

Docket Item #23
BAR CASE #2004-0154

BAR Meeting
August 18, 2004

ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Pari Payravi
LOCATION: 407 South Washington Street
ZONE: CL/Commercial

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends denial of the application.

I. Issue:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of a new front door at the commercial property at 407 South Washington Street. The proposed new wood door would incorporate a faux multi-light transom to replace the existing recessed multi-light transom. The proposed new door will be approximately 10" higher than the existing doorway.

According to the applicant, the increased size of the doorway is needed for increased head height so that patrons do not bump their heads on the existing transom.

II. History

407 South Washington Street is a two story wood frame commercial building with a two wood frame addition on the rear. It is part of a group of seven similar wood frame rowhouses. Numbers 401 through 409 were built by Charles Smoot in 1846-1847 according to Ethelyn Cox in *Alexandria Street by Street* (p. 185). Today, the exteriors of these rowhouses remain remarkably homogeneous. They are all basically simple, vernacular two story, three bay rowhouses with little surface modulation. The most notable exception are the recessed transoms above each of the entry doors which provide relief from the planar surfaces of the rowhouses. Thus, these recessed transoms are character defining features of this group of frame rowhouses.

In 2001, the Board approved signage for the existing hair salon (BAR Case #2001-0181, 7/18/01).

III. Analysis

Proposed door alterations complies with the zoning regulations

The drawings are somewhat misleading because they show no shadow lines indicating the change of plan of the existing transom. Therefore, the door appears to be almost identical in both drawings when, in fact, there is a significant difference.

Staff is strongly opposed to changing out the door and transom to a single plane door that has lights at the top. First, it will substantially change the appearance of the building. Second, it will destroy a character defining feature of the house and, third, it will disrupt the unity of the row. Fourth, the change will destroy the historic architectural integrity of the building and the row which have survived remarkably unchanged on the exterior for nearly a century and a half. For these reasons, Staff recommends denial of the application.

IV. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends denial of the application.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 If alterations to the structural frame are required for installation of the new door, a building permit will be required.

Historic Alexandria:

No comment.

National Park Service:

No comment.