

Docket Item # 14
BAR CASE # 2007-0006

BAR Meeting
February 7, 2007

ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Ayne Furman & Arthur Miller by BMK, PC
LOCATION: 517 ½ S. Royal Street
ZONE: RM/residential

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

1. That the proposed fence be constructed entirely of wood;
2. That care be taken in the removal of the existing wall to ensure that the façade of the house is not damaged and that any repair work match the façade brick and mortar as closely as possible; and,
3. That the following statements 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.

The applicant must not allow metal detection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.

(Insert sketch here)

Note: Docket item #13 must be approved before this docket item can be considered.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting a certificate of appropriateness for a new frame and Hardiboard fence and gate to replace the existing brick wall and wood gate that extends across the south side yard at the front of the property even with the face of the house. The new 6'2" high fence will be constructed of a pressure treated wood frame with 1" x 8" fiber cement planks on the exterior. Fence details include chamfered corners at the posts, a middle horizontal member and a projecting cap at the top. The gate will have diagonal members as well as the horizontal member. The fence and gate will be painted to match the house shutters (Benjamin Moore Stonington Gray).

The fence and gate will be readily visible from Royal Street.

II. HISTORY:

As explained in docket item #13, 517 ½ South Royal Street is one of a group of ten rowhouses constructed on the site of the old Alexandria Iron Works in 1964. In 2004, Board approved a permit to demolish and certificate of appropriateness for a new one story addition and dormer window at the rear of this property (BAR Case #s 2004-0117 & 0118, 8/18/04).

III. ANALYSIS:

Section 7-202(B)(3) of the zoning ordinance allows in any yard except the front yard open and closed fences which do not exceed six feet in height. As there is no front yard requirement in the RM zone, this fence, located even with the front of the house, is not considered a front fence and may be up to six feet in height. However, in accordance with Section 7-202(C) of the zoning ordinance, in the Old and Historic Alexandria and the Parker-Gray Districts, the requirement of section 7-202(B)(3) may be waived or modified by the Board of Architectural review where the Board finds that a proposed fence would be architecturally appropriate and consistent with the character of the district.

Therefore, the Board has the authority to waive section 7-202(B)(3) if it determines that the proposed 6'2" fence is appropriate. Staff recommends waiving the 6' requirement. The proposed fence is only 2" higher than the requirement and, in the opinion of Staff, the height is appropriate for this location.

Staff has no objection to the design of the fence. It is a less formal design than the existing brick wall, but still falls within the acceptable fence types for the historic district and will be compatible with the house at 517 ½ South Royal Street and its neighbor to the south.

Staff does have reservations about the use of fiber cement planks for the fence and believes this is the first time the Board has seen this material in this application. The Board has reviewed numerous applications for the use of fiber cement *siding* and has adopted a policy with respect to the product for that purpose. The policy allows the use of fiber cement in limited circumstances:

1. That fiber cement siding not be installed on an historic structure;
2. That historic materials should not be removed to install fiber cement siding;

3. That fiber cement siding replace other artificial or composite siding;
4. That the nails not show in the installation of the siding;
5. That smooth siding be installed; and,
6. That BAR Staff may administratively approve the installation of fiber cement siding on *non-historic* buildings (those constructed in 1975 or later).

Staff believes it is not necessarily appropriate to extrapolate from the guidance for the use of fiber cement siding for fences. The appearance of fiber cement planks is different from that of wood planks. While the Board and Staff oppose the use fiber cement with imitation wood graining because it has a distinctly false appearance, smooth fiber cement planks would be lacking in texture that is typically seen in board fences. While understanding the applicant's desire to have a maintenance free fence, Staff fears that a fiber cement fence will have an unnaturally perfect appearance and would not read as wood. Finally, Staff notes that the *Design Guidelines* discuss traditional fence types for the historic district. These include a variety of materials: masonry walls of *brick* or *stone*, ornamental *iron* and *metal* fences and *wood* fences, but not fiber cement (Fences – Page 2).

To conclude, Staff would have no objection to the proposed fence in wood or to a replacement brick wall similar to the existing.

In addition, Staff notes the comments of Alexandria Archaeology and recommends that they be included as a condition of the approval.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the proposed fence be constructed entirely of wood;
2. That care be taken in the removal of the existing wall to ensure that the façade of the house is not damaged and that any repair work match the façade brick and mortar as closely as possible; and,
3. That the following statements 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.

The applicant must not allow metal detection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

C-2 Additions and alterations to the existing structure and/or installation and/or altering of equipment therein requires a building permit (USBC 108.1). Five sets of plans, bearing the signature and seal of a design professional registered in the Commonwealth of Virginia, must accompany the written application (USBC 109.1).

Historic Alexandria:

No comments received.

Alexandria Archaeology:

F-1 Tax records indicate that a free African American household was present on this street face in 1810, but the exact address is not known. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into domestic activities of Alexandria's free black population in the early nineteenth century.

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 applicant must not allow metal detection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.

R-3 The above statements in R-2 and R-3 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.