

Docket Item # 15
BAR CASE # 2007-0157

BAR Meeting
September 5, 2007

ISSUE: Demolition/encapsulation
APPLICANT: Mark & Ann Kington by Belinda Reeder
LOCATION: 617/619 South Lee Street
ZONE: RM/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the permit to demolish with the following conditions:

1. That, prior to the submission of the building permit, the applicant provide Staff with an opportunity to review and approve the method of attachment of the breezeway to the rear wall of the main block to ensure minimal damage or loss of historic fabric; and,
2. 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 erosion control, sheeting and shoring, and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

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.

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

(Insert sketch here)

Note: This docket item must be approved by roll call vote.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish for demolition of the existing kitchen wing on the south side of the building, re-capsulation of the south wall of the existing main block for a new living room addition which will replace the kitchen wing, capsulation of a portion of the rear (west) wall of the existing main block for a new breezeway and various areas of infill and new openings on the existing rear ell. The proposed work is described in further detail below:



Figure 1 - West elevation of kitchen wing

1. Demolition of kitchen wing – The existing one story frame kitchen wing that extends from the south side of the main block of the 1798 house will be removed in its entirety. This structure is 307 square feet and was constructed in three stages, in 1920, c. 1950 and 1981, according to information provided by the architect.
2. Capsulation of south wall of existing main block- A new living room addition is proposed to be oriented to the existing house in the same way as the existing kitchen wing. It will connect to the main block in the same location as the existing kitchen wing and will encapsulate an area approximately the same size, although the addition itself will be considerably larger than the existing wing. The new area of encapsulation will be narrower but higher than the existing area of encapsulation. The new construction will have a flat rather than a gable roof where it meets the existing house.
3. Capsulation of the rear (west) wall of the existing main block – A new breezeway will be constructed along the rear wall of the existing main block, connecting the new living room addition to the existing rear ell. This new area of encapsulation (15.5' wide by 13' high or 201.5 square feet) will enclose a portion of original 1798 wall and two original windows lighting the dining room. The original wall and windows will remain exposed within the breezeway addition.
4. Demolition of the curved wall at east end of ell - The breezeway will also entail the demolition of a small portion of the existing curved brick wall where the rear ell joins the main block on the south side. This wall dates to circa 1950, according to information provided by the architect, and has no features.



Figure 2 - North elevation of rear ell

5. Capsulation of north wall of rear ell for new mudroom/hall – An area of the north wall approximately 12.5 wide by 8.5' high or 106.25 square feet will be encapsulated by a small mudroom addition at the back of the rear ell on the north side. In addition, a new opening will be cut in the north wall of the ell within the encapsulated area. The opening will require the demolition of approximately 28 square feet of wall. The encapsulation and demolition occur in a section of the ell which dates to c. 1950, according to the architect. There are no openings or other features on this section of wall. The wall will remain exposed within the new addition.



Figure 3 - North elevation of main block

6. North wall of main block and ell demolition and infill – There will be several areas of infill and new openings on the north wall. According to the information provided by the architect, a thick deep layer of brick veneer was added to the entire north wall at the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century. A small door at the back of the 1798 main block but dating to a c. 1950 alteration will be removed and the area, approximately 22.75 square feet, will be infilled with brick. A pair of windows in the first story of the ell, also dating to c. 1950, will be removed and most of the area will be infilled with brick. However, a portion of this area will receive a new door opening. This new opening will require removal of an area of the north wall at the east end of the rear ell. This section of wall was present in the original c. 1798 construction but, like the rest of the north wall, was later clad in a veneer of brick. The area of wall to be removed totals approximately 20 square feet. Lastly, two new window openings will be inserted in the north wall of the rear ell on the second story, near the back or west end. The new openings together remove approximately 28 square feet in wall area.

7. West wall of rear ell demolition – a small, lean-to garden shed located on the west end of the 1798 rear ell will be removed. The shed is of recent construction. Its removal will re-expose the original rear wall. A new door opening will be inserted in this wall, measuring approximately 21 square feet.

8. South wall of rear ell demolition and infill – The south wall of the 1798 rear ell will be subject to a number of alterations for doors and windows. On the first story, the four existing French doors, which date to a c. 1973 alteration, according to the architect, will be removed and windows will be inserted in their place. The lower portion of the door openings will be infilled with brick. An existing window opening on the second story at the east end of the south wall will be infilled and a new window opening will be inserted slightly to the west of it. Together, this area of demolition and infill total approximately 24 square feet. As described above, the new breezeway addition will tie into the south wall of the ell at the easternmost end, requiring the demolition of a small section of the c. 1950 curved wall on the first story. A 12 foot long section of the wall above the breezeway, including portions dating to 1798 and 1950, will be removed and replaced with a new brick wall recessed 4 feet back from the existing so as not to interfere with adjacent window on the 1798 main block rear wall.

According to the architect, there will be sufficient brick from the areas of demolition to meet the needs of all the areas of infill.

The main block of the house sits directly on Lee Street, with the ell extending back (west) from the rear on the north side of the main block and the kitchen wing well set back and extending from the south side wall of the main block out to the south. The front façade of the main block is highly visible. The north side and south sides, including the ell and kitchen wing are only partially visible due to dense vegetation surrounding the property and within the grounds. Except for the upper stories, the rear of the house is not readily visible from any location in the public right-of-way.

II. HISTORY:

According to Ethelyn Cox in Historic Alexandria, Street by Street, the house at 619 South Lee Street was built around 1800 for Thomas Vowell, Jr., a prominent Alexandria merchant. The Historic American Building Survey report (HABS No. VA-709) clarifies that construction apparently began in 1798 and was completed in 1800. Vowell was forced to sell the property in 1817 when he suffered business losses. It was purchased in 1842 by Edgar Snowden, editor and owner of the *Alexandria Gazette* and remained in the Snowden family for 70 years. In 1939, the property was purchased by Hugo Black, who served as senator from Alabama (1927-1937) and was appointed Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, serving more than 30 years. Justice Black resided in the house until his death in 1971. His widow held the property until 1973 when it was purchased by David Ginsburg who owned it until 2005 when it was purchased by the current owner.

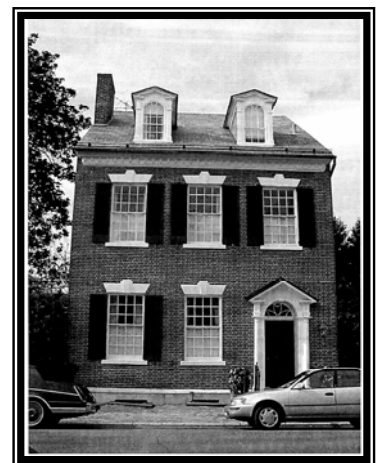


Figure 4 - East elevation

According to the HABS report, “the late Federal town house [is] designed in the indigenous manner with particular attention to proportions and refinements of detail” (page 5). The property has fairly high degree of integrity, perhaps due to the fact that it has had relatively few owners. The alterations, mostly confined to the wings, were each relatively minor but had a cumulative effect. The integrity of the house is enhanced by its setting. It has extensive grounds that extend through the block to South Fairfax Street and include a pool, gardens, tennis courts and a carriage house.

The architect for the project, Belinda Reeder of Archetype, has researched the property and prepared a history of the evolution of the house in footprint form. Her research indicates that the original house dating from 1798-1800 consisted of the main block and a separate dependency to the rear. For reasons not entirely clear, a veneer of brick was applied to the entire brick north wall at the turn of the 20th century. Over time, in the 1920s and 1950s, the rear ell was joined to the main block and extended to the rear with an addition on the west end. The ell was also subjected to various alterations minor alterations in the 1970s including changes to openings. The present small kitchen wing, dates to two separate building campaigns in 1920s and 1950s with further alterations to the roofline and west facade in 1981.

Staff was unable to locate any BAR records for the house before 1971 when the Board approved the wall and parking space on the north side of the house (8/5/1970). A cluster of BAR cases from 1974 appear to relate to alterations to window and door openings on the rear ell (believed to be those dated 1973 on the footprint chronology provided by the architect). According to the BAR minutes, the architect for these alterations was Hugh Newell Jacobson. Another cluster of Board approvals from 1981 relate to the reworking of the existing kitchen wing with an addition and change to the roof. According to the BAR minutes, the architect was Chris Lethbridge (8/5/1981).

III. ANALYSIS:

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources holds an easement on the property and has agreed to the proposed alterations, per a letter dated July 23, 2007.

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 and 3 are met in that the c. 1798 house is of considerable architectural and historical significance and that the building is of such old and uncommon design, texture and material that it could only be reproduced with great difficulty. Balanced against this is the long history of relatively modest alterations made to the house over the years (predominantly the north wall, rear ell and kitchen wing). Initially, Staff was concerned about the cumulative impact of the numerous small interventions in the existing fabric that the proposed project entails. However, when examined carefully as individual actions, Staff believes the proposed demolition and capsulation is acceptable as the architect has carefully considered the integrity of each area to be impacted and designed the project in such a way that it minimizes impacts.

1. Demolition of kitchen wing – Staff has no objection to the demolition of the kitchen wing. The existing kitchen, though incorporating older pieces, is most representative of the 1981 reworking which changed the roof form and added the projecting bay on the west.
2. Capsulation of south wall of existing main block- The new area of encapsulation will not be substantially different from that already encapsulated.
3. Capsulation of the rear (west) wall of the existing main block –Staff believes this is the most troubling aspect of the proposed demolition and capsulation. This section of the rear wall of the 1798 main block remains as constructed and has never been encapsulated. However, the plans call for the original wall, windows and sill to be restored and to remain exposed within the breezeway addition. Both the interior and exterior of the house are under easement to VDHR and thus this section of wall will remain protected. Lastly, though important original fabric, this area is not now or ever likely to be visible to the public.
4. Demolition of the curved wall at east end of ell - The demolition of a small portion of the existing curved brick wall where the rear ell joins the main block on the south side. This wall dates to circa 1950, according to information provided by the architect, and has no features.
5. Capsulation of north wall of rear ell for new mudroom/hall – The encapsulation and demolition occur in a section of the ell which dates to c. 1950, according to the architect. The wall will remain exposed within the new addition.
6. North wall of main block and ell demolition and infill – This wall has already been subject to considerable alteration beginning with the withe deep layer of brick veneer was added to the entire north wall at the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century and including a number of alterations dating to c. 1950. The alteration to the main block removes and infills a mid-20th century opening, so is in effect restoring that area.

7. West wall of rear ell demolition – The shed is of recent construction. A new door opening will be inserted in this wall, which may be unaltered from 1798. However, the area to be demolished is minor in size and is located on a secondary façade.

8. South wall of rear ell demolition and infill – The south wall of the 1798 rear ell has been subject to a series of alterations over the years, most recently in the 1970s with the insertion of a series of French doors. Due to the extensive nature of the changes on this elevation, Staff is not concerned by the proposed demolition and infill here.

To reiterate, Staff believes the proposed demolition and encapsulation will have minimal impact on original fabric. The areas of impact are not readily visible to the public. The proposed work has been approved by the easement holder, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. As mentioned above, the only area of significant concern to Staff is the encapsulation of a portion of the historic rear wall of the main block. Staff does recommend that the applicant provide Staff with an opportunity to review and approve the method of attachment to ensure minimal damage or loss of historic fabric prior to the submission of the building permit. According to the architect, the drawings have not yet progressed to this level of detail. In addition, Staff notes the comments of Alexandria Archaeology and recommends that they be included as a condition of the approval.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the permit to demolish with the following conditions:

1. That, prior to the submission of the building permit, the applicant provide Staff with an opportunity to review and approve the method of attachment of the breezeway to the rear wall of the main block to ensure minimal damage or loss of historic fabric; and,
2. 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 erosion control, sheeting and shoring, and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

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.

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 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-2 Roof drainage systems must be installed so as neither to impact upon, nor cause erosion/damage to adjacent property.
- C-3 A soils report must be submitted with the building permit application.
- 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 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).
- C-7 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-8 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-9 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:

No comments received.

Alexandria Archaeology:

- F-1 According to *Historic Alexandria, Virginia, Street by Street* by Ethelyn Cox, the house on this lot was constructed around 1800 by Thomas Vowell, Jr., a prominent merchant. When it was advertised for sale in 1817, the lot included a covered way, pantry, large

kitchen, smoke house, brick stable and carriage house. Edgar Snowden, editor and owner of the *Alexandria Gazette*, purchased the property in 1842. In the 20th century, it served as the residence of Hugo Black, Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. The property has the potential to yield archaeological resources into residential life in Alexandria during the late 18th and 19th centuries.

- R-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.
- R-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.
- R-3 The applicant must not allow metal detection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.
- R-4 The above statements in R-1, 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 erosion control, sheeting and shoring, and grading) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.

Transportation & Environmental Services:

- R-1 The building permit must be approved and issued prior to the issuance of any demolition permit.