

Docket Item # 3
BAR CASE # 2007-0006

BAR Meeting
April 4, 2007

ISSUE: Alterations

APPLICANT: Ayne Furman & Arthur Miller by BMK, PC

LOCATION: 517 ½ S. Royal Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION, APRIL 4, 2007: Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That care be taken in the removal of the existing wall to ensure that the façade of the house is not damaged and that any repair work match the façade brick and mortar as closely as possible; and,
2. That the following statements must appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.

The applicant must not allow metal detection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.

BOARD ACTION, MARCH 21, 2007: Deferred due to lack of public notice.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION, MARCH 21, 2007: Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That care be taken in the removal of the existing wall to ensure that the façade of the house is not damaged and that any repair work match the façade brick and mortar as closely as possible; and,

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2. That the following statements must appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

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BOARD ACTION, FEBRUARY 7, 2007: The Board combined the discussion of docket item #'s 13 & 14. On a motion by Mr. Smeallie, seconded by Mr. Wheeler, the Board voted to defer the application for restudy with a vote of 7-0.

REASON: The Board expressed concern with the demolition of the existing brick wall, design of the proposed new fence and also concern regarding the use of Hardiplank for the new fence.

SPEAKERS: Skip McGinnis, project architect, spoke in support

STAFF RECOMMENDATION, FEBRUARY 7, 2007: Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the proposed fence be constructed entirely of wood;
2. That care be taken in the removal of the existing wall to ensure that the façade of the house is not damaged and that any repair work match the façade brick and mortar as closely as possible; and,
3. That the following statements must appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.

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(Insert sketch here)

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Note: Docket item #2 must be approved before this docket item can be considered.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting a certificate of appropriateness for a new fence and gate constructed of pressure treated wood and composite wood planks to replace the existing brick wall and wood gate that extends across the south side yard at the front of the property even with the face of the house. The new 6'2" high fence will be constructed of a pressure treated wood frame with 1" x 8" smooth composite wood (Tuf Board) planks on the exterior. Fence details include chamfered corners at the posts, an arched top on the gate and circular cut-outs at the top of the planks. The fence and gate will be painted to match the house shutters (Benjamin Moore Stonington Gray).

The fence and gate will be readily visible from Royal Street but at a remove of six to seven feet.

II. HISTORY:

As explained in docket item #2, 517 ½ South Royal Street is one of a group of ten rowhouses constructed on the site of the old Alexandria Iron Works in 1964. In 2004, Board approved a permit to demolish and certificate of appropriateness for a new one story addition and dormer window at the rear of this property (BAR Case #s 2004-0117 & 0118, 8/18/04).

III. ANALYSIS:

Section 7-202(B)(3) of the zoning ordinance allows in any yard except the front yard open and closed fences which do not exceed six feet in height. As there is no front yard requirement in the RM zone, this fence, located even with the front of the house, is not considered a front fence and may be up to six feet in height. However, in accordance with Section 7-202(C) of the zoning ordinance, in the Old and Historic Alexandria and the Parker-Gray Districts, the requirement of section 7-202(B)(3) may be waived or modified by the Board of Architectural review where the Board finds that a proposed fence would be architecturally appropriate and consistent with the character of the district.

Therefore, the Board has the authority to waive section 7-202(B)(3) if it determines that the proposed 6'2" fence is appropriate. Staff recommends waiving the 6' requirement. The proposed fence is only 2" higher than the requirement and, in the opinion of Staff, the height is appropriate for this location.

In response to the Board's comments at the February 7, 2007 hearing, the fence design has been altered and the applicant is now proposing to use composite wood rather than fiber cement planks. The new design is somewhat less rustic than the previous design. The framing members (middle rail on the fence panels and diagonal bracing on gate) are now on the side of the fence facing into the yard, leaving a more polished appearance on the street face. The arched gate top and the circular cut-outs at the top of the planks add even more polish without directly mimicking a particular fence type or period. Staff has no objection to the design of the fence. It is still a less formal design than the existing brick wall, but still falls within the acceptable fence types for the historic district and will be compatible with the house at 517 ½ South Royal Street and its neighbor to the south.

While Staff had reservations about the use of fiber cement in a fence, Staff is somewhat more comfortable with the use of composite wood or Tuf Board than fiber cement. Tuf Board seems to have more of the appearance and feel of wood, particularly when painted. Staff does note that presumably the composite wood will not warp, develop knot holes or weather in the manner of wood. While this is considered a great benefit on the part of proponents of the material, it also makes for a less real and less historically accurate appearance. Thus, Staff is not prepared to give a blanket endorsement of the use of composite products in fences in the historic district. Wood continues to be the preferred material for fences in the historic district per the *Design Guidelines* (Fences- Page 2). Wood substitutes are probably not appropriate for fences associated with historic houses or in more readily accessible locations. Staff is willing to recommend to approve it in this particular case as it involves a non-historic house and a fence that is well removed from the public right-of-way.

To conclude, Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted. Staff notes the comments of Alexandria Archaeology and recommends that they be included as a condition of the approval.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That care be taken in the removal of the existing wall to ensure that the façade of the house is not damaged and that any repair work match the façade brick and mortar as closely as possible; and,
2. That the following statements must appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.

The applicant must not allow metal detection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F- finding

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-2 Additions and alterations to the existing structure and/or installation and/or altering of equipment therein requires a building permit (USBC 108.1). Five sets of plans, bearing the signature and seal of a design professional registered in the Commonwealth of Virginia, must accompany the written application (USBC 109.1).

Historic Alexandria:

No comments received.

Alexandria Archaeology:

- F-1 Tax records indicate that a free African American household was present on this street face in 1810, but the exact address is not known. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into domestic activities of Alexandria's free black population in the early nineteenth century.
- R-1 Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.
- R-2 The applicant must not allow metal detection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.
- R-3 The above statements in R-2 and R-3 must appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.