

Docket Item #9  
BAR CASE #2004-0241

BAR Meeting  
November 17, 2004

**ISSUE:** After-the-fact alterations

**APPLICANT:** Fernando Alvarez

**LOCATION:** 735 Bernard Street

**ZONE:** RM/Residential

---

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends approval of the of the brick walk and steps and of the rest of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the front windows be replaced with aluminum clad wood casement windows in a configuration closely matching the original steel casement windows;
2. That the masonry remain unpainted;
3. That the front door be replaced with an appropriate wood door;
4. That a simple wood or metal picket fence be installed;
5. That the applicant work with Staff to select appropriate windows, door and fence; and,
6. That the inappropriate windows and door be replaced within six 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 property at 735 Bernard Street. These alterations are both proposed and after-the-fact:

1. Six-over-six replacement windows (after-the-fact);
2. Painting unpainted masonry (proposed);
3. Front door (after-the-fact);
4. Installing a brick and iron wall with iron gate (proposed); and,
5. Bricking over top of the walkway and front steps (proposed).

### **II. HISTORY:**

735 Bernard Street is a two story, brick faced, rowhouse 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 Fagelson's Addition, most of which was constructed in 1939 and 1940. The houses on Bernard Street differ from those in Fagelson's addition in that they were designed in a clearly modern design idiom with rather severe lines, little architectural ornamentation and steel windows with a distinctly horizontal orientation.

In late Spring 2004, Staff observed a number of cosmetic alterations to the fronts of the houses in the 700 block of Bernard Street, including window replacement, painting, and installation of trim. By letter dated June 2, 2004, the owners of 739, 737 and 731 Bernard Street were notified of the need to request approval of after-the-fact alterations from the Board of Architectural Review (BAR). Subsequently, work was undertaken at 735 Bernard Street and on July 26, 2004 Staff wrote to the owner of that property. Thus far, only 737 Bernard Street has obtained BAR approval. On August 18, 2004, the Board approved a number of alterations at 737 Bernard Street, including painting unpainted masonry and adding window hoods and a cornice, but did not approve the vinyl shutters, which are to be removed (BAR Case #2004-0153). The remaining three properties, 739, 735 and 731 Bernard Street are on the November 17, 2004 docket (docket item #s 6, 9 & 10).

Mr. Alvarez is the applicant for each of these properties. Mr. Alvarez purchased the property at 735 Bernard Street in April 2004. Prior to that, the property had been vacant and neglected for a number of years.

### III. ANALYSIS:

The alterations and proposed wall comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

731 Bernard Street is one of four properties in the row with similar after-the-fact alterations. 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 spare design of these houses is not appreciated by the current residents, who desire to “improve” the properties by adding architectural features. Several of the alterations undertaken or proposed for 735 Bernard Street run counter to the *Design Guidelines* and to general historic preservation principles that encourage the appreciation of each building as a product of its own time and place and disapprove of alterations which seek to make buildings appear older or more elaborate than constructed.

#### Replacement Windows

In the opinion of Staff, the after-the-fact, six-over-six wood windows are an inappropriate replacement for the original metal casement windows. The *Guidelines* note that “windows are a principal character defining feature of a building” and should be retained or, if necessary, be replaced with windows which are appropriate to the period and style of the building (Windows - Pages 1-2). The new windows differ in many respects from the original windows which were modern in character and horizontal in orientation. Staff would prefer replacement windows that more closely matched the original windows. In other cases involving the replacement of mid-20th century steel casement windows, as on the 400 block of Gibbon Street, Staff and Board have recommended aluminum clad wood casement windows with a light pattern similar to the original configuration. On the other hand, in 2000, the Board approved after-the-fact six-over-six vinyl windows at 731 Bernard Street (BAR Case #2000-0044, 4/5/2000).

#### Painting Facade

The applicant proposes to paint the unpainted red brick facade. According to the *Guidelines*, “the Boards strongly discourage the painting of a previously unpainted masonry surface (Paint Colors - Page 1).” This prohibition is intended 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 in the 700 block of Bernard Street, the majority are now painted (739, 737 and 731 Bernard Street) and the Board did recently approve the painting of 737 Bernard Street (BAR Case #2004-0153, 8/18/2004). However, this was an after-the-fact approval. Staff recommends that the Board not approve the painting of 735 Bernard Street as it is not currently painted and the *Guidelines* discourage painting unpainted masonry.

#### Front Door

The after-the-fact Victorian style door should be removed and replaced with a simpler wood door, more appropriate to the architectural character of the house. The existing door appears to

be made of metal and has a single arched window of faux leaded glass. According to the *Guidelines*, “exterior doors and surrounding details should be appropriate to the period of the structure” and “modern exterior and storm doors often contain inappropriate decorative elements that detract from the integrity of the structure. Lastly, they note that, “exterior flush or paneled metal doors are generally not appropriate on residential structures” (Exterior Doors - Pages 1-3). Therefore, Staff recommends that the existing door be replaced with a wood door of a simple design more appropriate to the style of the house. The Board recently denied an inappropriate after-the-fact door at 1302 Michigan Avenue, located just down the street (BAR Case #2004-0013, October 20, 2004).

#### Front Wall

The applicant proposes to construct a 42" high wall with a brick base and piers and metal picket railing and gate. Lanterns would be installed on the piers flanking the gate. Other than the after-the-fact wall at 739 Bernard Street, the proposed wall is more solid and more elaborate than the other fences on the blockface. In the opinion of Staff, the proposed wall is not compatible with the simple, modern character of the original design of the house. Therefore, Staff recommends that instead of the proposed wall, a simple wood or metal picket fence be installed.

#### Walk and Front Step

Staff has no objection to the proposal to cover the existing concrete front walk and steps in brick. The Board does not typically review at-grade paving, such as the walk. The alteration to the front steps does fall under the Board’s purview, but it is so minor a change that it is expected to have little impact on the overall appearance of the property. Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the bricking of the walk and steps.

#### IV. Staff Recommendation

To conclude, Staff recommends approval of the brick walk and steps and of the rest of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the front windows be replaced with aluminum clad wood casement windows in a configuration closely matching the original steel casement windows;
2. That the masonry remain unpainted;
3. That the front door be replaced with an appropriate wood door;
4. That a simple wood or metal picket fence be installed;
5. That the applicant work with Staff to select appropriate windows, door and fence; and,
6. That the inappropriate windows and door be replaced within six months of the date of this hearing.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 A construction permit is required for the proposed brick fence.

Historic Alexandria:

“I would not support painting brick.”