

Docket Item #6
BAR CASE #2004-0077

BAR Meeting
May 19, 2004

ISSUE: Demolition and capsulation

APPLICANT: Mr. and Mrs. Alan Frey

LOCATION: 411 South Fairfax Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends **denial** of the Permit to Demolish.

NOTE: According to Board of Architectural Review Bylaws, this docket item requires a roll call vote.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish for a “3rd floor addition of 2 bedrooms & bath by extending internal stair to add 526 sf of useable space.” The third story addition will require the removal and capsulation of the existing roof structure of the two story historic main block and two story rear ell. The total roof area to be demolished/capsulated is 654.3 square feet. Two existing brick chimneys located on the south side of the main block near the front of the house will also be removed. Lastly, the proposed third story addition will also capsulate the uppermost portion of the east wall of the modern stucco addition. The stucco addition will not otherwise be altered.

The front and portions of the side elevations of the house at 411 South Fairfax Street are visible from Fairfax Street and along the horse alleys on the north and south sides of the house. The alley behind 411 South Fairfax Street is private.



Figure 1 - 411 South Fairfax Street from south

II. HISTORY:

According to a previous BAR case report, the two story, freestanding brick residence at 411 South Fairfax Street dates to circa 1870. The 1877 *Hopkins Atlas* shows a structure at this location but it is difficult to be certain that it is the subject house. The 1885 *Sanborn Atlas* shows a structure with a footprint which matches that of the main block and ell of the historic house. The architectural features of the house support a date of circa 1870, but would also support a later date, given the conservative character of building practice in Alexandria in the late 19th century. The three-bay wide house has segmental arches over the windows, an Italianate door surround and bracketed Italianate cornice. The house is located within a row of early- to mid-19th century houses. Although the house had apparently fallen into disrepair prior to its renovation in the late 1990s, it retains a high level of integrity when viewed from Fairfax Street. In 1996, the Board approved the reconstruction of an existing stucco addition at the rear of the house and a new small “vestibule” addition at the rear of the stucco section (BAR Case #'s 96-245 & 246, 11/6/1996).

III. ANALYSIS:

The Board has approved demolition/capsulation to allow for the construction of third story additions in the past. However, in the most relevant recent case before the Board, that of 610 South St. Asaph Street, the Board denied the Permit to Demolish and thus did not hear the application for the third story addition (BAR Case #'s 2002-0078 & 79, 5/1/02). The case was appealed to Council and remanded back to the Board to consider other design alternatives. Prior to returning to the Board, the applicant substantially revised the design to preserve the roofline of the main block and reduce the height of the rear ell to two stories. The revised design, which substantially reduced the demolition/capsulation required, was approved by the Board on October 16, 2002.

In considering a Permit to Demolish/Capsulate, the Board must consider the following criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, §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 believes that criteria #'s 1,5 & 6 are met in this case. The house at 411 South Fairfax Street is a contributing resource within the historic district. The flat roofed form of the house is an essential feature of its appearance and architectural character. In Alexandria, beginning in the 1870s, in the building boom following the Civil War, the gable roofed house form was abandoned for that of the flat roof. The circa 1870 house at 411 South Fairfax Street reflects this critical change in building practice. The retention of the historic roofline is necessary to the preservation of this historic building. In addition, the proposal calls for extensive loss of historic fabric, by removing or capsulating 654.3 square feet of original roof structure. While the actual roof surfaces of the main block and rear ell are not highly visible, due to the fact that they are flat, preservation philosophy calls for the retention of historic fabric to the greatest extent possible and recognizes that there is an intrinsic value in original materials and craftsmanship even when features are not readily visible. When viewed from across Fairfax Street, the flat roofed form of 411 South Fairfax is readily apparent and contributes to the varied roofscape of the blockface, which is composed of both flat roofed and gable roofed houses, none over two-and-a-half stories. The preservation of the original form and fabric of this building contributes to the overall authenticity and historic character of the Old and Historic Alexandria District and thereby to the general welfare of the residents Alexandria and the many others who enjoy and learn from the City's unique assemblage of historic architecture.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends denial of the Permit to Demolish.

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:

How old is the unused chimney? If original to the building, not a good idea to just remove it. The plan in my opinion changes the look of the streetscape and needs further discussion and study.