



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Commission of Architectural Review

3. COA-165913-2025	Final Review	Meeting Date: 6/24/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Billy Baxter; Junior Warden St. James Episcopal Church	
Project Description	Install a digital display board on integrated masonry wall of historic church.	
Project Location		
Address: 1201 West Franklin Street		
Historic District: Monument Avenue		
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant requests approval to install a new monument sign in front of St. James Episcopal Church. The monument sign will be constructed of brick and cast concrete. It will have a precast concrete pediment and an electronic message board.</p> <p>The sign will be integrated into a new retaining wall/ramp that was approved by the Commission in March 2024.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, alex.dandridge@rva.gov , (804) 646-6569	
Previous Reviews	<p>The Commission reviewed and deferred this application at their May 2025 meeting. Specifically, the Commission deferred the application to allow the applicant additional time to explore other signage technologies that were digital, but not illuminated.</p> <p>The Commission approved the installation of a ramp, retaining wall, and other site improvements at this location in March 2024. The design incorporated a monument sign; however, did not specify the illumination and technology of the signage.</p>	
Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff Recommends approval of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff finds that the overall design and materiality of the monument sign is appropriate and recommends its approval. Because the sign will not be internally illuminated, staff recommends approval of the color reflective LCD message board, noting that this is a new technology that has yet to be installed in a COHD, and should not be construed as precedent in future applications. Staff recommends that all underlying zoning requirements for the R-6 district be abided by. 	

Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards for Signage, pg. 75	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Signs should be easy to read.</i> <i>2. Signs should complement the signage of neighboring businesses.</i> <i>3. Signs should relate to the architectural features of an individual building.</i> <i>4. Signs should be located in traditional sign placement areas (cornice, sign-bands, transoms, display windows, etc.).</i> <i>5. Signs should not obstruct important architectural elements or details.</i> <i>6. Signs should not display colors that clash or conflict with a building.</i> <i>7. Signs should not be internally illuminated.</i> <i>8. Signs should not use animation or flashing or moving lights.</i> <i>9. LED and plasma display signs will not be approved for use in City Old and Historic Districts.</i> <i>10. Signs should not use franchised trademarks that do not represent the primary business.</i> <i>11. Internally illuminated plastic signs may be appropriate in newer commercial corridors but are not appropriate for use in Old and Historic Districts.</i> 	<p>The new monument sign will be approximately 10' tall and constructed of tan brick and precast concrete. There will be a precast concrete pediment at the top of the sign, which will be visually supported by pilasters. There will be an electronic message board that measures 4' tall by 2.5 feet wide. The main portion of the sign will be flanked by two lower walls with end columns topped with precast concrete caps.</p> <p>The precast pediment, brick, and pilaster designs are all in-keeping with the district and the elements and materials found on the primary building. <u>Staff finds that the overall design and materiality of the monument sign is appropriate and recommends its approval.</u></p> <p>The guidelines specifically state that "LED and plasma display signs will not be approved for use in City Old and Historic Districts".</p> <p>As originally submitted, the signs message board was proposed to be illuminated, digital signage. The Commission agreed at the May meeting that the LED signage was not in compliance with the <i>guidelines</i> and suggested that another technology be explored.</p> <p>The applicant has is now proposing a Color Reflective LCD message board. The specifications submitted indicate that this message board will be visible in the sunlight, and doesn't feature any back lighting, and is not internally illuminated. The lack of backlighting would reduce the signs "digital" appearance. Because the sign isn't backlit, uplighting will need to be added at the base of the sign for illumination at night.</p> <p><u>Because the sign will not be internally illuminated, staff recommends approval of the color reflective LCD message board, noting that this is a new technology that has yet to be installed in a COHD, and should not be construed as precedent in future applications.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that all underlying zoning requirements for the R-6 district be abided by.</u></p>

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, the application is consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation and New Construction outlined in Section 30-930.7 (b) and (c) of the City Code, as well as with the Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines, specifically the pages cited above, adopted by the Commission for review of Certificates of Appropriateness under the same section of the code.

Figures

Figure 1. View of the recently constructed ramp and retaining wall in front of St. James Church. The new sign will be incorporated into this wall.



Figure 2. View of the recently constructed ramp and retaining wall in front of St. James Church. The new sign will be incorporated into this wall.

