

Docket Item #6
BAR Case #2003-0235

BAR Meeting
December 3, 2003

ISSUE: Addition & alterations

APPLICANT: Dr. Lawrence Singer

LOCATION: 809 Cameron Street

ZONE: CD/Commercial

BOARD ACTION, NOVEMBER 19, 2003: Deferred because of lack of public advertisement.

BOARD ACTION, NOVEMBER 5, 2003: On a motion by Ms. Neihardt, seconded by Dr. Fitzgerald the Board deferred the application for restudy. The vote on the motion was 4-3 (Chairman Hulfish, Mr. Keleher and Mr. Smeallie were opposed).

REASON: The Board believed that the existing historic fabric should be retained and that another design solution that retained historic materials should be developed.

SPEAKER: Richard Clausen, project architect, spoke in support

BOARD ACTION, OCTOBER 15, 2003: On a motion by Ms. Neihardt, seconded by Ms. Quill the Board approved the alterations to the north, west, and south elevations and deferred for restudy alterations to the front facade. The vote on the motion was 6-0.

REASON: The Board agreed with the Staff analysis that the proposed alterations to the north, west, and east elevations were appropriate, but believed that additional attention should be given to the proposed third floor addition including the design of the porches and the cornices on the second and third floor levels.

SPEAKER: Richard Clausen, project architect, spoke in support

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of Alternative #2 with the following conditions:

1. That the narrow cornice or trim piece at the top of the second story west side terminate at the middle of the building, rather than extending over onto the east side;
2. That the westernmost window in the new east side addition be one-over-one and the keystones be eliminated from the arched lintels above the new east side windows; and,
3. That several more courses be added to the top of the brick cornice on east side.

DISCUSSION:

Applicant s Description of the Undertaking:

Permission to add new third floor @ east front, redesign exist. third floor @ west, add porch to second floor rear (3 sides) & change windows on rear elevation and add windows to front.

Update: The applicant has submitted two new alternatives for the front (south) elevation for the Board s consideration. Both add a third story to the east side and, following the recommendation of the Board at the previous hearing, seek to retain more of the historic fabric than in the previous designs. In addition, the applicant requests that the Board reconsider the previous Alternative #2 from the November 5, 2003 hearing.

Issue:

All three alternatives are identical in their treatment of the first and second stories. For the most part, the first and second stories will remain as they are. The basement windows will be replaced with new wood windows but all other existing windows will be repaired and retained. Two windows will be restored to the blank area above the central doorway in the second story of the front facade. These windows will be in the same location and will replicate in all respects the windows which were removed in 1969. They will have segmental arch lintels with a decorative keystone to match the existing and will have true-divided-light, two-over-two sash. The front entryway will be modified somewhat. The entablature above the entrance will be shortened to extend only across the opening, rather than to the bays on either side as the existing does. The sides of the entablature will return to the face of the building with a profile to match the existing. Although the drawings do not indicate this, the existing round wood columns are assumed to remain in place. The existing fully glazed wood doors will remain.

Both new alternatives are identical in terms of the proposed treatment of the west side on the third story and differ only slightly in the treatment of the new east side addition. Both new alternatives rebuild the wooden porch on the third story of the west side. According to the applicant, the existing porch, rebuilt in 1992, is badly rotted. The applicant plans to base the rebuilt porch on photographs of the original porch and to use historically appropriate materials. The existing window and door assembly with stained glass transom facing the porch will remain. The eastern window will be replaced with a two-over-two, wood, true divided light window to match the existing one. In addition, both alternatives extend the existing narrow wood cornice or trim piece at the top of the second story across to the side of the east bay.

Alternative #1 calls for the retention of the bracketed wood cornice on the top of the east bay, but removes it from the portion of the building to the west of the bay. According to the applicant, this fragment of the cornice, approximately 25% of the whole, will be displayed inside the building. The removal of that section of cornice allows the western window of the eastern half to be placed at the same height as the eastern window in the existing third story. The new window will be identical to the adjacent window. A pair of fully glazed doors will be located in the new east side third story over the bay. The doors will be surmounted by an arched transom and lintel. Unlike the lintels over the other windows, this lintel will not have a keystone. The transom will be of stained glass. The brick string course from the west side will be carried across the new east side addition. The corbeled brick cornice on the east side will be the same height as that to the west, but somewhat simpler in detailing.

Staff notes that while the plans do not show a railing on the top of the east bay, code typically requires a 3' high railing or wall on a balcony accessed by a door. It seems unlikely that the existing parapet at the top of the bay is sufficiently high.

In Alternative #2, the new east side addition is simpler and slightly more distinct from the west side third story than in Alternative #1. Alternative #2 retains the bracketed wood cornice at the top of the east side second story in its entirety. As a result, the western window in the new third story must be located slightly higher the wall. In all other respects, this window matches the adjacent easternmost window in the existing third story. Instead of paired doors with an arched transom as in Alternative #1, Alternative #2 proposes paired double hung, one-over-one arched windows with a segmental arch lintel with keystone. These windows will line up with the adjacent window and will thus be slightly higher than the third story windows on the west side of the building. Alternative #2 does not extend the brick string course across the new east side addition. The three step brick cornice in Alternative #2 is much shorter and simpler than the brick cornice on the west side and that proposed in Alternative #1.

The third alternative was known as Alternative #2 at the November 5, 2003 hearing. It differs from the two new alternatives in the extent of alterations proposed for the existing west side third story. This alternative eliminates the Queen Anne style porch from the west side and rebuilds the top of the bay with a wood cornice to match that to the east. According to the notes on the drawing, the existing window and door with transom assembly in the west side third story will be retained. However the drawings show paired, fully glazed doors. The new east side third story addition is identical to that proposed in Alternative #1 above and will be a virtual mirror image of the west side, replicating and continuing the brick string course at the top of the windows and the corbeled brick cornice. The east side brick cornice will be the same height, but slightly simpler than the existing west side cornice. The doorway over the east bay will match the appearance of that to the west, with paired doors and an arched transom. The transom on the east side will be stained glass like that on the west. A new wood trim piece, similar to that at the top of the second story on the west side, will be inserted above the center windows on the second story, further linking the two sides.

Staff notes that while the plans do not show a railing on the top of the east and west bay, code typically requires a 4' high railing or wall on a balcony accessed by a door. It seems unlikely that

the parapets at the top of the bays will be sufficiently high.

The building is a highly visible landmark on the 800 block of Cameron Street.

History and Analysis:

The Victorian townhouse now known as 809 Cameron Street was built as two separate houses (809 & 807 Cameron Street) between 1877 and 1885. A third floor addition with wood porch was added to 809 Cameron Street (the western half) circa 1899. In 1939, the central entranceway linking the two buildings was added (Permit #3218, September 11, 1939). In 1969, the two center windows on the second floor were bricked in (Permit #26105, 3/17/1969 and BAR approval February 12, 1969). More recently, in 1992, the Board approved the reconstruction of the wood porch on the third story of the western half of the building and, in 2002, approved after-the-fact the capsulation and enclosure of the second story porch on the west side (BAR Case #92-0046, 2/19/1992 and BAR Case #2002-0096 & 0070, 6/19/2002).

The proposed third story addition and alterations comply with the zoning ordinance requirements.

The three alternatives presently before the Board present a range of solutions, from most unified design and least retention of historic fabric (Current Alternative #3/Previous Alternative #2) to most retention of historic fabric and least unified design (Alternative #2), with Alternative #1 falling in the middle. Alternative #s 1 and 2 respond in varying degrees to the Board's recommendation from the November 5, 2003 hearing that the existing historic fabric be retained.

Staff previously expressed its opposition to the third story addition and to the concept of unifying the two buildings as one new entity. If there was to be an east side addition, Staff felt that it should be a clear expression of its own period, while the existing building should be kept as it is, a testament to a succession of alterations. Of the three alternatives, Alternative #2 most closely meets these objectives. Staff believes Alternative #2 could be further improved with a few minor modifications. First, the narrow cornice or trim piece at the top of the second story west side should be left exactly as it is, terminating at the middle of the building, rather than extending over onto the east side. The extension of this element seems an unnecessary attempt to unify the two sides and creates a cramped condition where it runs under the bracketed wood cornice and above the restored window on the east side. Secondly, the westernmost window in the new east side addition should be one-over-one and the keystones should be eliminated from the arched lintels above the new east side windows. This will subtly reinforce the distinction between the circa 1899 third story addition and the new addition. Lastly, that several more courses should be added to the top of the small, three step brick cornice on the east side addition to make it similar in depth to the brick cornice on the west side. As drawn, the three step cornice appears too light. The higher east side cornice will create an uneven roofline, echoing, though in a much less dramatic way, the current uneven facade of the building. The additional courses on the east side cornice can be treated as a parapet and need not be reflected in a raised roof height.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- F-1 The existing building is classified as 5B (Combustible / Unprotected) construction. The proposed project requests use of a 3rd floor addition for use as living quarters. The USBC limits 5B construction for R3 (Residential) use to two stories and 4800 square feet. The applicant is not permitted under code requirements to construct the proposed project without meeting the requirements of the USBC and applying for a change of construction type from 5B to 5A (Combustible / Protected).
- C-1 The current use is classified as B; the proposed uses are B and R. Change of use, in whole or in part, will require a certificate of use and occupancy (USBC 115.4) and compliance with USBC 118.2. including but not limited to: limitations of exit travel distance, emergency and exit lighting, a manual fire alarm system, and accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- C-2 The proposed alterations to the structure contains mixed use groups and is subject to the mixed use and occupancy requirements of USBC 313.0.
- C-3 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-4 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-5 Construction permits are required for this project. Plans shall accompany the permit application that fully detail the construction as well as layouts and schematics of the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.
- C-6 All exterior walls within 3 feet from an interior property line shall have a fire resistance rating of 1 hour, from both sides, with no openings permitted within the wall. As alternative, a 2 hour fire wall may be provided.
- C-7 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 taken to prevent the spread of rodents from the construction site to the surrounding community and sewers.
- C-8 Roof drainage systems must be installed so as neither to impact upon, nor cause erosion/damage to adjacent property.
- C-9 A soils report must be submitted with the building permit application.

- C-10 Permission from adjacent property owners is required if access to the adjacent properties is required to complete the proposed construction. Otherwise, a plan shall be submitted to demonstrate the construction techniques utilized to keep construction solely on the referenced property.
- C-11 A wall location plat prepared by a land surveyor is required to be submitted to this office prior to requesting any framing inspection.

Historic Alexandria:

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