

The proposed design of buildings #1 and #2 in the South Robinson Terminal project violate Alexandria's Zoning Ordinance and waterfront guidelines

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The following is a review and analysis of the drawings submitted with docket items presented to the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) on July 1, 2015, for the design of buildings #1 and #2 of the South Robinson Terminal project being developed by EYA. The proposed designs deviate from Alexandria's Zoning Ordinance in the following ways.

From the perspective of compliance with the ordinance, the base elevation for both buildings #1 and #2 at all sides is shown to be 11.60 feet. The roof of the both buildings is shown to be elevation 61.54 feet or 49.94 feet above the base elevation. That puts the roof at 49 feet, 11 ¼ inches above base elevation. However, the parapets on the buildings extend above the roof, thereby exceeding the maximum 50-foot height limit permitted with a Special Use Permit (SUP).

The top of the lowest parapet is approximately 12 inches above the 61.54 foot elevation, putting the building height at approximately 51 feet. The next lowest parapet is appropriately 24 inches high, putting the building height at approximately 52 feet. These heights are consistent on all elevations and therefore exceed the "average height" of 50 feet; no parapet elevation is below the 50 foot maximum average height permitted for the building under its SUP.

But that is not the worst of it. The sloped metal roof and associated parapet walls on the waterfront elevation are approximately 4 to 6 feet above that, making the building height in the range of 54 feet, 6 inches. The sloped roof and parapets have nothing to do with mechanical room penthouses.

This is the exact design (sloped metal roof) that EYA's architect, Shalom Baranes, used on a project in D.C. at 2100 K Street NW. The sloped roof canopy he proposed was in clear violation of the District's height restriction. Shalom argued to the D.C. Zoning Commission that the canopies were not part of the height restriction and were "towers." The Commission rejected the argument and sent Shalom back to the drawing board.

On another point, the language in the waterfront Design Guidelines dated May 1993 permits an increase in building height from 30 feet to 50 feet with the approval of an SUP. Besides keeping building heights within the context of Old Town, the language in the Guidelines states that increases above 30 feet can be approved, provided that "the basic 30 feet height is maintained at the street faces and the waterfront face of the proposed building or buildings. To provide a transition, building heights over this basic [30 foot] height level should be set back from the street faces and the waterfront faces." Based upon the latest drawings none of the faces on any of the elevations of Buildings #1 and #2 has any setback at all, let alone above the 30 foot mark.