

Docket Item #9
BAR Case #2004-0061

BAR Meeting
April 21, 2004

ISSUE: Replacement windows

APPLICANT: John & Meredith DeGuenther

LOCATION: 419 Gibbon Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that all of the replacement windows be wood.

DISCUSSION:

Applicant's Description of the Undertaking:

“We are requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to replace the five windows on our two story house. We intend to replace the existing windows with Kolbe & Kolbe wood casement units with grids in various configurations, intended to match existing windows. The windows we are proposing are the same windows our neighbors were approved for at 421 Gibbon St., in BAR Case #2003-0169. In fact, we are even using the same contractor. We are pleased that these windows will retain the character of the home, while allowing us to reduce the draft & heating problems that now exist.”

Issue:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to replace the five steel casement windows on the south (front), and north (rear) sides of the two story house. The proposed new wood Kolbe & Kolbe casement windows will match the recently installed windows at 421 Gibbon Street.

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 rear windows also consist of a fixed center portion flanked on either side by casements composed of four vertically aligned lights. The second story bathroom window consists of a single casement with three lights.

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.

The Board has only approved replacement windows for 421 Gibbon Street within this row of properties. While there is no record of Board approval, 413 Gibbon Street, located at the other

end of the row from 419 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.

421 Gibbon Street

BAR Case #2003-169 (10/1/2003) - The Board approved the installation of wood casement windows with fixed exterior muntins in a configuration similar to the original steel windows. The Board approved the application with the condition that the windows match those installed at 406 Gibbon Street.

The windows installed at 421 Gibbon Street do not match the windows recently approved by the Board. Staff notes that the property has recently been sold.

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 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.

Vinyl windows are a discouraged window type within the historic districts (Windows- Page 2). Staff does not support the installation of the rear vinyl bathroom window.

While the windows installed at 421 Gibbon Street do comply with the recent Board approval, Staff believes that the windows are acceptable. Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the application to match the existing windows at 421 Gibbon Street with the condition that all of the replacement windows be wood.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement

No comments.

Historic Alexandria

No comment.