



HISTORICAL AFFAIRS AND LANDMARK REVIEW BOARD
ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS STAFF REPORT

TO: Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board (HALRB)
FROM: Mical Tawney, Historic Preservation Associate Planner
DATE: September 10, 2024
SUBJECT: 311 N. Glebe Rd., CoA 24-19, Buckingham Commercial Area Historic District

Background Information

Designed by Henry Wright, Allan Kamstra, and Albert Lueders, the Buckingham Shopping Center was built as a component of the planned Buckingham Village residential community between 1937 and 1946. The complex consists of numerous commercial buildings at the intersection of North Glebe Road and North Pershing Drive. Evoking the idea of a traditional village center, the commercial complex was one of the final examples in the Washington, D.C., area of separating stores by a street, which was a popular design among planners in the 1920s. The majority of Buckingham Village became a Local Historic District (LHD) in 1993 and the commercial properties are also contributing resources to the Buckingham Village National Register Historic District.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to install one sign in a location above the historic storefront which previously had temporary signage for the Wesley Property Management Leasing Office. Prior to that, the storefront contained a neon sign for “A Checks Cashed.” The proposed sign over the business entry on the southwest storefront facing N. Glebe Road would read “Cosmo Salon & Nail Spa.” The sign would measure 20” high by 134” wide by 6” deep; the lettering would measure 10” tall and be centered in the sign. It would also be installed 6” above the top of the awning over the store’s entrance.

Design Review Committee (DRC) Review

The Design Review Committee (DRC) considered the application at its September 4, 2024, hybrid meeting. Historic Preservation Program (HPP) staff notified the applicant that the sizing of the proposed sign did not match the measurements noted as appropriate in the signage guidelines for Buckingham. In particular, the signage was 6” smaller in height than typical signs in the district and the sign extended past the length of the window awning. After some brief discussion about the sizing of the signage, Ms. Tawney offered that the applicant could make those changes to the project and that she’d send them the dimensions required per the guidelines. The applicant then informed the DRC that the sign would be LED neon tubing rather than traditional neon tubing. Mr. Davis and Ms. Foster both expressed that this was acceptable; Ms. Foster pointed out that it would look the same, was more environmentally friendly, and was easier to maintain. Understanding that the sign would be updated to match the dimensions outlined in the design guidelines, the DRC placed the item on the Consent Agenda for the September 18, 2024, hybrid HALRB public hearing.

Recommendation

The HPP staff recommends approval of the subject application. Chapter 11: Guidelines for Commercial Areas: Signage in the *Buckingham Historic District Guidelines* states that “Neon signs are appropriate” (p. 35) but does not list it as a requirement; however, the *Neon Signage Guidelines for the Buckingham Shopping Center* stipulate “all lettering to be white neon” and “all lettering under the neon tubing to be white flat vinyl cutout letters” indicating the use of “neon” to be more of a requirement for signage in the district. Neither set of guidelines outline specifically if neon is meant to be interpreted as traditional neon or if LED or lit neon could qualify as “neon.” Understanding this, the HPP staff believe that the current project, which proposes the use of LED neon tubing rather than traditional neon tubing, follows and captures the spirit of the design guidelines for Buckingham. Although the mechanism by which the sign is illuminated would not literally be neon but rather LED neon, visually, the signage would appear the same as other neon signs in Buckingham which is also why HPP staff support the application.

The proposed colors and overall design of the new sign conform to the *Neon Signage Guidelines for the Buckingham Shopping Center* and to Chapter 11: Guidelines for Commercial Areas: Signage in the *Buckingham Historic District Guidelines*. All elements related to the size of the sign conform as well except for the depth of the sign. The guidelines state that “all sign boxes will be 4” deep.” The current proposal would be 6” deep. While this is different than what is outlined in the guidelines, HPP staff do not believe this difference of 2” would be discernible from the public right-of-way. Additionally, previous CoA projects in Buckingham have been approved with a depth greater than 4” (CoA 21-13 – 243 N. Glebe Rd.; CoA 21-33 – 237 237 N. Glebe Rd).