

Docket Item #12  
BAR Case #2004-0034

BAR Meeting  
April 7, 2004

**ISSUE:** Conceptual review of addition and alterations

**APPLICANT:** Harambee Community and Economic Development Corp.

**LOCATION:** 1323 Duke Street

**ZONE:** CD/Commercial

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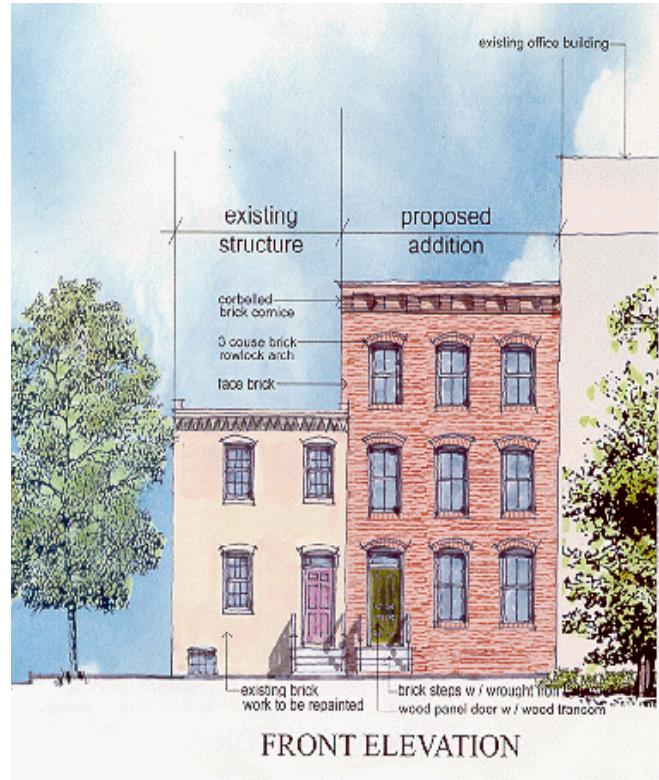
**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends conceptual approval of the mass, scale and architectural character of the proposed 5,250 square foot, three-story building that will be located at the corner of Duke and West Streets. The building is proposed by Harambee, a not-for-profit affordable housing organization, founded in 2002 to establish affordable housing in Alexandria. As its first project, Harambee is proposing an eight unit affordable senior housing facility at the subject property.

The proposed mass and scale provides an appropriate transition between the taller (approximately 50 ft. tall) office building on the eastern portion of the site and the smaller scale two-story (25' ft. tall) townhouse on the western portion of the site. The scale of the building is compatible with the existing development pattern of the neighborhood. Additionally, the proposed scale contributes to the variety of roof heights along Duke Street. The varying roof heights reflect the development of Duke Street over time and provide one of the more desirable characteristics of the historic district.

The community has raised concerns regarding parking, open space, and the need to provide a rezoning to accommodate the proposed development. Staff discusses those issues below.

Staff finds that the proposed development is a well-designed building that will be compatible with the mass and scale of the adjoining properties and with the historic district.



**Duke Street Elevation**



**West Street Elevation**

## **II. PROCESS:**

In 2003, the applicant proposed to demolish the existing building and construct a four story, 12 unit building on the site. Supporting the staff recommendation, the BAR denied the demolition request, citing the importance of the existing building and stating that any development on the site should retain the existing building. Since the denial, the applicant has reduced the number of dwelling units being requested from twelve to eight and has worked to create a design which incorporates and retains the existing building. From a historic preservation standpoint, staff strongly supports that effort.

The approval process for the proposed development will involve three steps – initial BAR conceptual review, review by the Planning Commission and City Council, and final BAR review. The initial BAR review involves two applications. The first is consideration of the proposed demolition of accessory structures and portions of exterior walls of the existing building on the site (*BAR case # 2004-0033*). The second is the conceptual review of the building addition that is proposed for the site. Following conceptual review by the BAR, the applicant will submit an application for zoning changes, development special use permits, and other necessary approvals. The applicant will return to the BAR for Certificate of Appropriateness review for the final design details and materials for the proposal.

As in other concept approval cases, the question for the Board is whether the mass and scale of the building, and its architectural character, are compatible with the district and generally approvable in concept.

Although some have suggested that this case should proceed to City Council prior to the Board's consideration, staff believes that it is appropriate for consideration by the Board as an initial matter. First, the Board has already acted on an earlier iteration of this case, and is familiar with the site and the prior proposal. If the current proposal to fill in the space between the existing historic structure and the adjacent building is not acceptable *from a historic preservation standpoint*, then there is no need for the zoning case to proceed. The application that will be required for Planning Commission consideration and Council approval is complex and will involve extensive staff work plus two additional public hearings and a great time commitment from public officials. Until there is approval of a concept that is compatible with the district, it is more efficient to avoid that process. Finally, from the applicant's standpoint, the preparation of detailed engineering plans required for the council process will not be necessary if the BAR determines that the proposal is not acceptable.

The need to have the BAR conduct a conceptual review of a project prior to Planning Commission or City Council review is stated as follows in the BAR Concept Review policy statement:

If a project is taken to Planning Commission and City Council for approval first, then detailed illustrative drawings of the building will have to be presented to citizen associations, city staff, Planning Commission and City Council, who rely on these representations in their approval. ... In addition, a project of any size requires

approval of a Preliminary Site Plan, which involves numerous detailed engineering drawings of the building site. In effect, the entire building will have been designed in some detail and these drawings will form the basis for neighborhood and Council approvals. Design revision by the BAR may require reapproval by all these groups. Further the applicant will have invested tens of thousands of dollars in attorney, engineer and architects fees and will be very reluctant to make meaningful changes to the building design. Finally, there would be no benefit for the BAR to deny final approval of a project when the applicant can appeal to City Council – who would already have approved the project.

Especially where the applicant is a not-for-profit organization, it is tremendously helpful to them to have a general sense of what the BAR will approve before undertaking the costly step of preparing the detailed site and elevation drawings that are required for Planning Commission and City Council. Concept approval also allows for the early involvement of citizens, before an applicant has committed expense to detailed drawings, and is specifically something civic associations and others have requested as part of the development process.

Thus, the BAR has provided conceptual guidance in many concept cases that involve subsequent Planning Commission and City Council hearings. For example, over the last few years, the Board has heard the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, Roberts Memorial Chapel and 800 South Washington Street cases as concept cases, each of which involved major zoning questions at City Council. In the 800 South Washington Street case in particular, the question at City Council was contentious and difficult and involved increased density based on the requested vacation of a public alley.

Therefore, staff determined that the subject case, having been before the Board before, being at a very conceptual design point, and being a case of great interest to the community, should be one that is subjected to conceptual review by the Board.

### **III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The applicant is requesting conceptual approval for an addition to the existing freestanding historic brick townhouse at 1323 Duke Street. The applicant is proposing the addition as part of an eight-unit senior affordable housing. The existing two story building will have one unit per floor, for a total of two units. The three-story addition will have two units per floor, for a total of six units.

The proposed addition will be to the east of the existing residence and will be approximately 17 ft. wide and 69 ft. in length and is proposed to be constructed of brick. The front is proposed as a tripartite facade with two-over-two wood windows with brick jack arches on all three levels. A four-panel door at brick steps will be on the west side of the new addition facing Duke Street. The Duke Street elevation will have a flat roof and a corbelled brick cornice.

The side (west) elevation will have two windows on the third level above the roof line of the existing house. The north section of the addition will also be three stories in height with four two-over-two wood windows on the second and third levels and three similar windows with a new four panel entry door on the first level. All windows have brick jack arches. A porch with decorative wood columns and fret work will extend the entire length of this north section of the new addition. Adjacent to the porch will be an accessibility ramp from the parking area at the rear of the site to the building entrance. The main entrance to the building will be along this elevation which will have new brick steps and walk. The porch along the west face is setback from South West Street and will have a standing seam metal roof like the flounder roof form above it.

The north elevation is two bays in width with two-over-two wood windows and brick jack arches. The existing building is set back some 62 feet from the rear property line; the new building addition will be set back approximately 43 feet. The alley itself is 16 feet wide, with houses built up to the alley on the north.

At the rear of the site, the applicant will provide three parking spaces accessed from alley, plus a walkway and landscaped strip. Along the South West Street elevation of the project the existing brick and iron fence is proposed to be extended to match the existing to the north end of the site.

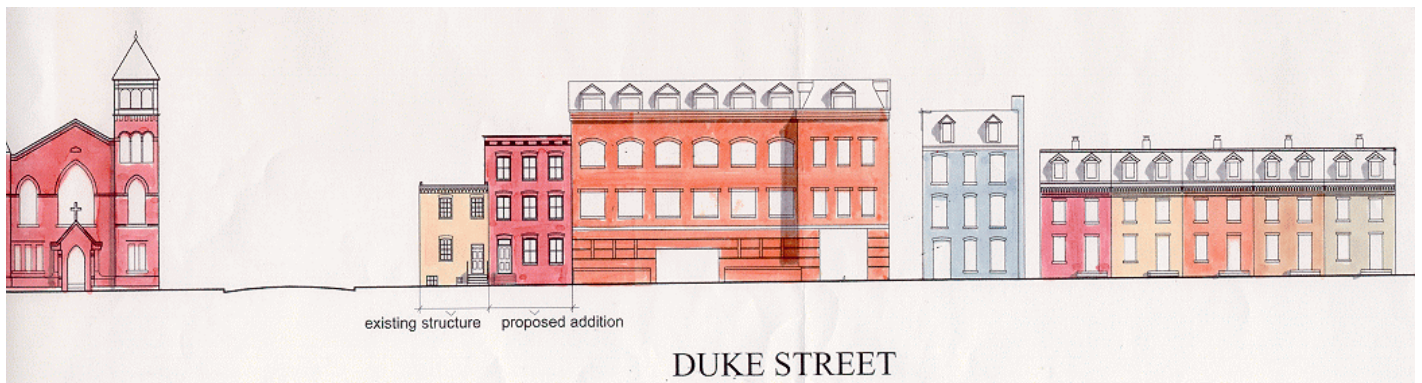
#### **IV. STAFF ANALYSIS:**

The applicant is incorporating the existing century-old two-story townhouse into a new, larger building that is to be built in the space between the existing townhouse and the 50-foot tall office building to the east. The design of the new construction as a three-story infill townhouse fills the space with a compatible building that creates a transition from the historic two story building to the west, and the taller, newer building to the east. It also creates a desirable urban form along both Duke and West Streets and, in staff's opinion, it is precisely the mass, scale and architectural character of the new building that make it compatible with the immediate neighborhood and the district.

As a conceptual matter, Staff believes that the proposed addition is exceptionally well thought out in responding to the urban design context of the immediately adjacent buildings and the surrounding portions of the historic district. The addition utilizes a townhouse form that is familiar in the historic district and provides a separate entrance into the project, further integrating the design in the rowhouse idiom of the historic district. The brick material, with wood windows and doors, echoes the traditional building materials of the historic district. The overall design form of the addition is Italianate Revival which is the design vocabulary of many of the residences in this section of the historic district.

### Duke Street Elevation

The three story height of the addition is similar to that found in this area of the district while at the same time providing a more nuanced transition from the small scale two story existing residence to the four story office building to the east. Without the building, the form of the block when viewed from Duke Street appears disjointed, because the small historic building on the corner is isolated, standing alone and removed from the tall building next to it. With the new townhouse form inserted, the urban form of the block becomes complete, providing a more uniform streetwall and a varied roof line.



Staff believes there is a longstanding architectural tradition that supports the construction of a new addition to the east of the existing building. Most corner buildings in the historic districts were intended to have an abutting building constructed at some later date. Although there are additional examples where the abutting building has never been built, the fact that those buildings lack fenestration and cornices support the original intent that another building would be added. The building at 1323 Duke Street appears to have been constructed with the anticipation that it would eventually have a neighbor on its east side. It is an urban rowhouse in form and plan and, except for the two windows on the second level, it does not take advantage of its east side yard. There are no projections, such as bays or wings, no architectural embellishments, and no doorways into the yard, or first floor windows. Thus, as pointed out in the demolition case, by building a new structure adjacent to the existing structure, there is virtually no loss of historic fabric, detail or workmanship. Staff finds that it is appropriate to place a new addition in the form of a row house on the east side of 1323 Duke Street.

### West Street Elevation

The rear section of the proposed townhouse uses a flounder form that is found at the rear of numerous buildings in the historic district. The flounder roof form reduces the perceived height of the new building when viewed from South West Street, and provides a logical transition from the proposed three-story portion of the building on Duke Street to the two-story townhouses on South West Street. Again, without the new building, the South West Street elevation provides an unfortunate entrance to the historic district, with the small historic building at the corner diminished against the large blank wall of the adjacent, new building. The proposed addition helps modulate the effect of the 50 foot blank wall, highlighting the historic building and giving it a more appropriate context.



Thus, in concept, the scale, design and high quality materials proposed in this application should provide an appropriate building and design for this visually prominent intersection at the entrance to the historic district.

## **V. OTHER SITE AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES:**

The proposed addition attempts to create affordable housing in the historic district and to do it in a compatible architectural form. Staff believes that the mass, scale and architectural design are appropriate to the district and that this concept should be approved. However, there are concerns identified by the community and, while not strictly related to the concept approval, are issues that must be addressed by the applicant when the case moves to the Planning Commission and City Council. Some of the concerns that have been raised by the community have been the overall scale of the building, open space and parking.

### Scale

Again, staff believes the scale of the building is appropriate to the district and consistent with the character of the neighborhood. As a zoning matter, it is important to note that, under the CD/Commercial downtown zone, a commercial building of the size proposed could be built without any special zoning approvals. Thus, the proposed mass, scale, height and architecture of the proposed building, if it were to be an office building, would not require any approvals other than the BAR's. It is only because there are residential units proposed that the building requires special zoning approvals.

### Open Space

To address the issue of open space and “openness,” staff has worked with the applicant to decrease the footprint of the building and reduce the overall density from twelve to eight units. An area of concern for the community and staff was that a portion of the open space on the site remain visually accessible for the community. The proposal includes a 336 square foot area adjacent to West Street which will remain open and contribute to the “openness” on the street. The size and scale of the remaining open space at the side and rear of the lot is typical of the side and rear gardens and courtyards that are prevalent throughout the district and contribute to the architectural character of the district.

While the rear of the property is presently open, the space seems shallower than 35' because so much of the yard is obscured by the existing wall of the adjacent building, which overwhelms the yard. The proposed addition will provide a much softer appearance than is provided by the wall of the office building, and will only minimally reduce the sight lines to the sky for passers-by along South West Street.

Staff will be recommending that the side yard open space be revised to be more visually accessible to the public and include high quality landscaping and design typical of the courtyards within the district. Staff is also recommending reuse of the existing iron fence and gate currently located Duke Street and that any fence or landscaping be designed in a way to retain the visual openness along West Street. These elements can be addressed fully as part of both the preliminary site plan and the Certificate of Appropriateness for the project.

### Parking

Neighbors are concerned that the three parking spaces proposed will not be sufficient and, if more than three vehicles need to park at the site, those vehicles will be parked on the street, exacerbating the on-street parking problems that already exist in the neighborhood.

The parking requirement for affordable elderly housing is one parking space per four dwelling units, with a special use permit. For this eight-unit building, given the affordable nature of the proposed units, only two parking spaces will be required, if a special use permit is approved, and the applicant is proposing to provide three. Nevertheless, as part of the analysis of the case before the Planning Commission and City Council, the applicant will have to provide information regarding the experience of elderly, affordable housing units and the parking demand they create. Although some elderly residents do not have cars, others do. Furthermore, even those persons who lack vehicles of their own have visitors, caregivers, and other parking and delivery needs.

Two alternatives have been suggested for addressing the potential parking impact. First, the applicant has suggested that residents of the elder care home could be prohibited from being issued on-street parking permits. A second option would be for off-site parking spaces to be provided to residents, most likely on property owned by Shiloh Baptist Church. However, the church uses all of its parking at peak times, so alternatives would have to be found for residents to park when church functions are scheduled.



## **VI. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

This case involves the classic land use issues that attend development cases in the historic district: open space, parking, mass and scale, architecture, and historic preservation. In addition, the case involves an effort to build affordable housing by a not-for-profit agency. Thus, the City has the opportunity to gain affordable units with a preserved historic building, as long as the applicant can address the issues of open space and parking, which will be part of the subsequent proceedings.

At this point in the process, staff recommends that the Board approve the proposal in concept, finding that its mass, scale and architectural design are compatible with the district. Staff recommends **conceptual approval** of the project with the following conditions:

1. Final detailing and materials of the development is subject to further review and approval by the BAR as part of the Certificate of Appropriateness.
2. Development of the site shall include restoration of the existing building, including replacing all windows and exterior doors with historically appropriate windows and doors, including a transom for the door on Duke Street.
3. The applicant shall reuse the existing iron fence and gate currently located on Duke Street and that any fence or landscaping be designed in a way to maximize the visual openness of the lot.

## CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

### Code Enforcement:

- C-1    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. This condition is also applicable to porches with roofs and skylights within setback distance.
  
- C-2    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-3    Roof drainage systems must be installed so as neither to impact upon, nor cause erosion/damage to adjacent property.
  
- C-4    A soils report must be submitted with the building permit application.
  
- C-5    New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
  
- C-6    Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
  
- C-7    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-8    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-9    A wall location plat prepared by a land surveyor is required to be submitted to this office prior to requesting any framing inspection.
  
- C-10    Required exits, parking, and facilities shall be accessible for persons with disabilities.

### Historic Alexandria:

Very fine looking addition. Need open space calculations.

Alexandria Archaeology:

- F-1 This property was part of the L'Overture Hospital and Contraband Barracks complex during the Civil War. The lot contained some of the ward tents for the hospital complex. The site is extremely significant since it has the potential to yield archaeological resources which could provide information about the African Americans who escaped from slavery and sought haven in the Union-occupied town of Alexandria. The demolition of the existing structures and any ground disturbance or construction activities could destroy these potential resources.
- C-1 To insure that significant information is not lost as a result of the current development project, the applicant must hire an archaeological consultant to monitor demolition activities and to conduct test excavations for an Archaeological Evaluation prior to any other ground disturbing and construction activities. Contact Alexandria Archaeology (703-838-4399) to obtain a scope of work for this investigation and a list of approved consultants. If significant resources are discovered, the consultant must complete a Resource Management Plan, as outlined in the *City of Alexandria Archaeological Standards*. Preservation measures presented in the Resource Management Plan, as approved by the City Archaeologist, will be implemented.
- C-2 All archaeological preservation measures must be completed prior to ground-disturbing activities (such as coring, grading, filling, vegetation removal, undergrounding utilities, pile driving, landscaping and other excavations as defined in §2-151 of the Zoning Ordinance). To confirm, call Alexandria Archaeology at (703) 838-4399.
- C-3 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.
- C-4 The General Notes of the Preliminary and Final Site Plans must include the statements in C-2 and C-3 above so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirements. Additional statements to be included on the Final Site Plan will be determined in consultation with Alexandria Archaeology.
- C-5 Certificates of Occupancy will not be issued for this property until the final archaeological report has been received and approved by the City Archaeologist.
- C-6 The developer will erect a historic marker on the property according to specifications provided by Alexandria Archaeology, and agreed to in concurrence with the Directors of the Office of Historic Alexandria and Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities. The marker will highlight the historical and archaeological significance of the property.
- C-7 If warranted by the City Archaeologist, the developer will produce a booklet for the public on the history and archaeology of the property, according to specifications provided by Alexandria Archaeology.
- R-1 All archaeological work will be carried out in accordance with the *City of Alexandria Archaeological Standards* and is subject to the approval of the City Archaeologist.