

Docket Item #10  
BAR Case #2003-0169

BAR Meeting  
September 17, 2003

**ISSUE:** Replacement windows

**APPLICANT:** Hannah & Steven Williams

**LOCATION:** 421 Gibbon Street

**ZONE:** RM/Residential

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**BOARD ACTION, AUGUST 6, 2003:** On a motion by Ms. Quill, seconded by Dr. Fitzgerald the Board deferred the application for restudy. The vote on the motion was 5-0.

**REASON:** The Board believed that the metal windows were a character defining feature of this row of houses and that consideration should be given to restoring the windows rather than replacing them.

**SPEAKER:** Steven Williams, homeowner, spoke in support

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that the Board review and approve an actual sample of the proposed window.

### Update:

At the public hearing of August 6, 2003, the Board deferred the application for restudy and asked the applicant to research whether the windows could be restored rather than replaced. The applicant has not been able to find a window company that would undertake the work. Instead of the vinyl windows originally proposed, a combination vinyl and aluminum window is proposed. This window has a vinyl structural system that is wrapped in aluminum.

### DISCUSSION:

#### Applicant's Description of the Undertaking:

We would like to replace our old steel casement windows with vinyl windows, as four of our neighbors have done.

#### Issue:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to replace the nine steel casement windows on the south (front), west, and north (rear) sides of the end unit, two story house. The proposed new vinyl and aluminum casement windows will have grids in various configurations, intended to match the existing windows.

The existing steel windows on the front consist of a fixed center portion of eight lights flanked on either side by casements composed of four vertically aligned lights. The first story window is surmounted by a transom of four horizontal lights. The smaller side and rear windows are a variety of sizes and configurations, generally consisting of a fixed section and an operable casement section.

All elevations of the house are visible from a public right-of-way, either from Gibbon Street or from Pitt Street to the west.

#### History and Analysis:

The row of two story, brick clad houses from 413 to 421 Gibbon Street was constructed circa 1955 (Building Permit #6282, 3/15/1955). The plans for the new houses were approved by the Board of Architectural Review on March 10, 1955. The otherwise plain facades of these modest buildings are distinguished by their large multi-light steel windows and Colonial Revival door surrounds. The houses at 413 to 421 Gibbon Street were designed by Joseph Saunders, AIA, and built for E.E. Lawler. They are very similar to the row of three houses at 406 to 412 Gibbon Street, on the south side of the block, which were also designed by Joseph Saunders, but built for Michael M. Abrams. These houses were approved by the Board of Architectural Review on July 1954 and were constructed circa 1954 (Building Permit #6153, 7/2/1954).

From the late 1940s through the late 1960s, Joseph Saunders was a prolific architect working in Alexandria. The work of his firm included churches, office buildings, shopping centers, schools,

motels (such as the Old Colony Motor Lodge) as well as residential buildings. Joseph Saunders also served as an architect member of the Alexandria Board of Architectural Review.

On November 18, 1992, the Board denied approval of the request to paint the west wall of the house at 421 Gibbon Street and approved the construction of a fence in the rear yard (BAR Case#92-214). The front and rear of the house were already painted at that time.

While there is no record of Board approval, 413 Gibbon Street, located at the other end of the row from 421 Gibbon Street, does have replacement vinyl slider windows. All the others in the row retain the original steel casement windows. In the last several years and under varied circumstances, the Board has approved window replacement at all three of the Saunders designed houses on the south side of Gibbon Street, across from the subject property:

#### 406 Gibbon Street

BAR Case #2002-173 (7/17/02) - The Board approved the replacement of the existing non-original vinyl windows with wood casement windows with fixed exterior muntins in a configuration similar to the original steel windows. The window replacement was part of a larger project including a rear addition and other alterations to the front facade undertaken by new owners. The Board felt the wood windows were an improvement over the vinyl windows with snap-in interior that they were replacing.

BAR Case #2001-0244 (3/6/02) - The Board approved after-the-fact the vinyl windows and shutters which had been installed approximately 12 years before. The windows which were approved were vinyl slider windows with interior snap-in muntins of 12 lights in each sash. The Board approved the vinyl windows, feeling that it would be unreasonable to request the long-time resident to replace windows which had been in place for 12 years.

The new wood windows with fixed exterior muntins approved by the Board on July 17, 2002 are in place at 406 Gibbon Street.

#### 408 Gibbon Street

BAR Case #2002-0051 (4/17/02) - The Board denied the request to replace the original steel casement windows with vinyl windows with snap-in muntins. The Board felt that the aluminum windows with fixed exterior muntins for which the applicant had previously received approval were an appropriate solution and that the proposed vinyl windows were not.

BAR Case #2001-208 (9/5/01) - The Board approved the request to replace the original steel casement windows with aluminum casement windows with fixed exterior muntins matching the original windows in configuration and operation.

The aluminum windows with fixed exterior muntins approved by the Board on September 5, 2001 are in place at 408 Gibbon Street.

#### 412 Gibbon Street

BAR Case #2001-254 (3/6/2002) - The Board approved after-the-fact the installation of vinyl casement windows with interior muntins. These windows had been installed by a prior owner. The Board had approved *wood* replacement windows for 412 Gibbon Street in 1999 (BAR Case

#99-0172,11/17/99). These wood windows were to have been casement and to have true divided lights. The muntin configuration and operation of the approved wood window was similar to the original steel windows. However, the vinyl windows were installed rather than the approved wood windows. In 2001, the Board approved the vinyl windows after-the-fact, believing that it would be unfair to require the present owner to replace the windows that had been installed by the previous owner.

The vinyl windows with interior muntins that received after-the-fact approval from the Board on March 6, 2002 are in place at 412 Gibbon Street.

The proposed replacement windows comply with the zoning ordinance requirements.

A central tenet of the philosophy of historic preservation is that the original historic material should be retained and repaired rather than replaced. In the case of the Saunders-designed houses on Gibbon Street, the steel casement windows are a primary character-defining element of the facade. The taut, planar look of the original windows convey a sense of mid-20th century modernity. The proposed windows will differ from the original in terms of material, thickness of members and overall feeling. In some cases, the proposed windows will also differ from the existing in configuration and operation. For example, the large first story front window will no longer have a fixed transom and the second story side and rear windows will be double casement rather than part fixed, part casement.

On the other hand, as discussed above, the Board has previously approved the replacement of steel casement windows in similar houses, acknowledging that repair of these windows is difficult and expensive. Likewise, it is understood that replacement in-kind with steel windows would be prohibitively expensive. At 408 Gibbon Street, the only similar replacement case that was not an after-the-fact approval, the Board approved aluminum windows with fixed exterior muntins which closely matched the configuration and operation of the original steel windows. The Board expressed a preference for aluminum windows as the material would be metal, like the steel originals.

The Board has discouraged the use of vinyl windows and windows with flat or snap-in muntins in nearly all circumstances. In fact, in 2002, after having been approved for aluminum replacement windows, the applicant for 408 Gibbon Street came back to the Board requesting vinyl windows, pointing to the approval of the vinyl windows at 406 and 412 Gibbon Street as precedent. The Board noted that those were after-the-fact cases with extenuating circumstances and therefore not comparable. The Board affirmed its preference for aluminum and voted to deny the request for vinyl windows (BAR Case #2002-0051, 4/17/02)

Staff believes either aluminum or aluminum-clad wood windows matching the existing as closely as possible would be acceptable. Staff would not object to minor modifications in the operation of the side and rear windows, such as changing a part fixed, part casement window to a double casement window, as is proposed in the current application, as long as the light pattern matched that of the existing. Staff believes more deviation from the original windows is acceptable on the side and rear as these windows are not as readily visible as the front windows. However, Staff

cannot make a definitive recommendation regarding the appropriateness of these windows without viewing a sample. Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that the Board review and approve an actual sample of the proposed window.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement

No comments.

Historic Alexandria

No comment.