

Docket Item #12
BAR CASE #2006-0058

BAR Meeting
April 5, 2006

ISSUE: Demolition and capsulation
APPLICANT: Amy M. Newton by Robert Bentley Adams
LOCATION: 208 North Fairfax Street
ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

NOTE: This docket item requires a roll call vote.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish and Capsulate portions of the residential rowhouse at 208 North Fairfax Street. Those portions to be demolished and capsulated include: portions of the rear (west) wall to allow construction of a new bay window; the south wall of the rear addition for a new window and door opening; and, the existing front entry steps so that new re-configured front entry steps can be built.

II. HISTORY:

208 North Fairfax Street is one of a pair of two and a half story brick rowhouses together with 210 which were constructed by William Duvall sometime between 1784 when he purchased the land from William Ramsay and 1793 when he sold the houses in 1793 to William Downman of Prince William County for 400 pounds.

208 and 210 North Fairfax are notable examples of 18th century brick rowhouses in Alexandria. They are both flounder houses turned at a ninety degree angle to the usual street orientation of other flounder buildings found in Alexandria. To the knowledge of staff, there are only five 18th century flounder houses with this street orientation existing in the historic district - one example is in the 200 block of North Pitt Street and the other two are paired houses in the 200 block of South Royal Street.

Further, staff notes that this pair of brick houses shares remarkably similar detailing especially of the belt course and watertable with a number of other 18th century brick houses in the historic district. So distinctive is the similarity that staff is of the opinion that the same hand designed these houses, which staff has dubbed "Designer X". Extant examples include 521 and 601 Duke Street, the Dr. Craik house on Prince Street, and another at 219 South Lee Street. Colross, now demolished, is also an example of this distinctive house design.

208 North Fairfax Street has a later addition on the south side of the main historic block. The addition is readily discernible because of the vertical joint between the 18th century section of the house and the addition as well as a change in the foundation material from stone to brick.

The portion of the building at the rear that is proposed to be capsulated/demolished is a later 20th century addition to the building. In 1963 the rear one story frame kitchen addition was removed and a new brick addition constructed in its place. At the same time, the dormer on the east slope of the roof was constructed (Building Permit #19234, 3/5/1963). This work was done by the previous owner John W. Cole.

The stone steps to be removed are a 19th century alteration. In the mid-1990s the steps were demolished by an automobile and were reconfigured at that time.

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?

In the opinion of staff, with respect to the demolition of the rear and side walls of the rear addition none of the criteria are met because the addition was built in the late 20th century. Staff also has no objection to the demolition of the front steps which are a later addition to the main historic block.

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 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:

This house was built by William Duvall on a lot purchased from William Ramsay in 1784. The proposed alteration of the front stoop of this late 18th century house is not appropriate. The re-constitution of the original bricks and stone to create a stoop that is accessed from the side, the re-positioning of the railing to run parallel to the house, and the heavier door surround all combine to create a more elegant and elaborate entrance than this home would have originally had.