

Docket Item #12
BAR CASE # 2006-0277

BAR Meeting
December 20, 2006

ISSUE: Demolition/capsulation
APPLICANT: Robert Brandt
LOCATION: 219 South Royal Street
ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the permit to demolish only for the narrow rearmost section containing the laundry on the first floor and bath and dressing room on the second floor and recommends deferral of the demolition of the larger frame section and infilling of openings on the brick section for restudy. Alternatively, should the Board approve the permit to demolish for the entire frame portion of the house, as is requested, the approval should include the following conditions:

1. The section to be demolished must be recorded as follows:
 - a. Large scale 4" x 5" negative black and white record photographs to Historic American Engineering Record Standards be made of the facades as well as the interior rooms and architectural features. Two sets of these photographs together with one set of negatives are deposited at both the Special Collections, Alexandria Library as well as the Alexandria Archives and Record Center prior to the issuance of a building permit;
 - b. Preparation of a history of the building to be prepared by a historian meeting the Secretary of the Interior's qualifications and approved by Staff prior to the issuance of a building permit; and,
 - c. Physical design detail elements to be determined at the discretion of the Director of the Lyceum are to be removed and deposited in the collections of the Lyceum in consultation with Staff of the Department of Planning & Zoning.
2. The statement below must appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

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.

(Insert sketch here)

Note – This docket item requires a roll call vote.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a permit to demolish to remove the entire two story frame section at the rear of the house and to encapsulate the rear of the brick section with a new two story frame addition on the same footprint. The portion of the house to be demolished consists of a larger block immediately behind the brick measuring approximately 28 ½' long by 14 ½' wide and a smaller block at the back measuring approximately 13'8" long and 10'8" wide. The area to be demolished is approximately one half of the existing house.

The applicant is seeking to demolish the frame section of the house because he believes it to be too structurally unsound to be worthy of retention. The applicant has provided a letter from a structural engineer stating that the “non-masonry rear walls of the structure” were “originally built without any foundations” and would require extensive underpinning and rebuilding. Staff is not in a position to refute or confirm the engineer’s report. Staff toured the interior and exterior of the building and noted evidence of settlement in a number of areas throughout the house, not unlike that found in other historic buildings of similar age.

In addition to this, the applicant is seeking to infill two standard rectangular window openings and a circular window in the south wall of the brick section of the house and to install two skylights in the roof of this section. These actions constitute encapsulation and fall under the permit to demolish.

The house is free-standing and the rear frame section of the house is visible from Prince Street and in a through-the-block view from Duke Street.



Figures 1 & 2 - Rear frame portion of 219 South Royal

II. HISTORY:

The following history is based on map research and a site inspection by Staff and the April 2006 report prepared by Ruth Lincoln Kaye, provided by the applicant. The evolution of the house is not entirely clear. Historical records, including land and personal property taxes and water company records, conclusively indicate that a frame house was extant on the lot by 1857. The 1877 Hopkins Atlas shows a frame house with a narrower rear ell in this location. A significant jump in the value of the house between 1889 and 1890 suggests that major improvements were made to the house in this year. Clearly, the front brick portion dates to this improvement. However, it is not clear whether the front portion is the earlier frame structure re-faced in brick with an updated Victorian exterior or an entirely new masonry structure. The 1891 Sanborn map depicts the front in brick and rear in frame. It also shows a somewhat different footprint from the 1877 Hopkins Atlas and 1885 Sanborn map, with a front and rear portion of equal width, much like the present footprint. However, physical evidence, such as interior moldings and finishes, suggests that the back frame portion of the house dates to the mid-19th century. Further frame additions, apparently including the narrower rearmost section were added in 1902. A building permit dated July 18, 1966, requests approval to apply aluminum siding over the wood clapboard siding on the rear section of the house (Permit #23217). Staff could not locate any record of prior BAR review for this property.

The house is currently vacant. From 1950 until recently, the house was the residence of William (“Bill”) Hurd. Mr. Hurd was instrumental in the development of the Alexandria Transit Company (“Dash”), serving as Chairman of the Board of Directors. His distinguished record of civic involvement includes service on the Old and Historic Board of Architectural Review and the Planning Commission, which he chaired. Mr. Hurd was also involved in the establishment of the Old Town Civic Association and Historic Alexandria Foundation.

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?

In the opinion of Staff, Criteria 1, 3 and 5 above are met. The frame portion of the house retains many interior features strongly suggesting that it dates to the mid-19th century. At the very least, it dates to 1890. Structures of this period, including the less prominent but essential rear service wings, are of value and contribute to the historic district. The historicity and integrity of the district would be diminished by the wholesale loss of these structures. While this is only one such structure, Staff believes it is worthy of preservation and that, with sufficient effort, it could be retained. The frame rear section of the house is at present covered in aluminum siding, but this is likely to have been applied over the wood siding which still remains and could be salvaged. It also retains a number of windows and a door that may be original.

Staff notes that the *Design Guidelines* state that while the Boards are sympathetic to the needs of building owners to make contemporary use of a property, they urge restraint in utilizing demolition, even at the rear of a property:

It is the policy of the Boards that the absolute minimum demolition of an existing structure should take place. For example, in the case of an addition to the rear of a property, the Boards prefer that the amount of demolition be limited to that necessary to accommodate access to the addition rather than wholesale demolition and replacement of the rear façade. (Demolition of Existing Structures – Page 1)

Staff would not object to the removal of the rearmost addition which dates to circa 1902 and appears to be of poorer construction, but urges the applicant to consider retention and restoration of the rear frame section of the house. At the very least, Staff believes further investigation should be made into the physical evolution of the house and the feasibility of retaining the frame section.

Staff recommends against the infilling of the two standard windows in the south wall of the brick section but would not object to the filling of the round window lighting the stair hall as this window is assumed to date to the 20th century. These are original features of the house and provide desirable light and ventilation. Staff has no objection to the minor areas of demolition required for the skylights.

If the Board should approve the request to demolish the entire rear frame section, Staff recommends that it be recorded prior to issuance of a building permit. In addition, Staff notes the comments of Alexandria Archeology.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the permit to demolish only for the narrow rearmost section containing the laundry on the first floor and bath and dressing room on the second floor and recommends deferral of the demolition of the larger frame section and infilling of openings on the brick section for restudy. Alternatively, should the Board approve the permit to demolish for the entire frame portion of the house, as is requested, the approval should include the following conditions:

1. The section to be demolished must be recorded as follows:

- a. Large scale 4" x 5" negative black and white record photographs to Historic American Engineering Record Standards be made of the facades as well as the interior rooms and architectural features. Two sets of these photographs together with one set of negatives are deposited at both the Special Collections, Alexandria Library as well as the Alexandria Archives and Record Center prior to the issuance of a building permit;
 - b. Preparation of a history of the building be prepared by a historian meeting the Secretary of the Interior's qualifications and approved by Staff prior to the issuance of a building permit; and,
 - c. Physical design detail elements to be determined at the discretion of the Director of the Lyceum are to be removed and deposited in the collections of the Lyceum in consultation with Staff of the Department of Planning & Zoning.
2. The statement below must appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

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.

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 Tax records indicate that free black households were present on this street face in 1830 and 1850, but the exact addresses are not known. The G.M. Hopkins Insurance Atlas indicates that a house was present on this lot by 1877. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into domestic activities, perhaps relating to African Americans, 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 and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including sheeting and shoring and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.