

Docket Item #8
BAR CASE #2004-0067

BAR Meeting
July 21, 2004

ISSUE: Demolition and capsulation
APPLICANT: Steve Edson and Kelly Worthington
LOCATION: 510 North Columbus Street
ZONE: RM/Residential

BOARD ACTION, JUNE 2, 2004: On a motion by Mr. Wheeler, seconded by Mr. Smeallie the Board deferred the application for restudy with the condition that Staff visit the site in an effort to better date the rear wall of the house. The vote on the motion was 7-0.

REASON: The Board believed that they did not have sufficient information to make a determination as to whether the wall had been rebuilt in the 1920s. They suggested that Staff examine the wall to try to determine its construction date.

SPEAKER: Gabriel Romero, RKtects, project architect, spoke in support

UPDATE:

At the June 2, 2004 meeting, the Board requested Staff inspect the rear (west) wall of 510 North Columbus Street in order to assess its age. While the row of eight houses from 506 North Columbus Street to 520 North Columbus Street is believed to date to c. 1830, the applicant had suggested that the rear wall was dated c. 1920, when it was rebuilt due to a storm. On July 8, 2004 Staff inspected the interior and exterior of the house at 510 North Columbus Street, including the rear wall. Clearly aspects of the construction of the rear wall are inconsistent with the c. 1830 date, namely the use of steel lintels above the openings and the use of Portland cement in the mortar. However, in nearly all other respects the wall is consistent with the rest of the row and with the c. 1830 construction date. The bricks themselves (in their coloration, lack of uniformity, softness and wear) appear to be early 19th century bricks. The brickwork of the wall of 510 North Columbus Street flows seamlessly from top to bottom and into that of the houses to either side (508 and 512 North Columbus Street). The window and door openings are consistent in location, size and appearance from house to house. Thus, if the rear wall of 510 North Columbus Street was rebuilt, it appears to have been done in its entirety and along with the rear walls of the adjoining properties. In addition, the rear wall of 510 North Columbus Street, at the far end of the row, appears to be identical to these three. In summary, the staff inspection was inconclusive as to the date of the wall.

There is an attached report prepared by C. Richard Bierce, a preservation consultant retained by the applicant to evaluate the rear wall. Mr. Bierce concludes that “it is circumstantially evident that the continuous rear wall of at least 3 of the coeval row was substantially rebuilt.”

After taking all of this information into account, Staff is still unwilling to endorse the wholesale demolition of the rear wall of 510 North Columbus Street, as required by the current plans. Therefore the Staff report from June 2, 2004 is repeated below.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy to further reduce the amount of demolition proposed.

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

ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish for the demolition of the rear (west) wall and the lower portion of the rear (west) slope of the gable roof of the existing brick rowhouse at 510 North Columbus Street. The rear of the house is visible from the unpaved public alley that runs along the rear of the row and may be visible from Alfred Street when the trees are not in full leaf.

HISTORY:

510 North Columbus Street. is a two story, gable-roofed, brick rowhouse that is located in a row of eight similar houses that were constructed together as a row (506-520 North Columbus Street). The houses were constructed prior to 1863, as they appear in a birds eye view of Alexandria with

that date.

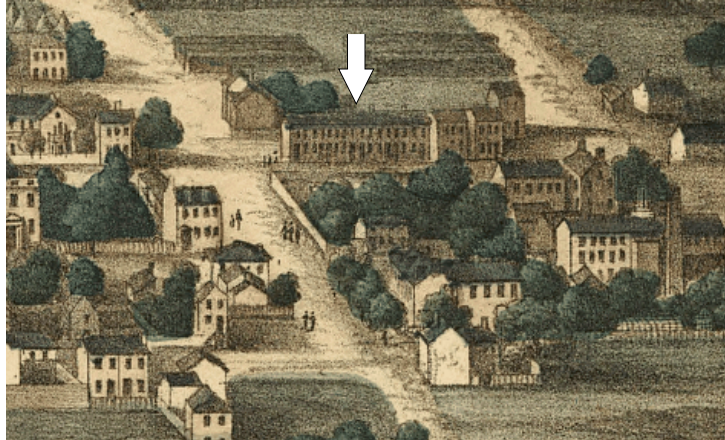


Figure 1 - 1863 Birds Eye View (row in center of picture)

Survey information in the Office of Planning and Zoning indicates that the row was constructed in the Federal period, prior to 1830. An early- to mid- 19th century date is supported by the massing of the houses, the brick coursing and the brick cornice. The houses were constructed as relatively simple, vernacular worker housing. Each of the houses has a side hall plan, two bays in width, two stories plus high basement, a continuous standing seam metal roof and shared front and back chimneys. Staff believes the row is unusual for the number of units built simultaneously. Smaller rows of four or less were more typically constructed in Alexandria in the 19th century.

The early date of the houses is supported by the fact that the houses were constructed without rear service wings. The service functions may have been housed in the basement. Due to a change in grade from front to back, the basement level is fully exposed at the rear of the houses and the basement level has both a door and window. Based on Sanborn mapping and BAR records, the row of eight remained without rear additions until the early 1950s and possibly until the early 1980s. In the subsequent years, there have been a number of changes to these houses. However, four of the eight, 508, 510, 512 and 520 remain without additions. The front of the row retains a substantial degree of integrity, despite minor alterations. 510 North Columbus has had its windows, door and stoop replaced on the front.



Figure 2- Rear Elevation



Figure 3 - Rear Elevation

The Board of Architectural Review approved a handicapped lift at 510 North Columbus Street in 1988 (BAR Case #88-15, 4/27/1988). Board records indicate that the additions at 518, 506, 514, and 516 North Columbus Street were approved on 8/13/1953, 6/2/1982, 1/3/1990 (BAR Case #89-211) and 7/18/90 (BAR Case #90-154) respectively. The addition at 518 North Columbus covers the basement and first story only. The other three additions capsulate the second story as well as basement and first story.

ANALYSIS:

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 #1,3,5 & 6 are met in this case. The house is one of a significant row of early- to mid- 19th century workers housing that retains a high level of integrity, when considered as a whole and in relation to other similar rows in Alexandria. 510 North Columbus is one of three consecutive rowhouses (508-512 North Columbus Street) that have not had any addition to the rear and thus give a sense of what the entire row looked like in the rear when constructed, with a continuous rear wall plane and uninterrupted brickwork, a continuous gabled roof and shared chimneys.

Staff notes that the *Design Guidelines* encourage minimizing demolition to the greatest extent possible:

It is the policy of the Boards that the absolute minimum demolition of an existing structure should take place. For example, in the case of an addition to the rear of a property, the Boards prefer that the amount of demolition be limited to that necessary to accommodate access to the addition rather than wholesale demolition and replacement of the rear facade. (Demolition of Existing Structures - Page 1)

In addition, the *Guidelines* give special weight to demolition affecting earlier buildings, stating that “[t]he Boards actively seek to retain the existing historic fabric of the historic districts and strongly discourage the demolition of any portion of an 18th or early 19th century structure.” (Demolition of Existing Structures - Page 2) While not a high style house owned by a prominent Alexandrian, 510 North Columbus Street is an important example of vernacular architecture and of the type of housing built for the working classes in the first part of the 19th century.

The *Design Guidelines* note that while the Boards seek to preserve the resources of the districts, they are “also sympathetic to the needs of building owners to make contemporary [21st] century use of a property.” (Demolition of Existing Structures - Page 1) Staff acknowledges that the existing house is small by modern standards and is willing to accept an addition. However, Staff is concerned by the amount of demolition proposed. Only the front wall, front slope of the gable and framing on either side of the existing house will remain intact. The full rear wall (exposed basement and two stories) and lower portion of the rear gable will be removed. Staff here notes that the applicant believes the rear wall was subject to extensive repairs, if not entirely replaced in the 1920s due to storm damage. Staff believes the wall has been repaired, but has no reason to believe that it was entirely replaced. The brickwork and openings are consistent with the houses to either side. Staff notes that the Board has previously approved demolition or capsulation for four other houses in the row, as mentioned above. However, the demolition/capsulation at 518 North Columbus Street would have been substantially less than that proposed in the current application as it extends out from the basement and first story only. The approved plans for 514 and 516 North Columbus, entailed capsulation rather than demolition of the rear walls and do not appear to have entailed demolition or capsulation of the rear slope of the gable. At Staff’s recommendation the applicants have already reduced the amount of roof to be demolished at 510 North Columbus Street. A prior design called for demolition of at least 2/3 of the rear slope of the roof.

To conclude, recognizing the needs of the applicant, the Board’s prior approval of additions in

this row and the limited visibility of the rear of the house, Staff is willing to recommend approval of demolition at 510 North Columbus Street. However, Staff believes the extent of demolition must be reduced to conform to the directive in the *Guidelines* that “the amount of demolition be limited to that necessary to accommodate access to the addition rather than wholesale demolition and replacement of the rear facade.”

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy to further reduce the amount of demolition proposed.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-2 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-3 Construction permits are required for this project.

Historic Alexandria:

No comment.

Alexandria Archeology:

- F-1 Tax records indicate that development on this street face had begun by 1810 and that two free African American households were located on the block in 1830. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources which could provide insight into domestic activities, perhaps relating to free blacks, in early 19th-century Alexandria.
- R-1 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.
- R-2 The above statement must appear in the General Notes of the site plan so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.