

Docket Item #10
BAR CASE #2004-0242

BAR Meeting
November 17, 2004

ISSUE: After-the-fact alterations

APPLICANT: Fernando Alvarez

LOCATION: 731 Bernard Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the window hoods be removed;
2. That the shutters be removed;
3. That the above be completed 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 731 Bernard Street. These alterations are all after-the-fact:

1. Painting unpainted masonry;
2. Installing trim at windows;
3. Installing shutters; and,
4. Installing a wood picket fence.

II. HISTORY:

731 Bernard Street is a two story, brick faced, end unit 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. Fernando Alvarez is the applicant for each of these properties. In the case of 731 Bernard Street, Mr. Alvarez is representing the property owner, Mr. Sergio Alvarez, who is also his son. Mr. Sergio Alvarez purchased the property in August 2004 from his sister with full knowledge that the alterations she had undertaken had not been approved by the Board. The Board has approved alterations at 731 Bernard Street prior to the Alvarez family ownership. In 2000, the Board gave after-the-fact approval for the double hung, multi-light vinyl windows which replaced the original metal casement windows and for the new bay window on the front (BAR Case #2000-0044, 4/5/2000). Shortly after that approval, the Board approved a new two story

addition to be constructed on the east and north sides of the building (BAR Case #2000-00204 & 00205, 9/20/2000). This addition was not constructed.

III. ANALYSIS:

The alterations and fence 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. Many of the alterations undertaken for 731 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.

Painting 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). Recognizing the difficulty of removing the paint, Staff is willing to recommend that the painting of the building be approved. In addition, Staff notes that the Board allowed the paint to remain at 737 Bernard Street.

Window Trim

Staff would prefer that the trim be removed and the window opening be returned to its original, unornamented appearance. The addition of the window hoods above the windows, along with the shutters and previously approved double hung windows totally changes the architectural character of the window openings from a horizontal, clean, modern appearance to a traditional, cottage-like appearance. As the windows are a primary architectural feature of the house, the impact on the overall architectural character is substantial. The *Guidelines* call for window treatment consistent with the period and style of the building (Windows- Page 1). However, Staff notes that the Board allowed the same window hoods to remain at 737 Bernard Street.

Shutters

The shutters are architecturally inappropriate for the style of the building. 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). Staff recommends that the shutters be removed. Staff notes that the Board determined that similar shutters at 737 Bernard Street must be removed within 6 months of the hearing date.

Front Fence

In the opinion of Staff, the existing 42" high wood picket fence is acceptable. The fence replaced the original chain link fence at the front of the property.

IV. Staff Recommendation

To conclude, Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the window hoods be removed;
2. That the shutters be removed;
3. That the above be completed within six months of the date of this hearing.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

“No comments.”

Historic Alexandria:

“It is not generally appropriate to paint brick.”