



HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD
ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

TO: Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)

FROM: Lorin Farris, Historic Preservation Planner
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DATE: January 4, 2024

SUBJECT: CoA 24-02, 2500 Columbia Pike, Columbia Pike Form Based Code Project

Background Information

In March 2002, the County Board adopted the *Columbia Pike Initiative - A Revitalization Plan*. A major recommendation of the plan was to develop a new review process to evaluate redevelopment proposals in the corridor, which became the Form Based Code (FBC). In February 2003, the County Board adopted the FBC, which made commercial development sites within the “Columbia Pike Special Revitalization District” designated on the General Land Use Plan, eligible for development according to the FBC. The Arlington Village Shopping Center, located at 2500 Columbia Pike, is identified in the FBC as a historic building to be fully preserved.

The Arlington Village Shopping Center is a contributing resource in the Arlington Village National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Historic District, which was designated by the National Park Service in April 2003. The shopping center complex consists of six stores and serves as the northernmost boundary of the neighborhood. The shopping center continues to support the community and its residents. The nomination form has a brief description of the Arlington Village Shopping Center:

“The Colonial Revival design of the residential buildings in Arlington Village is repeated at the shopping center. The shopping center layout allows for an open floor plan at the interior of the six stores with a combination of roof designs to prevent a symmetrical presentation along Columbia Pike. Projecting show windows, Colonial Revival-style door surrounds, brick facing, and dentiled cornices unite the shopping center design with the residential section of Arlington Village. Access to parking spaces in front of the shopping center is provided by Columbia Pike and the side streets access the parking lot at the rear.”

Additionally, the nomination states the following about the shopping center:

“One-story in height on façade and two-stories at rear; the roof is hipped at each end with a flat roof in the center; Colonial Revival in style.”

Lastly, the Arlington Village Shopping Center is ranked Essential, the top category, in Arlington County’s Historic Resources Inventory (HRI).

In June 2023, the HALRB approved CoA 23-12 for the addition of a Colonial Revival-inspired rear entry vestibule for the Celtic House restaurant that would allow the commercial space to become ADA compliant.

Current Proposal

The applicant, Celtic House, currently uses a Columbia Pike-facing retail space and has been making changes, such as the new rear entry vestibule, to connect the main retail space to the ground level space at the rear of the building. The applicant proposes to install a new light box sign on the rear elevation at 2500 Columbia Pike. The new horizontal light box sign will measure 24” x 240” x 6”, will be installed on the rear elevation above two large existing windows, and will read “Celtic House Whiskey Bar”. The aluminum sign cabinet will have black returns and the sign face will consist of a printed polycarbonate material. The sign, which is proposed to be mounted into the brick with lag bolts and anchors, will connect to supplied electric in a junction box.

Design Review Committee (DRC) Review

The DRC considered the subject application at its January 3, 2024, hybrid meeting. The Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff noted that the proposed sign would be larger in size than the other existing signs along the back of the commercial building; thus, staff expressed a preference for a smaller sign. Additionally, the HPP staff noted that installing the sign above the brick banding instead of beneath it as proposed would also allow it to match the neighboring commercial signage.

The DRC members agreed that both the placement and size of the proposed sign are appropriate. They noted that given the stepped design and topography of the shopping center at the rear, none of the signage would be perfectly aligned. Ms. Foster asked about the middle vertical bar at the center of the sign and suggested it might be more visually appealing if the bar did not connect to the frame around the sign but stood on its own with some spacing on either side. Mr. Wenchel noted that the sign’s proposed font style was different than the font used on the front signage of their restaurant. The applicant expressed their desire to approach new signage with a more modern sensibility. The DRC members placed the application on the Consent Agenda for the January 17, 2024, hybrid HALRB public hearing.

Recommendation

The HPP staff recommends approval of the subject application. Even though the size of the proposed sign is slightly larger than other signage on the rear of the shopping center, staff appreciates the applicant’s desire for the sign to be visible from around the new entry vestibule. Further, although the sign would be situated below the existing decorative brick banding, which would differ from other neighboring rear signs that are situated primarily above it, staff recognizes that placement above the banding could make the signage asymmetry more obvious given that the Celtic House segment is at a higher elevation than the other commercial segments. The proposed placement of the sign also would allow the applicant to utilize a pre-existing electrical outlet rather than installing a new one in the building façade, thereby potentially causing more damage to the historic fabric. To that end, staff recommends that the HALRB instruct the applicant to install the signage in the mortar joints rather than the brick to minimize damage to historic fabric.

The HPP staff finds that the proposed sign materials and overall design are consistent with other signage along the commercial FBC corridor. The proposed font is both simple and traditional and complements the shopping center’s simple architectural design. Additionally, the proposed signage conforms with



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Standard #10 specified in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, as it is an alteration which could easily be reversed without an adverse effect to the property.

Standard #10: New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.