

Docket Item #20
BAR CASE #2005-0190

BAR Meeting
September 7, 2005

ISSUE: After-the-fact alterations to front steps & a new gate

APPLICANT: Thomas D. Crowley

LOCATION: 214 North Royal Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that the applicant be fined \$500.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations to the residential rowhouse at 214 North Royal Street. The applicant is proposing to replace the existing wooden gate at the side passageway with a new iron gate. The six foot tall gate will be flanked by two piers constructed of brick to match the brick on the building. The gate will match the design of railings previously approved by the Board for the rear of the property.

The applicant is also requesting approval for alterations to the front entrance steps. At a previous hearing, the Board required that the applicant stabilize and reuse the historic steps. In response, the applicant stabilized and reused the steps, but has covered them with a parging mixture to make the steps look new.

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.

In 2003, the Board approved a rear addition and other alterations to this property (BAR Case #2002-0310, 1/15/03). In 2004, the Board heard an application to replace the existing front steps (BAR Case #2004-0190, 9/23/05). The Board approved the application with the condition that the existing steps be stabilized and reused except for the broken step which may be replaced if it cannot be repaired.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed gate and alterations to front entry steps comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

Fences, garden walls and gates should be appropriate in materials, design and scale to the period and character of the structure they surround (Fences - page 2). Staff believes that the proposed gate which complements the existing iron work on the house is appropriate.

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. Although the applicant originally requested replacing all of the steps, the Board required that the steps be retained and stabilized. Staff believes that the subsequent parging of the steps is unfortunate. The parging treatment has destroyed the historic integrity of the steps by creating a flat even surface that appears new. Unfortunately it is not feasible to return the steps to their previous condition. That being said, Staff reluctantly recommends approval of the existing steps. Staff however notes that the alterations to the steps without the Board's approval, without consultation with BAR Staff, and without a building permit is a class II civil violation. Staff believes that the applicant should be fined the applicable \$500 fine.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the condition that the applicant be fined \$500.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-2 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-3 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.

Historic Alexandria:

“No comment”