

Docket Item #10
BAR Case #2004-0094

BAR Meeting
July 21, 2004

ISSUE: Permit to Demolish/Capsulate

APPLICANT: Stephanie Dimond

LOCATION: 128 North Payne Street

ZONE: RB residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends deferral of the Permit to Demolish for restudy to reduce the amount of demolition/capsulation of historic fabric.

NOTE: This docket item requires a roll call vote.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish to demolish the entire one story rear ell and the rear wall of the two story main block for the construction of a new two story rear addition. In addition, the applicant proposes to capsule the existing roof to allow for a continuous roof plane from the front of the house to the back of the proposed new addition.

Currently, the rear of the house is minimally visible from Cameron Street. The alley behind the house is private.



Figure 1- Front and Rear Elevations

II. HISTORY:

The house at 128 North Payne Street is a 100 Year Old Building, designated by City Council in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Located in a strip lying between the Old and Historic and Parker-Gray Districts, the north end of the 100 block of North Payne Street includes numerous mid- to last-quarter 19th century buildings which are also designated as 100 Year Old Buildings. 128 North Payne Street is one in a row of nine nearly identical two story brick townhouses extending from 118 North Payne Street to 134 North Payne Street, at the corner of Cameron Street. Only two bays wide, these modest houses are distinguished by their handsome Italianate cornices. Six of the nine houses, including 128 North Payne Street, appear on the 1877 Hopkins Atlas and are believed to have been constructed circa 1875. The last three houses, 130 through 134 North Payne, extended the row north to the corner with Cameron Street. Based on their appearance, they probably were constructed at the end of the 1870s, shortly after the first six.

While basically identical in the front, the houses were built with varying conditions in the rear. The first four of the houses in the row (118 through 124 North Payne Street) were built without any rear appendage. 126 and 128 North Payne Street had one story ells. The last three houses, 130 through 134 North Payne Street, were constructed with two story rear ells. The ells at 126 and 128 and at 130 and 132 North Payne Street were constructed back to back. The ell at 134 North Payne Street was constructed several feet longer than the others. As constructed, this row illustrated the evolution of the urban rowhouse form from the main house block with separate or appended kitchen building, typical of the early and mid-19th century, to the fully integrated two story rectangular main block and two story ell that came to prominence in the latter part of the 19th century.

The row retains a high level of integrity on the Payne Street side and presents a unified appearance. The variety that was extant at the rear of the row from the beginning has been accentuated over the years with the construction of many rear additions of varying size and appearance. Staff could not locate records of Board review for any but the most recent rear addition. It may be that the additions were constructed prior to the houses being designated 100 Year Old Buildings. On October 15, 2003, the Board approved a Permit to Demolish and Certificate of Appropriateness for a two story addition at 132 North Payne (BAR Case #2003-0119 & 0120) With 132 North Payne Street under construction, only 128 North Payne Street remains unaltered in the rear. The ell at 126 North Payne, which undoubtedly was once a twin to that at 128 North Payne, has been extensively altered and now extends 16 feet beyond the back of 128 North Payne Street at the full width of the lot and at two stories.

III. ANALYSIS:

In considering a Permit to Demolish, the Board must consider the following criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, Sec. 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?

In the opinion of Staff, Criteria #1 and #5 are applicable. As explained above, the row of nine nearly identical two story brick townhouses once illustrated the evolution of the urban rowhouse form from the main house block with separate or appended kitchen building, typical of the early and mid-19th century, to the fully integrated two story rectangular main block and two story ell that came to prominence in the latter part of the 19th century. Now only 128 North Payne Street remains unaltered in the rear. With its original one story rear ell, it is a significant representative of a pivotal period in row house construction in Alexandria.

Staff is concerned about the extent of demolition proposed. Virtually the entire rear ell and the rear wall of the main block of the circa 1877 building are to be demolished and the roof structure of the main block is to be capsulated. What will remain of the historic building is essentially a facade. Staff believes this extensive demolition is contrary to the Board's policy. According to the *Design Guidelines*:

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)

The Guidelines also state that:

The Boards actively seek to retain the existing 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 the house at 128 North Payne Street is not an *early* 19th century structure, Staff believes it is of considerable significance as an intact example of working class housing of the immediate post Civil War period. The rear of the house appears have an unusually high level of integrity. Not only is the original footprint retained, but the original door and window openings and roofline remain.

Staff notes that the recent case at 132 North Payne Street raised similar issues. In the previous case, the Board deferred the request for demolition so that the applicant could consider reducing the amount of demolition. Ultimately, the Board determined that the revised design, which

retained portions of the rear ell and rear wall of the main block, did little to accomplish preservation goals and approved the original request for the full demolition of the rear ell and rear wall.

While similar to the previous case, Staff believes the current case has a significant difference: it calls for the capsulation of the original roof structure in addition to the demolition of the rear ell and rear wall of the main block. The resultant project is basically a “facadectomy,” a practice generally denounced by the preservation community and one that is contrary to the Board’s policy as found in the *Design Guidelines*.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recognizes that the Board recently approved demolition in a similar case at 132 North Payne Street, but continues to believe the proposed demolition is too extensive. Staff would prefer an addition which preserved the existing footprint of the house and began at the back of the rear ell. At the very least, Staff believes the demolition and or capsulation of the roof structure of the main block should be eliminated.

Therefore, Staff recommends deferral of the Permit to Demolish to allow the applicant to consider how the loss of historic fabric might be reduced.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

No comment.

Historic Alexandria:

“No comment.”

Alexandria Archeology:

- F-1 The Hopkins Insurance Map indicates that a structure was present on this property by 1877. The lot therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources which would provide insight into life in 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.