

Docket Item # 18
BAR CASE #2006-0105

BAR Meeting
June 7, 2006

ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Peter Hirsch
LOCATION: 510 South Columbus Street
ZONE: RB/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends denial of the application.

(Insert sketch here)

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for an increase in the height of the brick wall on the west and south sides of the house at 510 South Columbus Street. Currently, the existing brick wall is approximately 4' high and it is proposed to be increased by 2' to an overall height of approximately 6'.

The wall will be increased in height along the section fronting on South Columbus Street and for nearly 50' facing the alley alongside the south side of the house beginning at the existing section of the wall. It is not proposed to be increased in height from a point 5.8' from east of the rear wall; nor is the rear section of wall proposed to be made higher. These sections of the existing brick wall are built on common property of the homeowners association.

II. HISTORY:

510 South Columbus Street is a two story, two bay brick residential rowhouse that was built as part of the DIP Urban Renewal project in 1984.

There has been no prior Board review of any alterations to this house.

III. ANALYSIS:

The Zoning Ordinance allows the Board to approve a fence or wall of any height in historic district as long as it determines that the wall is "architecturally appropriate."

The purpose of raising the height of the brick wall is to separate the house from the construction of the three townhouses on Gibbon Street.

Staff is not supportive of raising the height of the brick wall for several reasons. First, the increased height of the brick wall will serve to visually isolate the existing townhouse from its immediate neighbors. The Board has opposed such proposals in the past preferring that existing house remain integrated into the overall fabric of the historic district. Second, raising the height of the brick wall begins to create, in the opinion of Staff, a semblance of a gated community for the urban renewal townhouses in the immediate vicinity of this house, a condition that the Board has long opposed within the boundaries of the historic district. Third, a high brick wall will necessarily decrease interaction and communication between neighbors, a less than desirous condition in an urban area. Fourth, approving the increase in height of the brick wall will create a precedent for other requests to raise the height of other wall separating properties in the historic district. Fifth, by increasing the height of the brick wall only in the area facing the construction to the south will create a visually awkward appearance for the wall that is not appropriate to this house nor the historic district. And, finally, raising the height of the brick wall to block out construction activities for the new townhouses on Gibbon Street will solve a temporary problem and create other problems as noted. For these reasons, Staff cannot support the increased size of the brick wall.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:
Staff recommends denial of the application.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 A construction permit is required for the proposed project.

Office of Historic Alexandria:

The proposed total height of 6' for a side wall is allowable, but is there enough visual clearance from the alley turning onto Columbus?