

Docket Item #22
BAR CASE #2004-0153

BAR Meeting
August 18, 2004

ISSUE: After-the-fact alterations

APPLICANT: Alicia Glassburn

LOCATION: 737 Bernard Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the shutters and window hoods be removed;
2. That the cornice be removed; and,
3. That the work be completed within three months of the date of this hearing.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for a variety of alterations to the facade of the two story brick rowhouse at 737 Bernard Street. The alterations include painting the building white, installing vinyl shutters, and adding window hoods and a cornice.

II. HISTORY:

737 Bernard Street is a two story brick faced interior rowhouse unit constructed circa 1948 (Permit #4461, 12/27/1948). This house is part of a row of flat front brick rowhouses that sit at the north end of Michigan Avenue and form a terminus of the community known as Fagelsons's Addition, most of which was constructed in 1939 and 1940. The area has been part of the historic district since the district was originally established in 1946 and was included to protect the George Washington Memorial Parkway. Following the establishment of the historic district, the Mason Hall Apartments were constructed on West Abingdon Drive. This 1951 apartment complex screens views to Bernard Street from the Parkway.

The row was largely unaltered until the last decade. The number of alterations have accelerated recently, including window replacement, painting, and installation of trim. The owners of 739, 737, 735 and 731 Bernard Street were all recently notified of the need to request approval of alterations from the Board of Architectural Review. To date, only 737 Bernard Street has made application. The other property owners have been notified again and issued citations.

III. ANALYSIS:

The after-the-fact alterations comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

The case is a difficult one for a number of reasons. As explained above, 737 Bernard Street is one of four properties in the row with similar after-the-fact alterations, and the only applicant thus far. As constructed, the houses were extremely simple, the result of economical construction for lower income residents and the mid-20th century modern design aesthetic. The simple design of these houses is obviously not appreciated by the current residents, who desire to "improve" the properties by adding architectural features where none existed previously. Unfortunately, the alterations at 737 Bernard Street generally run counter to the *Design Guidelines*.

Painting Facade

According to the *Guidelines*, "the Boards strongly discourage the painting of a previously unpainted masonry surface (Paint Colors - Page 1)." The reasons for this prohibition is to preserve the red brick character of the historic district as a whole, to preserve the original

character of the building itself and to eliminate maintenance issues that arise once a building has been painted. Staff notes that within the row of five houses, the majority are now painted (739, 737 and 731 Bernard Street). Taking into account the late construction date of the row, the lack of architectural and historic significance and the difficulty of removing the paint, Staff is willing to recommend that the painting of the facade be approved.

Shutters and Window Hoods

The shutters and window hood are architecturally inappropriate for the thoroughly modern steel casement window set in a punched and untrimmed opening. They attempt to make the building appear more ornamented and older than it is. Contrary to the *Design Guidelines*, the shutters are vinyl, non-operable and inappropriately sized for the windows (Shutters - Page 1 & 2). Even if wood and installed on hinges, the shutters could not meet the requirements of the *Guidelines* as they could not feasibly be sized to fit the large window openings. Staff recommends that the shutters and window hoods be removed.

Cornice

The cornice with its dentils, moldings and swag trim is Victorian in character and architecturally inappropriate for the simple mid-20th century building. In addition, it does not appear likely to hold up well. Staff notes that the adjacent house at 739 Bernard Street has installed the same cornice and that it has already been damaged. Staff recommends that the cornice be removed and the original cast stone be repaired if necessary.

IV. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the shutters and window hoods be removed;
2. That the cornice be removed; and,
3. That the work be completed within three months of the date of this hearing.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 Construction of the cornice requires a building permit.

Historic Alexandria:

Changes the level of the roof area and joint cornices. Would like the owner to consider moving it back.