

Docket Item # 9  
BAR CASE # 2006-0253

BAR Meeting  
December 6, 2006

**ISSUE:** After-the-fact alterations  
**APPLICANT:** Caroline and Timothy Hanson  
**LOCATION:** 726 South Alfred Street  
**ZONE:** RM/residential

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

(Insert sketch here)

**I. ISSUE:**

The applicant added brick jack arches above the three windows on the front façade and a soldier course brick sill below. As built, these punched openings had no window heads or sills or ornamentation or trim of any kind; the tops and bottoms of the window openings were indistinguishable from the bond of the surrounding brick wall. Staff was notified of the completed work by a citizen in October and requested that the property owners make application; they did so in a timely manner.

The alterations are highly visible on the front façade of the building which is located on a blockface composed of identical or nearly identical units.

**II. HISTORY:**

The interior unit townhouse at 726 South Alfred Street was constructed in 1941, according to the City's Real Estate records. The brick clad cinderblock rowhouses with steel casement windows were built in a minimalist modern style as part of a development known as the Patrick Henry Homes, consisting of approximately 53 homes on the 700 block of South Patrick, South Alfred, and South Columbus and the 800 and 900 blocks of Jefferson Street. The "new brick homes" were advertised for sale in the Alexandria Gazette on June 16, 1942 and were part of a massive expansion of Alexandria's housing stock in the years leading up to and during World War II. Today, the houses appear much as they were constructed, except that nearly all have had the original steel windows replaced. The majority of these window replacements occurred prior to the area's inclusion in the district or after inclusion but without Board approval.

While there is no record of Board review for 726 South Alfred Street but the Board has reviewed a number of cases in this area over the years. Most alterations have been for sheds, fences and decks at the rear. However, several cases have dealt with alterations to the street façade: handrails on the front steps at 727 South Alfred Street (BAR Case #95-16, 3/1/1995); multi-light, double hung vinyl replacement windows at 724 South Alfred Street (BAR Case #97-50, 4/2/1997) and painting of previously unpainted brick at 733 South Alfred Street (BAR Case #2000-0155, 7/19/2000).

**III. ANALYSIS:**

The after-the-fact alterations comply with the zoning code requirements.

As explained in the *Design Guidelines*, windows are a principal character defining feature of a building and the size, location, type and trim of windows are defining elements of historic architectural styles (Windows – Page 1-2). As originally constructed, the steel casement windows set flush with the wall surface in the unadorned punched openings expressed ideals drawn from International Style. The lack of detailing around the window was intended to express the modernity of the buildings. Of course, it also served to lower the costs of construction; such economies were essential to the effort to provide as much affordable housing as possible as quickly as possible. Thus, the lack of brick or wood trim at the window openings is an intentional architectural characteristic of the houses in the development, as well as numerous other houses of the period in the City. While most of the houses have had the original steel window sash replaced, the window openings have not been altered.

If consulted prior to the work commencing, Staff would have recommended against alteration in the interest of preserving the original character of the building. However, the work has been completed and is not readily reversible. Staff fears that any attempt to return the openings to their original state would result in even more noticeable disruption in the brickwork. It is interesting to note that the minimalist modern buildings of the Patrick Henry Homes also included a highly traditional decorative element: the Colonial Revival doorways that serve as a focal point of the facade. The jack arches could be viewed as being compatible with this feature. Lastly, as the original steel casement windows were removed some time ago, the original appearance of the windows has already been substantially altered. Thus the impact of the present alteration is not as severe as it could have been. For these reasons, Staff reluctantly recommends approval.

**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.

Historic Alexandria:

No comments.