

Docket Item #14
BAR CASE #2004-0190

BAR Meeting
September 23, 2004

ISSUE: Replacement steps
APPLICANT: William Kehoe
LOCATION: 214 North Royal Street
ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy.

I. Issue:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for replacement steps at the entrance doorway to the residential rowhouse at 214 North Royal Street. The new steps are proposed to be sandstone and match the color of the existing steps.

II. History

According to Ethelyn Cox in Historic Alexandria, Virginia: Street by Street, the three story brick dwelling with two story brick ell at 214 North Royal Street was erected in the mid- to late-19th century (p. 153). The rear ell is a flounder which appears to date from c. 1830. It is not known whether it pre-dates the main block. The main block combines elements common to c. 1830 buildings in Alexandria with later features that suggest that it may have been updated in the 1840s or 1850s. The 1877 Hopkins Atlas shows a building at this location with a footprint very similar to that of today, with a long and narrow rear ell behind the large main block. A building permit dated 6/4/1918 suggests that the single family residence was converted to an apartment building in that year (Building Permit #343). Exterior wooden stairs were added at that time and the small hyphen between the main block and flounder was expanded to accommodate a kitchen and bath.

Last year the Board approved a rear addition and other alterations to this property (BAR Case #2002-0310, 1/15/03).

III. Analysis

Replacement steps comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

Staff is troubled anytime that historic fabric is removed from a property in the historic district. This is especially so with regard to historic steps and stoops. Because steps are used each time someone enters a house they show the accumulated wear of generations and provide a strong visual reminder of the past of a building. Thus, Staff believes that original stoops and steps should be retained wherever possible. In this case, Staff does not believe that chipped steps warrant full scale replacement. Staff believes that efforts should be made to conserve and repair the original stone steps before a decision is made regarding wholesale replacement. If, indeed, one step is so broken that it is beyond repair, then Staff could support replacement of this single tread, but not replacement of all steps. Staff believes that a stone conservator should be retained as part of an effort to retain as much of the original historic fabric of the steps as possible.

IV. Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 A construction permit is required for step repairs / replacement.

C-2 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

C-3 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

Historic Alexandria:

No comment.