

Docket Item #13
BAR CASE #2006-0059

BAR Meeting
April 5, 2006

ISSUE: New front entry steps and alterations

APPLICANT: Amy M. Newton by Robert Bentley Adams

LOCATION: 208 North Fairfax Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends:

1. Approval of the revised front entry steps and railings; and,
2. Denial of the proposed new wood surround.

NOTE: Docket item #12 must be approved before this docket item can be considered.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations to the residential rowhouse at 208 North Fairfax Street. First, the existing front entry steps are proposed to be rebuilt with new stone steps at a 90 degree angle from the existing steps. The new entry steps will re-use the existing stone steps as well as the metal balusters, newels and railings. Second, the existing front entry door is proposed to be removed and replaced with a new door and wood surround. The new door will be a Colonial Revival style six panel door with a wood Doric surround.

II. HISTORY:

As noted in the discussion section for docket item #12, 208 North Fairfax Street is one of a pair brick rowhouses originally constructed in the late 18th century.

III. ANALYSIS:

Proposed front stoop renovations and bay window comply with zoning ordinance requirements.

The bay window at the rear (west) of the house as well as the new door and window on the south side of the rear addition noted in the application are not visible from the public right-of-way and are therefore not before the Board.

As noted in the discussion section for docket item #12, the southern part of the house is a later addition to the 18th century portion of the house. The existing stone steps are steep and awkward to navigate. The proposed revision will create a set of front entry steps that provide a smoother transition to the front door. Additionally, the existing stone steps have been re-worked during the late 20th century. Staff also notes that the metal railings and balusters are proposed to be reused. Oral tradition provides that these railing were salvaged from the White House during one of the renovations. Based upon this, Staff has no objection to the revised front entry steps and railings.

Staff is, however, not as sanguine regarding the proposed new door surround. 208 North Fairfax is a twin with the adjacent house at 210. At the present time, both have simple front entry doors without wood trim, but including a three light transom above. The simple, unadorned front doors to both houses contributes to the paired symmetry of the two houses. However, at the same time staff is aware that the section where the front door is located for this house is a later addition and that the re-oriented front entry steps lessen the perceived symmetry somewhat. Nevertheless, staff believes that the new front door surround will be a visual feature that will diminish the paired symmetry of the front elevations of these houses. For this reason, staff is opposed to the introduction of the wood door surround.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends:

1. Approval of the revised front entry steps and railings; and,

2. Denial of the proposed new wood surround.

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.