

Docket Item #13
BAR CASE #2005-0002

BAR Meeting
February 2, 2005

ISSUE: Demolition and capsulation
APPLICANT: Steve Stylianoudis and Vallery Vandegrift
LOCATION: 508 North Columbus Street
ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

NOTE: According to the Bylaws of the Board of Architectural Review, this docket item requires a roll call vote.

ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish for the demolition and the infilling of portions of the rear (west) wall and the capsulation of the entire rear wall within a new three level rear addition. The rear of the house is visible from the unpaved public alley that runs along the back of the row and from Alfred Street.



Figure 1 - Rear of 508 N. Columbus on right

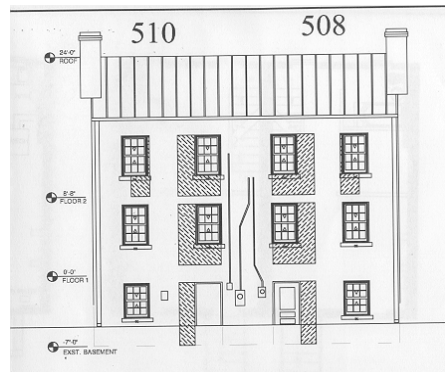


Figure 2 - Demolition on rear (west) wall

HISTORY:

508 North Columbus Street is a two story, gable-roofed, brick rowhouse that is located in a row of eight similar houses that were constructed together as a row (506-520 North Columbus Street). The houses were constructed prior to 1863, as they appear in a birds eye view of Alexandria with that date.



Figure 3 - 1863 Birds Eye View (row in center of picture)

Survey information in the Office of Planning and Zoning indicates that the row was constructed in the Federal period, prior to 1830. An early- to mid- 19th century date is supported by the massing of the houses, the brick coursing and the brick cornice. The houses were constructed as relatively simple, vernacular worker housing. Each of the houses has a side hall plan, two bays in width, two stories plus high basement, a continuous standing seam metal roof and shared front and back chimneys. Staff believes the row is unusual for the number of units built simultaneously. Smaller rows of four or less were more typically constructed in Alexandria in the 19th century.

The early date of the houses is supported by the fact that the houses were constructed without rear service wings. According to Mrs. Helen Miller, who was born in 508 North Columbus Street in 1916, the kitchen and dining room were located in the basement. Due to a change in grade from front to back, the basement level is fully exposed at the rear of the house has both a door and window. Based on Sanborn mapping and BAR records, the row of eight houses remained without rear additions until the early 1950s and possibly until the early 1980s. In the subsequent years, there have been a number of changes to these houses. However, four of the eight, 508, 510, 512 and 520 North Columbus Street, remain without additions. The front of the row retains a substantial degree of integrity, despite minor alterations. A 1946 building permit recently located by Staff, requests “to demolish west wall and rebuild on concrete footings” for the five houses at 508-516 North Columbus Street. Physical evidence suggests extensive repair or rebuilding was carried out at some point on the west wall of the row. 508 North Columbus has had its windows, door and stoop replaced on the front and, until recently, had formstone applied to the front. The Board approved the application of the formstone on September 11, 1952 and BAR staff gave administrative approval for its removal on November 19, 2004.

On July 21, 2004, the Board of Architectural Review approved the demolition of the rear wall of 510 North Columbus Street (BAR Case #2004-0067) and on August 18, 2004, approved the renovation of the existing house at 510 North Columbus Street and a new three level rear addition (BAR Case #2004-0068). Board records indicate that the additions at 518, 506, 514, and 516 North Columbus Street were approved on 8/13/1953, 6/2/1982, 1/3/1990 (BAR Case #89-211) and 7/18/1990 (BAR Case #90-154) respectively. The addition at 518 North Columbus covers the basement and first story only. The other three additions capsulate the second story as well as basement and first story.

ANALYSIS:

In considering a Permit to Demolish/Capsulate, the Board must consider the following criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, §10-105(B):

- (1) Is the building or structure of such architectural or historical interest that its moving, removing, capsulating or razing would be to the detriment of the public interest?
- (2) Is the building or structure of such interest that it could be made into a historic house?
- (3) Is the building or structure of such old and unusual or uncommon design, texture and material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty?
- (4) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway?
- (5) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve and protect an historic

place or area of historic interest in the city?

(6) Would retention of the building or structure promote the general welfare by maintaining and increasing real estate values, generating business, creating new positions, attracting tourists, students, writers, historians, artists and artisans, attracting new residents, encouraging study and interest in American history, stimulating interest and study in architecture and design, educating citizens in American culture and heritage, and making the city a more attractive and desirable place in which to live?

Staff believes that criteria #1,3,5 & 6 could be met in this case. The house is one of a significant row of early- to mid- 19th century workers housing that retains a high level of integrity, when considered as a whole and in relation to other similar rows in Alexandria. 508 North Columbus Street is one of three consecutive rowhouses (508-512 North Columbus Street) that have not had any addition to the rear and thus give a sense of what the entire row looked like in the rear when constructed, with a continuous rear wall plane and uninterrupted brickwork, a continuous gabled roof and shared chimneys. Staff does note that the historic integrity of the rear wall of the row including 508 North Columbus Street, has been compromised.

Unlike the recent application for demolition at 510 North Columbus Street (BAR Case #2004-0067, 7/21/2004), which involved complete demolition of the rear wall, the present case involves relatively little demolition. The proposed demolition is limited to areas around existing openings on each of the three levels. Other openings will be infilled as necessary, but the majority of the rear wall will be retained and capsulated within the new addition. A narrow strip of the lower edge of the gable roof in the rear will be capsulated where the roof of the new addition ties into the existing roof. Thus, Staff believes the proposed demolition and capsulation complies with the *Design Guidelines* which encourage minimizing demolition to the greatest extent possible:

It is the policy of the Boards that the absolute minimum demolition of an existing structure should take place. For example, in the case of an addition to the rear of a property, the Boards prefer that the amount of demolition be limited to that necessary to accommodate access to the addition rather than wholesale demolition and replacement of the rear facade. (Demolition of Existing Structures - Page 1)

Staff notes that the Board has previously approved demolition and/or capsulation for 506, 510, 514, 516 & 518 North Columbus Street and that the demolition recently approved at 510 North Columbus Street was considerably more substantial than that requested here.

To conclude, recognizing the needs of the applicant, the Board's prior approval of additions in this row and the limited visibility of the rear of the house, Staff is willing to recommend approval of demolition at 508 North Columbus Street.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 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 be taken to prevent the spread of rodents from the construction site to the surrounding community and sewers.

Historic Alexandria:

No comment.

Alexandria Archeology:

F-1 Tax records indicate that development on this street face had begun by 1810 and that two free African American households were located on the block in 1830. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources which could provide insight into domestic activities, perhaps relating to free blacks, in early 19th-century Alexandria.

R-1 Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.

R-2 The above statement must appear in the General Notes of the site plan so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.