

Docket Item # 9
BAR CASE #2006-0033

BAR Meeting
March 15, 2006

ISSUE: Demolition and capsulation

APPLICANT: Jennifer & Nels Nordquist by Robert Bentley Adams

LOCATION: 408 Duke Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

NOTE: This docket item requires a roll call vote.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish and Capsulate portions of the freestanding residential house at 408 Duke Street. Those portions to be demolished and capsulated include:

- The first and second levels of the first five bays of the two story flounder at the rear (south) of the historic main block;
- A new opening in the roof of the rear flounder for a skylight; and,
- The enlargement of an existing window into a door on the first floor of the east elevation of the historic main block.

The proposed capsulation on the east side of the flounder will allow construction of a new two story enclosed porch addition.



Figure 1 South (rear) and East (side) elevations

II. HISTORY:

408 Duke Street is a freestanding, three and a half story, three bay brick residence. It is one of the most important buildings in the Old and Historic Alexandria District for its associative values with prominent citizens in Alexandria history. The house was built by Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick in 1795. Dr. Dick was George Washington's personal physician and attended him at the time of his death in 1799. The house was acquired by Kate Waller Barrett in 1896 and remained in her family until 1969. The Queen Street Library was named in honor of Kate Waller Barrett. She was the co-founder of the Florence Crittenden Homes and served as the President of the American Legion Auxiliary. She was also the first woman to be honored by lowering the flag at the United States Capitol to half staff at the time of her death in 1925.



Figure 2 Front elevation

The building was constructed as a one story brick residence in 1795 and was enlarged to its present height of three stories in 1826.

Substantial additions to the east side and rear elevations were added by the Barretts in the late 19th century. In 1896 a two story wood “conservatory” was constructed on the east side of the house. This “conservatory” measured approximately 65' in length and 24' in width, nearly doubling the size of the house (Building Permit #9, 11/1/9/1896).

The present configuration of the building is the result of demolition work carried out by a previous owner of the building following purchase of the structure in 1969 until sale of the house in 2002. Much of the work that was performed on the house during this period was done without building permits and/or approval of the Board.

During that time, the east wall of the main historic block, flounder and connector section were substantially reworked and repointed. Staff inspection of the flounder wing indicated that the repointing was carried out in running bond with Portland cement mortar and that no ghost marks of the 1896 conservatory addition are visible. The reworking of the rear brick work of the flounder wing is so substantial that there is no visible brick bond pattern that would indicate a 19th century date of construction for this section.

In 2004, the Board approved a gate at the rear alley entrance to the property (BAR Case #2004-0137, 7/21/04). In 2002 the Board approved the conversion of an existing window on the east side of the house into a new entryway to permit access to the house directly from the street (BAR Case #2002-0181, 7/17/02).

III. ANALYSIS:

In considering a Permit to Demolish, 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 shrine?
- (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?

The current proposal to capsculate the east side of the rear flounder almost exactly re-creates the capsulation of that took place when the conservatory was added in 1896. Staff also notes that the east side of the rear flounder is not highly visible from the public right-of-way. The nearly 7' high brick wall on Duke Street to the east of the historic main block obscures views from Duke Street and the rear brick wall obscures views from nearly any area to the rear of the house. Staff also notes that the surface parking lot to the rear of the house is private property. Thus, the area to be encapsulated to permit construction of the new story two porch addition on the east side of flounder will largely not be visible from the public right-of-way.

In evaluating the capsulation proposed, Staff believes that criteria #'s 1, 5, and 6 are likely met in this instance. However, because of the extensive alterations to the east side of the property that have taken place in the late 20th century and the fact that the east side of the flounder has extremely limited views from a public right-of-way, Staff recommends approval of the Permit to Capsulate. In the opinion of Staff, even if portions of the existing brick walls of the east elevation of the flounder section were to be demolished at a subsequent date, little original 19th century building fabric would be lost because of the extensive alterations that have already taken place.

IV. 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 taken to prevent the spread of rodents from the construction site to the surrounding community and sewers.

Historic Alexandria:

The original one story brick house on this site belonged to Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick in 1796. By 1853, it had been expanded to a 3-story brick house. It was also the home of local civic activist Kate Waller Barrett when she died in 1925 (See, *Alexandria Street by Street*, p.23).

The proposed alterations, especially the side elevation, would drastically alter the design of the house and seem very incompatible with the original period and simplicity of the structure. Of note is the extensive articulation of the wall surface and incompatible details such as the Doric pilasters, casement windows, and screen porch. Even though these changes would not be seen from Duke Street, they seem drastic for the building.