

Docket Item #14
BAR Case #2003-0234

BAR Meeting
October 15, 2003

ISSUE: Demoliton/capsulation

APPLICANT: Dr. Lawrence Singer

LOCATION: 809 Cameron Street

ZONE: CD/Commercial

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends:

- 1) approval of the Permit to Demolish/Capsulate for the alterations to the rear of the building and for the restoration of the second story center windows on the front of the building; and,
- 2) denial of the Permit to Demolish/Capsulate for the third story addition and alterations to the front (excepting the restoration of the second story windows as stated above).

NOTE: This docket item requires a roll call vote.

DISCUSSION:

Applicant s Description of the Undertaking:

Request permission to capsulate east wall of existing 3rd floor.

Issue:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish/Capsulate to allow for a third story addition on the east side of the front of the building. In addition, there will be numerous smaller changes consisting of both demolition and infilling, including restoring two openings and removing other features on the front facade and making various alterations to openings on the sides and rear. These items are described in more detail below:

Third Story Addition

The proposed third story addition will entail the demolition and/or capsulation the roof of the front portion of the eastern half of the building (520 square feet of roof area) and capsulating the 26' long east side wall of the western half of the building on the third story.

Other Alterations

Two window openings will be created in the brick wall of the front facade at the second story above the entrance. This will restore original window openings which were infilled c. 1969. The third story balcony on the west side will be demolished. The existing full length paired windows surmounted by an arched stained glass transom, which give access to the balcony will be removed. The bracketed wood cornice on the east side and narrower molded wood or metal cornice on the west side will be removed.

Extensive changes will be made to the rear ell to establish new openings, including the installation of six pairs of french doors. Openings will be moved, others will be created or bricked in. The submitted drawings do not show the demolition/infilling of these areas and the full extent of the alterations can only be roughly established by comparing the drawings with the photographs of the existing building. In addition, a two story porch will wrap the sides and back of the rear ell. The existing two story porch on the west side will be either repaired or replaced, as required.

History and Analysis:

The Victorian townhouse now known as 809 Cameron Street was built as two separate but attached houses (809 & 807 Cameron Street) between 1877 and 1885, when the Sanborn Fire

Insurance maps first documented this area. It is one of a row of four identical, two story, Italianate style units (803 - 809 Cameron Street) distinguished by their two story bay windows and bracketed comices. Between 1896 and 1902, a third floor addition was added to the westernmost building (809 Cameron Street). The addition, incorporating a wooden balcony to terminate the two story brick window bay below, is an interesting example of an early addition done during the same general time period of the original building, but in a different architectural idiom. Sanborn mapping indicates that, in the late 19th and early 20th century, frame porches were found on the back of the buildings, including one story porches on both and a two story side porch on the west side of 809 Cameron Street.

According to the building permit record, as early as 1936, the two townhouses were joined internally and served as the Cunningham residence and funeral home. In 1939, the two buildings were further linked by additional internal changes and the construction of the recessed arched door flanked by columns which exists today (Permit #3218, September 11, 1939). In 1953, apparently after the present funeral home building was constructed at 811 Cameron Street, the building at 809 Cameron Street underwent interior renovations for conversion to offices (Permit #10993, 6/25/1953). In 1969, a renovation of the building for use as an arts and crafts shop entailed bricking up the two center windows on the second floor to provide space for sign. At the same time, three windows on the east side of the building on the first floor were bricked up and a door in the rear wall was replaced (Permit #26105, 3/17/1969). These alterations were approved by the Board of Architectural Review on February 12, 1969.

More recently, in 1990, the Board denied an application to demolish the building (BAR Case #89-231, 1/3/1990). In 1992, the Board approved the reconstruction of the wood balcony on the third story on the west side of the building (BAR Case #92-0046, 2/19/1992). The project sought to retain and to match the historic fabric to the greatest extent possible. Last year, the Board approved the after-the-fact capsulation and enclosure of the side second story porch at 809 Cameron Street (BAR Case #2002-0096 & 0070, 6/19/2002).

In considering a Permit to Demolish and/or Capsulate, the Board must consider the following criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, Sec. 10-105(B):

- (1) Is the building or structure of such architectural or historical interest that its moving, removing, capsulating or razing would be to the detriment of the public interest?
- (2) Is the building or structure of such interest that it could be made into a historic house?
- (3) Is the building or structure of such old and unusual or uncommon design, texture and material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty?
- (4) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway?
- (5) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve and protect an historic place or area of historic interest in the city?
- (6) Would retention of the building or structure promote the general welfare by maintaining and increasing real estate values, generating business, creating new positions, attracting tourists, students, writers, historians, artists and artisans, attracting new residents, encouraging study and interest in American history, stimulating interest and study in architecture and design, educating citizens in American culture and heritage, and

making the city a more attractive and desirable place in which to live?

Staff recommends denial of the application for Permit to Demolish/Capsulate as it applies to the construction of a new third story. In the opinion of Staff, Criteria 1, 3, 5 & 6 are met by the proposal. The subject building is a Cameron Street landmark. A unique creation of three separate periods of construction, each building campaign is clearly visible on the facade: the Italianate core, particularly strong on the east side; the late Victorian third story with a Queen Anne style balcony on the west side; and the grand Colonial Revival entrance uniting the two buildings at the first story. The asymmetrical roofline is a distinctive characteristic of the building; it attracts the eye of even the most casual passerby and raises questions about the evolution and history of the building. Staff believes the proposed third story addition, would significantly diminish the historic integrity of the highly unusual building and detract from the architectural interest in the Cameron Street streetscape.

Staff also objects to the other proposed alterations to the front of the building which entail demolition and infilling, except for the restoration of the second story windows. The plans call for the removal of the existing balcony and the paired windows with stained glass transom on the west side in the third story. Portions of the wall will be bricked in for the installation of a new smaller door opening and oval windows. As far as Staff can determine, the window ensemble and balcony are unchanged from the late 19th century. The balcony was rebuilt in 1992, preserving as much of the original material as possible and replicating the original appearance. The plans also call for the removal of the Italianate cornice on the east side. The handsome cornice is undoubtedly original and links the pair of 807 & 809 with the 803 & 805 Cameron Street to the east. Also of concern is the loss of the cornice on the west side dating from the late 19th century addition.

Staff does not object to, and in fact welcomes, the reintroduction of window openings at the center of the second story. As noted above this will restore window openings which were unfortunately removed c. 1969. The drawings indicate that the new window openings will be in the same location and the same size as the original windows openings. While the cumulative extent of demolition/capsulation proposed for the rear of the building is fairly substantial, Staff believes these alterations are of considerably less concern than the proposed demolition/capsulation on the front. The rear of the building is less visible and, based on inspection and the permit history, has been subject to numerous alterations, additions and subtractions of openings. The footprint and massing of the rear of the building is retained in the proposed plans. Lastly, Staff believes the proposed capsulation of portions of the rear of the building by the two story porch is acceptable, given that much of this area had porches in the past.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 Prior to the issuance of a demolition permit or land disturbance permit, a rodent abatement plan shall be submitted to Code Enforcement that will outline the steps that will be taken to prevent the spread of rodents from the construction site to the surrounding community and sewers.

Historic Alexandria:

Although I am generally opposed to constructing a third floor, this project creates a much more attractive final product.