

**Town of Vienna
Board of Architectural Review Regular Meeting
September 18, 2024 – Transcript for Item#2 ACE Hardware**

Patty Hanley: Item number one has requested to be moved to later in the agenda due to a scheduling conflict, so we're going to go to an item number 2. Request approval for a new wall sign for Vienna Ace located at 264 Cedar Lane SE, docket number PF-1808851-BAR in the Gateway S zoning district. If you can please come forward, state your name and address for the record.

Burton, Francois 504 Shaw Rd., Suite 209, Sterling, VA.

Patty Hanley OK. Ms. Abaied, do you want to give a background or?

Sharmaine Abaied Yes, the I spoke with the sign company, which I think Mr. Francois is the person who's just the person standing in for the sign company, correct?

Burton Francois Yes, I'm local,

Sharmaine Abaied yes. So I spoke with the sign company who did the design for ACE and had mentioned that you guys had recommended possibly some options. They presented their logo catalog um, but then when it came close to the submittal deadline, he said that they just wanted to move forward with the same application that was presented at the last month's meeting, and in the in between time it came to was brought to our attention that the sign had already been installed, of course, without the board's approval and then also without a Fairfax County permit either.

Patty Hanley Thank you for that background. Would you like to say anything about the application before I open it up to the board?

Burton Francois No, it's kind of similar to the the last month's presentation. They, they went back to the to Ace to see where they would make some changes or and Ace basically presented their brand book and said they're they're very limited to be able to make any changes to the proportions or the position of the sign without going afoul of the brand guidelines. So it's that's

Patty Hanley: I, I hear what you're saying. I also saw in the package that was provided to us the the brand book that had several options in there that were in my opinion could achieve what we were were trying to achieve with what was going there. I didn't see any requirement of the white in their brand book. I'm just going to open it up to the board for comments.

John O'Keefe: Yeah, I have a couple. I have a question, if you don't mind.

Patty Hanley: yeah, sure go ahead.

John O'Keefe: Yeah, I had that same observation that the brand guidelines had no specificity on the white. And I think our request at the last meeting was fairly modest at one point. I mean, we have talked about a few things, including a background

color that wasn't a pure white, that was closer to the color of the surrounding building. They're not, which is not that far off. I was just there a few minutes ago looking at it again. So I'm, I'm curious though, was the decision, was the sign already made when you came to the meeting a month ago and the decision was made because it was already done to install it or was the decision made to install it after the board's decision to um to defer it?

Burton Francois: that I'm I'm not aware of, I believe that the sign may have been in production but not completed. The the concern with the colors, the Ace Hardware, their colors are red, black and white. So there, there's very few, there's kind of deviations to that in, but those are their brand colors. And they felt that there were other signs. The, the previous sign was a CVS sign with a small CVS logo with kind of a large white space. And I, I believe there's another sign in the same Plaza, the chicken,

John O'Keefe: The RedBird

Burton Francois: the red bird sign, which is also kind of very similar in that it's, they felt it centered to the sign and then there's a lot of white space. And again, there's two signs, there were two signs in the Plaza with that background. So they

John O'Keefe: and and I understand

Burton Francois: comfortably enough moving forward.

John O'Keefe: I understand that. And I mean, you might recall we discussed all of that at length at the last meeting and we deferred and you went out and talked to your client, came back. So we did discuss that. I think the board had a slightly different view, although we were divided. And I would say that I was probably on the fence on whether to approve it. I'll also say that seeing it in person, it's one of those circumstances where I actually feel like in person, I, I like it more than the rendering, but I'm still dismayed. Let's just say that the applicant and the business owner hasn't went, went ahead and did this direct contradiction of what we, our decision was and, and the answer being, well, we just disagree with you. So all right, that's it. I'll hand it off to others who have comments.

Patty Hanley: Mr. Penati?

Nate Penati: No comments.

Patty Hanley: Ms. Couchman?

Ms. Couchman: Yeah, I just don't really understand because I do think that there are some better options in the in the document that was provided and I'm..yeah, I think it's a shame, I think it's a shame. I don't know what else to say really. I don't like it. I've seen it. I was just across the street from it a few minutes ago. But you know, I don't know. I don't have anything else to say.

Ellen Shelly: I..I had the same experience as John that I do feel like seeing it in

person, it has a better aesthetic appeal than what we originally saw in the rendering. I I don't have enough of an aesthetic objection to it to disapprove.

Patty Hanley: OK, yeah, aesthetically I I still am going to stand by my comments from last time. I agree with Miss Couchman that there were other options in the in the brand book that would have met the symmetric symmetry or change in the color of to to blend with the building would have made it less. I think this sign is it I I'm not going to vote for this sign because of those reasons and especially because when we say no, don't go and do it and then ask for forgiveness. This is not how the town operates. This is kind of, it's not the how regulation works. If we wanted to, you know, have a discussion or even if they came back and said, you know, no, we really, really want this. I might not vote no, but because it, it was just like a slap in the face. And I, I'm sorry, but that to me is, is the more offensive piece of them coming back with this application. That being said, I'm just one board member. Not um...

John O'Keefe: I'll, I'll, I'll, I'll say I'm torn, right? I mean, I, I was, you'll remember the vote, I was the last person to vote and I was on the fence, but I did vote no because I thought particularly we could just adjust the background color just a little bit. But yeah, I think on principle and I think I don't mean to direct all of my. Higher towards you, who's just the contractor in all of this. And in fact, my comment as I walked in was whether the business owner was going to show tonight or whether you'd be back. So you have to fall on the sword here. But I'm not going to change my vote at this time.

Patty Hanley: OK any other board members have anything to add?

Burton Francois: I kind of have a question, just out of curiosity, right, You guys saw the brand guide and Miss Hanley and Miss Couchman. What would your preferred option be kind of sticking to the the brand colors with the white, the black and the red from their brand guide from because these are kind of the..

Sarah Couchman: Right, so I'm, oh, go ahead.

Burton Francois: Just out of curiosity. Hopefully it won't impact your final decision. But just so one, the one option that I prefer with regard to layout is the one in the middle row where so I feel like that's more balanced to have it centered and you know, Vienna could or Vienna hardware that could go at the bottom, I would think. And then what I don't understand about the background is page is on page 21 of the I mean, those are examples of different building. I mean, or maybe I'm misunderstanding the the graphic, but but it looks like you can have you can, you can have the building as the background. It's a more, [multiple speakers talking at once] but I, I think that's a cost issue, right? That's a more expensive well in the in the landlord, right.

Burton Francois: Backer to this sign

John O'Keefe: And we understood, yeah, we talked about it,, [multiple speakers talking at once] but the color, but it does not specify that it must be against a white background. I'm very familiar with brand guidelines. I went through this closely and there's absolutely no specification. And in fact, there's several examples of it not

against white background. So the mere request that the background color of the backer be modified to be slightly more harmonious with the building, I viewed as a minor as a minor modification.

Patty Hanley: Or the third option would be to request the landlord not to use the backer board. And if that they pursued that and that was a no go, then that's fine. But make sure they really pursue that if they want to just keep the letters, everything's already made, everything's there. But again..

Burton Francois: I, I, I think one of the concerns with going like the, the, so a, a lot of times landlords will request like 3 different install methods, right? It's direct attached like your Vienna sign or Raceway because less penetrations in their wall and like a backer board with, with this particular architecture with the wooden slats it it, it would be a little bit more difficult to install individual letters because then you, you would have to kind of identify your, your penetrations with, with the slats and where your electrical cord goes for each because each letter would have an electrical wire coming out of it versus everything kind of inside like an M1 thing.

Patty Hanley: I think arrangement could be done so that it would blend with those, but it would just take a little care.

Burton Francois: Yeah.

Nate Penati: And even with the white background, the as long as the Ace is bigger and then Vienna is smaller on the opposite side of it, we are OK with that, right? Like Ace Hardware in our in our original thing, the the starting Vienna was smaller and then that gave that...white spot..

Patty Hanley: Yeah, yeah.

John O'Keefe: I mean, I don't blame them for choosing to name their store Vienna Ace instead of Ace Vienna. But but so, you know, no, I hear you on that. It look, it's an awkward it's an awkward thing to do with that large A, but it's done all over the country and probably the world and other places. I think we were just mostly objecting to that very large Swatch of white, which we're still seeing right there and how to soften that a little so there would have been other options. I think the lettering is very nice. I actually think the way it was done, it doesn't didn't come through on the rendering. I looked at it very closely, the raised letterings it it's attractive, it's neat um..But anyway, that's that's. Where I come down, could that backward board be painted?

Burton Francois: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

John O'Keefe: As I mean, I just meant tend to technically be painted like without destroying the sign or that's just question.

Burton Francois: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it can, right. But I, I, I don't want to kind of, I, I guess give my 1 cent right, because it's just, it's just that right? But it's, it's just an opinion and I don't want to..

John O'Keefe: sure you're not authorized.

Burton Francois: I, I don't want to what I, what I say to, you know, go the same way it went last time, which maybe I think I spoke about right, right. [John O'Keefe laughs] But right, The thing is, right, if you center the sign like an option, like the second option where it's, you know, the ace and the hardware, then Mr. O'Keefe, then you still have the issue of the white space, right?

Patty Hanley: Why would you have the issue of the white space?

Burton Francois: Because then it's going to be centered like this, right? And you could only expect

Patty Hanley: you said last time that this.

Burton Francois: No, no, no, I'm just saying like with with the with the second option that you guys, I think YouTube may have preferred right where it's centered, like the CVS sign where it's the red and you have it's centered, then you have more, you have even more white space.

Patty Hanley: no, no, no I don't think you are understanding. You would not size the backer board the same size because that would not that you, you told us it was a new backer board

Burton Francois: and that's the point. Then you have a big backer board.

Patty Hanley: Well, cut it. [laughs]

Burton Francois: OK.

John O'Keefe: I do think we talked about one option was whether the word hardware could appear under Vienna. So it would be Vienna Ace Hardware and that that would fill some of the space. I do think that was one one thing that you were talking about in sort of like that's not a very good example, Smith's Ace Hardware, but but if we're see where Smith's ace is, if that hardware were up under Smith's or something along those lines, it might have filled the space a little bit better.um, But we could we could debate this all all night if we wanted to. I guess we tried that last time.

Patty Hanley: OK, this is actually well, Ms. Couchman?

Sarah Couchman: I would just so I I had a had a new experience that I just wanted to share. I had to appear before the Fairfax County Architectural Review Board for the first time last month, and my project was deferred. And when I was up there, I felt like the feedback I was receiving was perhaps a little maybe irrational or not, you know, because I thought I had a very good design, right? But but my client was not with me. And so they recommended that I bring my client next time and, and they offered to workshop it with me. And I'm not saying that for a sign we need to have a workshop necessarily, but I think the the board, as with this body is very interested in reaching a mutually, you know, we want to come to an agreement that is satisfactory

to all parties. I and so I think it would be helpful if whomever is making the, whoever's making the decision maybe come to, if they're depending on how this goes down, come to the next meeting or one of the board members offered to meet me at the project site. And so we're actually going to do that with the client. I would be happy to meet the Ace Hardware person at Cedar Lane Shopping Center and talk to them about it. But I think that's, you know, I think that's at this point, what, what would be most helpful? Because as you know, there is sort of the principle thing and the, and we don't really want to set a precedent where people, you know, where we give feedback and we've, and we vote no to something. And then they just come back and say, well, I'm want to keep it this way. Like we, we, we would like to facilitate a better communication and, you know, and working together.

Patty Hanley: Agreed.

Burton Francois: I'm, I'm a passionate sign guy, right? I, I love signage, right? And, and with within signage, there's plethora of opinions, right? But in in what I try to do with my customers right? Try to stick to their brand as much as possible. I have customers that come to me and they want to deviate from their brand and I tell them, I caution them about their brand because your brand is your brand, right? If I print for Coca-Cola, I'm going to print Coca-Cola red. I'm not going to print Carmine red or rose red or another red and to to somebody else, it may not be Coca-Cola red, but Coca-Cola and Coca-Cola customers. You, you're not following me.

Patty Hanley: I'm just not sure where your point is coming from.

Burton Francois: But because my, my point is in, in most cases, I recommend that the customers stick to their brand. Their brand color is red, black and white. I know there's deviations, there's exceptions to that, right? But what you see in most of the pages, it's red, black and white. So I would encourage my customer to stick to their brand and not go with any other. And yes, there were buildings that have the color, but I'm sure if that customer had the option, they would paint the building white versus going with a maroon building. Because the fact is the sign looks better in my 1 cent.

Patty Hanley: ok

Burton Francois: It looks better on a white background because it stands out more. But that's just one my 1 cent and I I think this is going to for you guys to come back and re re redo this thing. So I just wanted to kind of put that out there because I can't help but be passionate about my science.

Patty Hanley: Very good.

Burton Francois: Thank you.

Patty Hanley: OK. Does any other board members have anything to add? Does anybody from the public wish to comment on this application?

John O'Keefe: Can I ask you a question? Ms. Abaied remind me the distinction between deferring and we deferred this the last time and denial is what in the end?

Sharmaine Abaied: denial would mean they would have to come back with a brand new application. They couldn't even revise this one. It would have to be a new application.

John O'Keefe: OK.

19:54:57

That's the main difference.

Patty Hanley: Yeah.

John O'Keefe: OK.

Patty Hanley: From what I heard from the applicant and that what they took from our suggestions last time and what they brought forward this time is they deserve an answer.

John O'Keefe: Yeah, Yeah, that's fair. OK, I'll make a motion.

Patty Hanley: Sure, Go ahead.

John O'Keefe: I move to deny the application for a new wall sign for Vienna Ace located at 264 Cedar Lane SE, docket number PF-1808851-B AR in the GS Gateway Cell Zoning District, filed by Desi Varsel Signs Unlimited.

Patty Hanley: Do I have a second?

Sarah Couchman: I second.

Patty Hanley: uh, that is a motion and a second. Any discussion? No? All in favor say aye aye. Any opposed one nay that motion passes. Thank you.

John O'Keefe: Thank you, Appreciate your passion.

Sharmaine Abaied: Can I just check with that was a four to one vote?

Patty Hanley: Yes.

John O'Keefe: 4 to 1. Yes, Mr...

This is the end for this item.