

Docket Item # 6
BAR CASE # 2006-0256

BAR Meeting
December 20, 2006

ISSUE: Re-approval of demolition
APPLICANT: Jane Slatter by Eleanor Krause
LOCATION: 811 Prince Street
ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the application with the following condition:

The requirements stated below must be included in the General Notes of all site plans, as well as on every site plan sheet that refers to any ground disturbing action. Additional statements may be required to be included on the Final Site Plans by Alexandria Archaeology:

Call Alexandria Archaeology (703/838-4399) two weeks before the starting date of any ground disturbance so that an inspection schedule for city archaeologists can be arranged.

Call Alexandria Archaeology (703/838-4399) immediately if any buried historic structural remains (wall foundations, cisterns, wells, privies, 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 to record the finds.

(Insert sketch here)

NOTE: This docket item requires a roll call vote.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is seeking re-approval of a Permit to Demolish for the selective demolition of exterior features on the house and in the garden in order to prepare the site for renovation.



Figure 1 Front elevation



Figure 2 Garden wall facing Prince Street



Figure 3 Rear Portion to be demolished

The Board approved the proposed demolition on October 5, 2005 and the approval expired before the work could be completed (BAR Case #2005-0199). The features proposed for removal include approximately 15' of the five foot tall masonry garden wall facing Prince Street, which includes the existing portal and piers and a large masonry stoop and stair at the entry to the east wing galleria. The shutters on the street elevation of the main block are to be removed as well.

All of the above requests were previously approved. In addition to these, the applicant now proposes to remove the rearmost portion of the two story rear addition. This section is approximately 14' wide and 9' long. It is brick on the first story and frame clad in clapboard on the second story. It has paired windows on the first and second story on the east side and a window on the north (alley facing) side. BAR Staff inspected the section that is proposed to be removed.

An architectural and open space easement on 811 Prince Street is jointly held by Virginia Department of Historic Resources Board (VDHR) and Historic Alexandria Foundation (HAF). The property is visible from Prince Street and in views from South Columbus Street looking down the private alley that runs east-west from South Columbus Street to South Alfred Street.

II. HISTORY:

The house at 811 Prince was constructed between 1849 and 1855 by William Bayne. The property was used as the Powell Hospital by Union troops during the Civil War and after the war as a residence and doctor's office. It consists of a three bay wide 3-1/2 story masonry block on the west side of the property which is topped by a strongly bracketed and deeply projecting cornice. The entry is recessed into a deep niche and is characterized by the unique transom which conforms to the segmental arch of the lintel. All window openings have segmental arched lintels as well. The

two windows on the first level of the street elevation contain full length jib windows which open onto shallow balconies with iron rails set upon deep brackets.

The east side of the house faces a large garden and consists at the first level of a one story glazed wooden porch or galleria which has been converted to year round use. The octagonal center bay of the porch features round arch window openings which rest upon a paneled dado, while the flanking bays feature elliptical arched windows.

The c. 1852 house is one of the more notable Italianate examples in Alexandria and is distinguished by a very high degree of architectural and historical integrity.

The rear ell is another story; this utilitarian structure evolved through a series of small building and demolition projects and may incorporate portions of a mid- to late- 19th century outhouse. The 1877 Hopkins Atlas shows a long narrow structure running along the rear property line directly behind the house. The 1885 Sanborn map shows the same footprint and provides further information; it is two stories, brick and labeled, “out house.” The footprint of the main block and outhouse remain unchanged on the 1891 and 1896 Sanborn maps, but the 1896 map no longer provides a use label for the rear structure. By 1902, there is a one-story brick connector extending from the main block of the house to the rear structure and the north wall of the rear structure facing the alley appears to be pierced with a series of openings. The 1907 and 1912 Sanborn maps do not reveal any changes. The 1921 Sanborn map indicates that there are only two openings on the north wall of the rear structure, but shows no other changes. By 1931, the long brick rear structure had been reduced to a small, square, two-story building in the northwest corner of the property, linked to the main house by the one story brick connector. This demolition would have necessitated building a new brick wall on the east side of the reduced former outhouse. Thus, only the rear (north) and west side walls could be possible remnants of the mid- to late-19th century brick structure. The brick garage at the back of the property first appears on the 1931 Sanborn map. Permit records include a letter dated July 6, 1936 from Dr. S.B. Moore of 811 Prince Street requesting permission “to build a bedroom over the present kitchen.” The drawings accompanying the letter show a frame structure which matches the footprint of the current rear ell and has similar fenestration to the existing second story. Between 1921 and 1936, the two story brick rear structure appears to have been reduced to one story. Thus, the rear addition as it exists today is a highly utilitarian structure incorporating construction from at least three separate builds that bears no architectural relation to the original c. 1852 main block.

III. ANALYSIS:

In considering a Permit to Demolish/Capsulate, 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 house?
- (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?

A number of the items proposed for removal or demolition are documented to have been constructed or installed in the mid-20th century and do not contribute to the significance of the house and in fact detract from its integrity although not in irreversible ways. The existing garden wall was built in the 1960's and is not a superb example of the mason's art and it obscures the rich detailing below the sill line of the porch structure. The masonry steps are intrusive and architecturally inappropriate in this context. Similarly, the shutters were determined by noted architectural historian Calder Loth of Richmond to be of recent origin in openings which had no shutters historically.

The removal of the back (northern) section of the two-story rear addition is necessitated by its precarious structural condition. According to structural and geotechnical engineers engaged by the applicant, the northwest corner of this addition has sunk over the years due to unstable earth in the area and would require extensive underpinning to rectify the problem. The addition itself is a hodge-podge of construction periods that are neither structurally or stylistically cohesive. The first story of the section to be demolished is thought to incorporate remnants of the much larger mid- to late-19th century brick outhouse. The frame second story dates to 1936. The reconstruction of the foundations and brickwork that would be required to retain the outhouse remnant would further compromise what little integrity it retains. Its value seems to lie more in the archeological potential than in the structure. A December 6, 2006 email message from VDHR to the owner gives their approval for the demolition of this section.

In the opinion of the staff, none of the above criteria are met.

Staff notes the comments of Alexandria Archeology and recommends that they be included in the approval as a condition.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the permit to demolish the features and elements described in the application as submitted with the following condition:

The requirements stated below must be included in the General Notes of all site plans, as well as on every site plan sheet that refers to any ground disturbing action. Additional statements may be required to be included on the Final Site Plans by Alexandria Archaeology:

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CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 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.

Historic Alexandria:

No comments.

Alexandria Archeology:

F-1 This property was occupied by at least the mid19th-century and was used as the Powell Hospital by Union troops during the Civil War. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into 19th-century residential and Civil War-period hospital life.

C-1 Call Alexandria Archaeology (703/838-4399) two weeks before the starting date of any ground disturbance so that an inspection schedule for city archaeologists can be arranged.

C-2 Call Alexandria Archaeology (703/838-4399) immediately if any buried historic structural remains (wall foundations, cisterns, wells, privies, 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 to record the finds..

C-3 The requirements stated in C-1 and C2 above, must be included in the General Notes of all site plans, as well as on every site plan sheet that refers to any ground disturbing action. Additional statements may be required to be included on the Final Site Plans by Alexandria Archaeology.