

Docket Item # 22  
BAR CASE # 2007-0097

BAR Meeting  
October 3, 2007

**ISSUE:** Permit to Demolish

**APPLICANT:** Laurie Lowe and Carl Gudenius by Robert Bentley Adams & Associates

**LOCATION:** 323 North St. Asaph Street

**ZONE:** RM/Residential

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends denial of the application.

(Insert sketch here)

Note: This docket item requires a roll call vote.

**I. ISSUE:**

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish and Capsulate the bulk of the rear (east) wall as well as portions of the roof of the residential rowhouse at 323 North St. Asaph Street in order to construct a rear addition.

**II. HISTORY:**

323 North St. Asaph Street is a two story, two bay frame vernacular residential rowhouse that was constructed as a rental property by John A. Dixon, a prosperous landowner, sometime between 1858 and 1867. It was constructed together with the adjacent rowhouses at 321 and 319 and the properties share common chimneys structures.

The house was substantially remodeled in the late 1960s and early 1970. In 1966 the Board approved shutters and a new stoop (4/13/1966) and in 1970 alterations to the windows (9/2/1970). The change out in windows was the replacement of single double hung window on the second level with new paired double hung windows and a new matching sized window on the first level. This remodeling created a much more "Colonial" caste to the house than had heretofore existed and was part of a number of such residential remodelings in these decades that sought to cement the impression of the historic district as a cornerstone of colonial architecture.

The bay window that is a prominent visual feature of the rear of the house was installed by a previous homeowner in the late 1970s is apparently a direct and conscious violation of the requirements of the historic district ordinance.

**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?

The basic historic physical form of these three rowhouses has remained remarkably unaltered since they were constructed in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, there has been

considerable change in the physical environment surrounding their location. The rear yards have certainly changed since the houses were constructed and secondary structures such as outhouses, storage shed, stables and similar outbuildings have disappeared and been replaced by passive open space. Similarly, the roadway in front of these rowhouses has changed considerably during the last century and a half as have the surrounding land uses. To some extent, the exterior architectural appearance of the rowhouse has also changed. What has remained a constant, however, is the essential volumetric configuration of these houses and, as such, they provide a direct and tangible link to the immediate post Civil War period in the City.

The expressed skin of the house has been changed with replacement siding. Additionally, because of the alterations and changes to the fenestration on both the front and rear of the house the framing has likely been modified and altered. What has not changed, however, is the spatial relationship of the house to the street and its neighbors.

Staff notes that previously we had recommended denial of a similar request for a Permit to Demolish the rear wall of the house at the south end of this row at 319 N St Asaph Street (BAR Case #95-00150, 10/14/95). In considering the case in 1995, the Board was also concerned about the extent of the demolition of the rear wall and asked for additional information. However, the case was withdrawn before the Board made a decision.

Staff finds the proposed demolition of the east (rear) elevation of this 19th century vernacular frame rowhouse an unacceptable loss of historic architectural fabric and form.

In the opinion of Staff, the proposed demolition of the rear façade meets criteria #'s 1, 2, 5 & 6 and the Permit to Demolish should not be approved.

**IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends denial of the application.

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:

S-1 Approve with wood clapboards.

Alexandria Archaeology:

F-1 According to Ethelyn Cox's *Historic Alexandria, Street by Street, A Survey of Existing Early Buildings*, the house on this lot dates to the mid-nineteenth century. Tax records from 1850 indicate that there was a free African American household on this street face, but the exact address is not known. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources, perhaps relating to African Americans, that could provide insight into residential life in nineteenth-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. above must appear in the General Notes of the site plan so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.

Transportation & Environmental Services:

F-1 An approved Plot Plan must be attached to the building permit application. This determination is based on the change in grade of 12-inches or greater, changes to existing drainage patterns and the existence of current drainage problems in the vicinity. (TES)

R-1 The building permit plans shall comply with requirements of City Code Section 8-1-22 regarding the location of downspouts, foundation drains and sump pumps. Refer to Memorandum to Industry dated June 18, 2004. [Memorandum is available online at the City web site under Transportation\Engineering and Design\Memos to Industry.]. (TES)

R-2 Applicant shall be responsible for repairs to the adjacent city right-of-way if damaged during construction activity. (TES)

- R-3 All improvements to the city right-of-way such as curbing, sidewalk, driveway aprons, etc. must be city standard design. (TES)
- R-4 No permanent structure may be constructed over any existing private and/or public utility easements. It is the responsibility of the applicant to identify any and all existing easements on the plan. (TES)
- R-5 Compliance with the provisions of Article XIII of the City's zoning ordinance for stormwater quality control is required for any land disturbing activity greater than 2,500 square feet. (TES)