

Docket Item #20
BAR CASE #2006-00143

BAR Meeting
July 19, 2006

ISSUE: Addition and alterations

APPLICANT: Lyle & Christine Roberts by Robert Bentley Adams

LOCATION: 509 ½ S. Fairfax Street

ZONE: RM/Residential

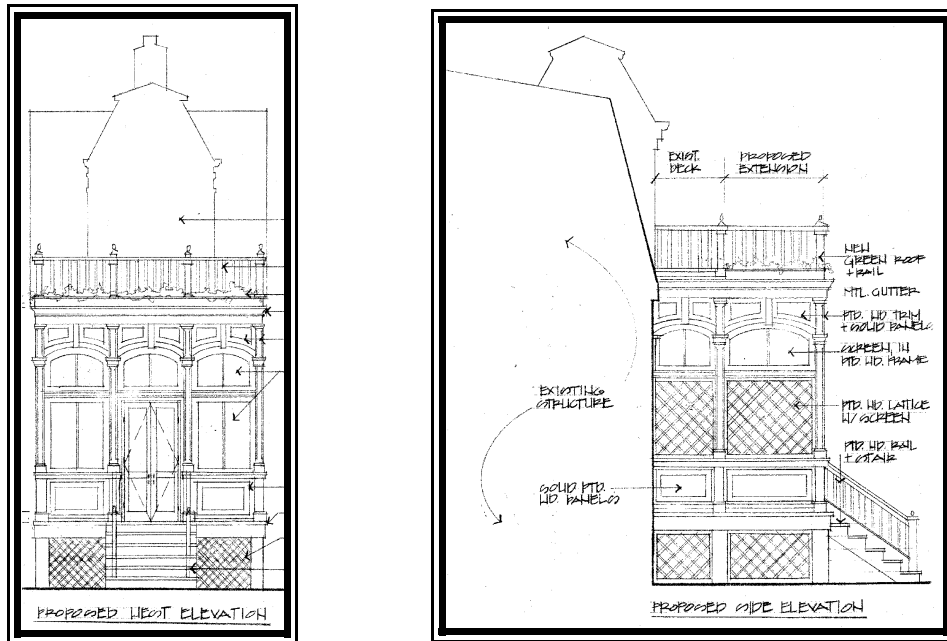
STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends denial of the application as submitted.

(Insert sketch here)

NOTE: Docket item #19 must be approved before this item may be considered.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to extend the existing rear porch to create a larger screened porch with green roof above. The existing one story porch with second story deck dates to 1992 when the house was substantially expanded with a two story rear addition. The current porch extends the entire width of the lot and is 4' deep. The addition to the porch will also extend the entire width of the lot and will be 6' deep. The new section of porch will utilize the same Victorian style detailing as seen on the existing porch: the raised panels, square posts with applied molding details, lattice screens at the side and base, arched top panels and railings on the steps and around the deck. The stairs from the rear yard will be centered on the west elevation. There will be a double leaf screened door flanked on each side by arched sections with raised panels at the bottom and screening above. As with the existing porch there will be a railing above, surrounding the second story deck. The wood railing will have square posts with ball finials and square balusters. The expanded portion of the second story deck will be planted to serve as a green roof. All elements of the porch, deck and steps will be of wood and will be painted.



The expanded rear porch and deck will extend approximately 6' beyond the rear wall of 509 South Fairfax Street to the north and approximately 1' beyond the rear wall of 511 South Fairfax Street to the south.

The house backs up to the Safeway parking lot in the 500 block of South Royal Street. The alley behind the house is private. The applicant recently obtained Board approval for a new 6' high brick wall to be constructed at the rear of the property. Portions of the rear of the house are visible from Gibbon Street and the Safeway parking lot. However, these views, and particularly those of the first floor level, are limited.

II. HISTORY:

5091/2 South Fairfax Street is a two story wood frame Queen Anne/Second Empire Victorian style, duplex townhouse was constructed between 1891 and 1896 according to the Sanborn Insurance Maps. The front facade is simple but well proportioned, with a rectangular bay/tower capped by a polychrome slate hip turret and Mansard roof. The wood trim displays Eastlake style details. The Board approved the existing Victorian style two story rear addition with one story porch in 1992 (BAR Case #92-229, 12/6/1992). This addition was designed by Robert Bentley Adams.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed addition and alterations comply with the zoning ordinances requirements. The applicant sought and obtained approval of a variance of 145 square feet to reduce the required open space to 405 square feet for this porch expansion (BZA Case #2006-0027, June 8, 2006). The code requires 550 square feet of open space for this property. Zoning staff recommended denial of the application. The BZA approval was conditioned upon the installation and maintenance of a green roof above the porch.

Staff has no objection to the *design* of the porch, which continues the Victorian style design of the existing porch which was approved by the Board in 1992 and which relates to the Victorian facades of the houses. However, staff is concerned that the addition of yet more building mass and corresponding elimination of additional ground level open space at 509 ½ South Fairfax Street will have an adverse effect on the block. The historic character of the interior of the residential blocks within the historic districts has been eroding in recent decades with the continuing expansion of houses, sometimes doubling the size of the historic house. The interior of this portion of the 500 block, west side, is open and visually unobstructed and staff is concerned that the expanded porch will continue the pattern of depletion of limited visual and useable open space.

Moreover, staff is concerned that the approval of this project will set a precedent for accepting green roofs as a substitute for ground level open space in the historic districts where development is already significantly more dense than it was historically, where open space is extremely limited and where the desire for larger houses continues unabated. As far as staff is aware, this practice, which is currently enjoying popularity as a “green building” technology, has not been used previously for a single-family house within the historic districts. While it is probably possible to cite examples of planted areas above ground level on historic buildings in urban settings, green

roofs are definitely not a typical historical practice for Alexandria's largely vernacular historic houses.

As the porch cannot be expanded without reducing the open space, staff recommends denial of the application as submitted.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends denial of the application as submitted.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- F-1 The proposed design of the lattice work privacy side walls shall be evaluated by Code Enforcement in more detail. The proposed design provides additional enclosure of the porch along interior lot lines which may no longer qualify as an open porch. As a result, these walls may have to be constructed to the requirements of C-1 below.
- C-1 All exterior walls within 5 feet from an interior property line shall have a fire resistance rating of 1 hour, from both sides of the wall. As alternative, a 2 hour fire wall may be provided. This condition is also applicable to skylights within setback distance. Openings in exterior walls between 3 and 5 feet shall not exceed 25% of the area of the entire wall surface (This shall include bay windows). Openings shall not be permitted in exterior walls within 3 feet of an interior lot line.
- C-2 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.
- C-3 Roof drainage systems must be installed so as neither to impact upon, nor cause erosion/damage to adjacent property.
- C-4 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-5 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-6 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.
- C-7 Permission from adjacent property owners is required if access to the adjacent properties is required to complete the proposed construction. Otherwise, a plan shall be submitted to demonstrate the construction techniques utilized to keep construction solely on the referenced property.

- C-8 A wall location plat prepared by a land surveyor is required to be submitted to this office prior to requesting any framing inspection.

Historic Alexandria:

- F-1 It seems an extensive expansion for a fairly limited, compressed space, especially considering the building's relationship to flanking homes.
- F-2 The re-styling of the Victorian facade with screening, more lattice and other elements also seems extreme for the given space.

Alexandria Archaeology:

- F-1 Tax records indicate the presence of a free African American household on this street face in 1810 and in 1850, but the exact addresses are unknown. The 1877 G.M. Hopkins Insurance Atlas depicts a structure on the lot. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into domestic activities, perhaps relating to free blacks, in 19th-century Alexandria.
- R-1 Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.
- R-2 The above statement must appear in the General Notes of all site plans so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.