to move forward. To that end, County ought to get serious and use the many tools it has at its disposal (outlined in the HRI policy quoted above) to work with the developer to save this HRI-Essential building.

In 2021, the County Board did not appropriately protect the HRI-important Investor building at Courthouse Landmark, and allowed the developer to demolish the building and move the altered façade to the corner of the block.

Failure to protect the HRI-Essential Joyce Motors building would be an order of magnitude worse, and make a mockery out the County's HRI policy. Accordingly, the HALRB urges your support of the Planning Commission motion to protect the Joyce Motors building.

Thank you for your consideration of this most important matter.

Sincerely yours,
Dick Woodruff
Chairman, Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board

Cc: Mark Schwartz
Brett Wallace
Cynthia Liccesse-Torres

Lorin Farris
Elizabeth Mortin
Daniel Weir