

Docket Item #12
BAR CASE# 2004-0231

BAR Meeting
November 3, 2004

ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Robert Staples
LOCATION: 225 North Fairfax Street
ZONE: CD Commercial

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

- 1) That the porch and HVAC enclosure be constructed of wood and be painted to match the building;
- 2) That the porch railing be a traditional railing with the pickets between the rails; and
- 3) That the HVAC enclosure have the boards oriented vertically rather than horizontally.

Note: Docket item #11 must be approved before this docket may be considered.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for various alterations to the rear (east) and front (west) of the large brick building located on the southwest corner of Fairfax and Queen Streets and to the parking area behind the building. The front entrance will be refurbished within the existing opening. The appearance at the rear of the building will be “cleaned up” through alterations to the building and the parking lot.

Front Entrance

The applicant seeks to replace the existing front entry on Fairfax Street with a new entry system. The existing non historic entrance is of wood and glass and consists of a fully glazed door flanked by sidelights and surmounted by a three part transom. The proposed new entry will be similar to that on the north elevation, which was approved by the Board in 2003 (BAR Case #2003-0077, 5/7/2003).

According to the drawings, the new door assembly will be of bronze anodized aluminum. (Staff notes that the existing north elevation door appears to have a black rather than bronze finish.) The entry will consist of a fully glazed door and two side lights. The sidelights will have solid panels at the base and horizontal members approximately on level with the door handle. There will be no transom. However, there will be a canopy installed over the entryway. The steel and glass canopy will be a simple rectangular panel suspended at an angle by four cables attached to the brick above the door. The canopy will project approximately 2 ½' from the face of the building. Two new light fixtures will be located on either side of the entry. These new fixtures will match the existing simple modern fixtures at the entrance on the north side.

Rear Porch

Since the creation of a pedestrian entrance on the north elevation, the rear door no longer functions as a required exit. Therefore, the applicant proposes to replace the unneeded steps at the rear door with a larger “porch” which will be a useable outdoor area for the building’s inhabitants. The porch will be approximately 6' wide and 17' long. It will be raised approximately 4' above the ground and will have a 3 ½' high railing with simple square pickets around all three sides. The porch structure will be constructed of synthetic wood in a grey color to match the paint color of the building. There will be no stairs from the porch to the ground. The trash cans that are now placed along the rear wall of the building will be stored beneath the porch. A new 2' high brick planter at the base of the porch on the north side will contain plantings and will partially screen the trash storage area along Queen Street.

Window

A new window will be located in the rear (east) wall in the single story section appended to the south side of the building. The white aluminum window will be 30" by 30".

HVAC Relocation

The five existing HVAC units currently arrayed on the ground along the rear wall will be moved to the roof. They will be located on the flat roof of the single story section. The equipment will rest on steel beams located directly on the roof and will be screened on the east, south and west sides by a wall constructed of grey synthetic wood boards laid horizontally. The sloping parapet of this section of the building will partially obscure the base of the HVAC enclosure. At its highest point, the wall will extend 4'4" above the parapet.

Parking Lot

The parking lot will be resurfaced. A new 36" high wall will be constructed along the east side of the lot. The red brick wall will be in running bond and capped with a soldier course of half round bricks. The existing wood fence at the rear of the parking lot will remain and a planting strip edged in brick will be installed in front of it.

II. HISTORY:

As discussed in docket item #11, 225 North Fairfax Street is a two and half story masonry building with a large stepped parapet originally built as a garage in 1919. Subsequently, it served as a warehouse and, beginning in the 1970s, was renovated for a series of retail and office tenants. A review of building permit and BAR records indicates that numerous changes have been made to the door and window openings over the years. Most recently, the Board approved alterations to convert a raised loading dock door on the Queen Street side of the building at 225 North Fairfax Street into an at-grade pedestrian entrance (BAR2003-0077, 5/7/2003).

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed porch and planter fronting Queen Street and low planter at the rear of the property comply with the zoning ordinance requirements. The zoning ordinance requires the relocated rooftop HVAC units to be located a minimum of 25' from the abutting residential zone property. Alternatively, the applicant may obtain a variance or an HVAC waiver approval prior to the BAR hearing.

Given that the building has had many alterations to the window and door openings over the years so that its historic architectural character is conveyed primarily through its overall form, large gable roof, stepped parapet and brick walls, the proposed alterations will not greatly alter its overall character. In addition, Staff acknowledges that the proposed alterations should create a neater appearance at the rear of the building. For these reasons, Staff is inclined to recommend approval of the alterations.

On the other hand, Staff is concerned that the proposed front entrance, rear porch and HVAC enclosure, all designed in a thoroughly modern idiom and materials, are not sufficiently sympathetic to the historic building and surrounding historic district. Therefore, Staff

recommends several modifications to the design. Staff recommends against the use of synthetic wood for the porch and HVAC enclosure. The *Design Guidelines* recommend that porches and fences in the historic district be constructed of traditional materials. The porch will be only a few feet from the public sidewalk and will be highly visible. Staff believes the porch should have a wood, or possibly simple metal, railing. If wood, the railing should be a traditional type railing with the pickets located between the top and bottom rail rather than on the outside, as seen on suburban decks. The railing should be painted to match the trim or body of the building. Similarly, Staff recommends that the rooftop HVAC enclosure be constructed of wood painted to match the body of the building with the pieces oriented vertically rather than horizontally.

Staff also notes that the dark steel members of the new entrances contrast oddly with the existing white aluminum windows. Painting the existing windows or the newly installed Queen Street (north side) entrance so that they are the same color is probably out of the question as they have intact factory finishes. As an alternative, Staff suggests that the applicant consider repainting the building, or perhaps just the orange trim, to create a color scheme that more effectively draws together the disparate elements of the building.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

- 1) That the porch and HVAC enclosure be constructed of wood and be painted to match the building;
- 2) That the porch railing be a traditional railing with the pickets between the rails; and
- 3) That the HVAC enclosure have the boards oriented vertically rather than horizontally.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- F-1 The proposed removal of the exterior side stair and enclose of the opening in a balcony may create a conflict with the approved means of egress within the structure. The applicant shall work with a licensed design profession to ensure that the egress requirements of the USBC are maintained.

- C-1 Structural calculations are required to verify the ability of the existing roof to support the additional weight of the HVAC unit.

- 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).

- C-4 Construction permits are required for this project. Plans shall accompany the permit application that fully detail the construction as well as layouts and schematics of the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.

- C-5 Prior to the issuance of a demolition permit or land disturbance permit, a rodent abatement plan shall be submitted to Code Enforcement that will outline the steps that will taken to prevent the spread of rodents from the construction site to the surrounding community and sewers.

Office of Historic Alexandria:

“No comment”