



HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD  
ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

**CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT**

**TO:** Historical Affairs & Landmark Review Board (HALRB)  
**FROM:** Mical Tawney, Historic Preservation Associate Planner  
**DATE:** August 13, 2024  
**SUBJECT:** 2911 Columbia Pike, CoA 24-17, Columbia Pike Form Based Code Project

**Background Information**

The commercial building located 2911 Columbia Pike is one of the store fronts located within the Arlington Theater, also known as the Arlington Cinema N' Draffhouse, at 2903 Columbia Pike. In its original design, the theater had two businesses flanking the main entrance to the theater. Today, two businesses, at 2911 and 2901 Columbia Pike, continue to flank the theater's entrance. Constructed in 1939, the Arlington Theater was designed in the Art Deco style by Fred Bishop and is the only remaining operating theater in the County from the cinema boom period of the 1930s and 1940s. The brick building is characterized by an emphasis on verticality via the three-part stepped façade, the notches along the parapet of the roof and brick fluting on the façade, and the large vertical blade sign at the center above the triangular marquee. In addition to having two separate shops flanking the main entrance, the 616-seat theater also had bowling alleys on the second and third floors when it opened in 1940. Previous occupants of the shop at 2911 Columbia Pike include a bakery and other restaurants. The subject building is called out for Full Building Preservation in the Columbia Pike Revitalization Plan and Form Based Code (FBC) (2016); therefore, all subsequent exterior alterations require CoA review and approval by the HALRB.

**Proposal**

The current business owner is proposing to replace the existing sign with a new one. The new signage would be in two parts: lettering above the store front entrance and a logo sign near the main entrance. Both would be electric and connect to power sources behind the wall. The lettering signage, which would state "La Chiquita Taqueria I," would measure 152" wide and 10,2" tall (about 10,76 s.f.). The logo signage would measure 18" wide and 30,5" tall (about 3,81 s.f.) and replace an existing menu advertisement box. Both signs would be installed flat to the wall, be attached to the façade with steel toggle bolts or metal screws, and have either acrylic or metal faces with metal frames.

**DRC Review**

The Design Review Committee (DRC) heard this application at its August 7, 2024, hybrid meeting. The original proposal included both the logo and the lettering above the entryway. Mr. Dudka offered that he did not think the inclusion of the logo at the top of the sign was necessary. He felt that its placement competed with the fluting on the façade of the building and that the logo details would be lost to the pedestrian due to their small size. He proposed either making the logo smaller and placing it in the front

of the portion of the sign with the wording or to remove it entirely and place the logo somewhere at the ground level. Mr. Davis and Mr. Wenchel both agreed with these points; Mr. Wenchel offered the idea of placing it where the menu box was located. The applicant, Ms. Mercier, asked about an alternate design and offered that she might be able to turn the logo into a blade sign instead. Ms. Tawney noted that the DRC could not determine whether that would be appropriate per Zoning Ordinance sign standards, but that they could speak to the design elements of that idea. Mr. Dudka did not support the blade sign idea, and Mr. Davis agreed noting that using a sign like that could compete with the blade sign at the theater's entrance. Ms. Tawney offered that the applicant could take away the portion of the logo that reads "La Chiquita" since it was a repeat of the wording already on the sign. The DRC reiterated their desire to have the logo removed from the sign altogether and placed somewhere at the street level. Ms. Mercier noted that she would need to speak with her clients to make sure they were okay with this proposed change and shared that this location was one of two in the County and that the client would likely want to keep signage consistent at both locations. The DRC decided that the item could go on the Consent Agenda for the August HALRB public hearing if the logo was relocated and placed somewhere at the ground level of the restaurant. The applicant made the requested changes of the DRC and therefore, the item was placed on the Consent Agenda for the August 21, 2024, hybrid HALRB public hearing.

### **Staff Recommendation**

As this property is not a local historic district, there are no design guidelines for this building. In lieu of design guidelines, the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance Section 15.7 directs the HALRB to use *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* to evaluate CoA applications. The Historic Preservation Program staff finds that the application meets the requirements of *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, particularly Standards #2 and #10, as follows:

2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
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.

Additionally, commercial signage on the façade of this portion of the building has been in place for at least over fifteen-years, if not longer, and is a common façade element seen along Columbia Pike. It is for all these reasons that HPP staff recommend approval of the subject application.