Docket Item # 4
BAR CASE # 2008-0193

BAR Meeting
January 7, 2009

ISSUE: New Construction

APPLICANT: Sophie Development LLC

LOCATION: 714 Wythe Street

ZONE: OC/Office Commercial

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

1. That the applicant remove the different color synthetic slate at the center roof line.
2. *The applicant/developer shall 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.
3. *The applicant/developer shall 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.
4. *The applicant/developer shall not allow any metal detection to be conducted on the property unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.
5. The statements in archaeology conditions above (marked with an asterisk) shall appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including Erosion and Sediment Control, Grading, Utilities and Sheeting and Shoring) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirements.

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UPDATE:
The Board deferred a decision on the case at the November 5, 2008 hearing. The Board agreed with the Staff analysis and recommendation for deferral for further study. The applicant submitted revised materials for the December 17, 2008 hearing. BAR Staff and the City Architect had meetings with the applicant on November 21, 2008 and on December 2, 2008. The applicant requested a deferral for further study after the December 2, 2008 meeting with Staff.

The revised application has several changes in response to Board and Planning & Zoning Staff comments, as well as improvements initiated by the applicant. The revisions made by the applicant include the following:

Overall/Site:

- Stepping the entire building back 11" from the front property line
- Replacing the proposed bollards with foundation plantings
- Changing the color scheme of the frame portion

Front Elevation:

- Reducing the height and size of the front shed dormers
- Differentiating the two townhouses through changes in brickwork and a break in the cornice
- Changing the front foundation from a stone base to brick with a water table
- Lowering the chimney cap
- Reducing the pitch of the gable roof

Side Elevation:

- Widening the brick portion to 23'4" (previously 20'), reducing the pitch of the gable roof on the brick portion, and reducing the width of the frame portion to 27'3" (previously 32')
- Changing the fenestration to a more historically appropriate pattern (removal of bands of awning windows and reducing the size of the third story windows)
- Lowering the roof height on the rear frame portion to approximately 34'10" (previously 37')
- Eliminating the penthouse access roof structure on the rear of the frame portion (previously 40')

Rear Elevation:

- Changing the second and third floor windows from three ganged windows to two single windows
- Eliminating the uppermost portion of the penthouse access roof structure.

I. ISSUE:
The applicant is requesting approval for the construction of two semi-detached, townhouses located at 714 Wythe Street.

The applicant is proposing a three-story masonry and frame building that will contain two semi-detached townhouses fronting on Wythe Street on a currently paved vacant lot. The building footprint will measure 37.5' by 51'1" (a slight reduction from the original submission due to a setback of 11" from the front property line). The highest point of the roof was originally a low-rise penthouse with roof access at the rear of the building that measured 40' in height. The highest point of the revised roof is the gable ridge at 38'3". The roof height at the rear of the frame portion will measure 34'10". Each townhouse will be a mirror image of the other, both internally and externally. The applicant has designed the townhouses to have several "green" features.

Front (North) Elevation
The front (north) elevation is two stories plus an attic story with shed dormers. The revised scheme has smaller shed dormers than the original submission. This elevation is symmetrical with a six bay pattern, three bays for each townhouse. The front features a central double entryway with recessed flagstone stairs leading to side-by-side entry doors. The revised foundation will have a brick water table in place of the dark gray ashlar blocks originally proposed. The main block of the building will be faced with red brick laid in a running bond pattern. The brick is identified as Tuscan Series Red Cliff Modular red brick. Between the first and second stories will be an area laid in a Flemish bond pattern with accent headers in charcoal-colored brick. In the revised scheme, the applicant also proposes recessed decorative brickwork (vertically oriented at the center of the building) at the second story and a break in the cornice to differentiate the two townhouses. The gable roof is proposed to be a dark gray synthetic slate and have red brick chimneys on either end. In the revised scheme the applicant proposes different shading of the synthetic slate along the center property line. The front door will be a six-panel American red oak door with a single light transom. The wood windows will all be one-over-one, double-hung, double-glazed with limestone sills and lintels. The first floor windows will have a low decorative iron railing. The second story windows will be slightly smaller in size but otherwise the same. At the roof, there will be two shed dormers, each with a series of three one-over-one, double-hung, double-glazed windows. The proposed shed dormers in the revised scheme are smaller (three windows instead of four windows) and lower in height than the original submission. The cornice will have a simple profile with a break at the center and is proposed to be constructed of Fypon.

Side (East and West) Elevations
The side (east and west) elevations continue the form and materials found on the front elevation for approximately 23'4" (previously 20'). This front third of the side elevations wrap around the brick from the front elevation and feature end wall chimneys. The basement level will have two single-light windows and window wells with metal grates. The first and second stories will have two one-over-one, double-hung, double-glazed wood windows with limestone sills and lintels (in the original submission the second-story windows were ganged). The third story will have smaller ganged one-over-one, double-hung, double-glazed wood windows with limestone sills and lintels. These will be centered under the chimney. Between the windows on the first story of

the brick portion will be a vent for a gas fireplace that the applicant proposes to paint the same color as the brick.

The rear portion of the building will be of frame construction with Hardiplank smooth siding. This area measures approximately 27'3" (previously 32') in depth. Although the original submission had a more contemporary style and fenestration, the revised fenestration has a more historically appropriate pattern with single windows and smaller windows at the third story. The foundation will be painted concrete with a stamped brick pattern and a wood water table. Basement windows will be single fixed wood windows. The rear of the building has a small central projection that is visible on the side and rear elevations. The side elevations of this projection will also be Hardiplank and will have single square awning windows on each story. Originally the rear projection (to accommodate a low-rise penthouse with dayliter skylight roof hatch) was 40' in height, but the additional height was eliminated so that this projecting element is lower, rather than higher, than the proposed roof line of the rear portion. In place of the low-rise roof hatch, the applicant has revised the design for a flat roof hatch that will not be visible from the public right-of-way. Adjacent to the projection, at the rear, will be a wood deck with simple picket railing. Mechanical equipment will be located on the roof but will not be visible due to a parapet enclosing a roof deck.

On a strip of ground running along the side elevations, adjacent to the alleys, the applicant has proposed porous grass pavers to replace the existing hard surface. The porous pavers will comprise a strip approximately 3' wide along the side property lines. In the earlier submission the applicant proposed to install fifteen bollards along each side elevation but has eliminated the bollards and replaced them with foundation plantings.

Rear (South) Elevation
The rear elevation will be three stories and will be symmetrical with a three-story projecting element at the center. On the first story each side will have three contiguous full-length, single-light openings (one door and two fixed windows) with a single transom running across all three. The first story door will be a single-light wood door. Originally, the second and third stories were proposed to each have a set of three contiguous one-over-one, double-hung, wood windows. In the revised submission the second and third stories each have two one-over-one, double-hung single wood windows. The center projecting element will extend only to the top of the third story windows whereas it was originally proposed to be a penthouse access higher than the main roof line. The rear elevation will also have metal downspouts painted to match the trim.

Materials
The siding is proposed to be Hardiplank in a beige color. The Hardiplank siding will be Navajo Beige 7.25 smooth horizontal plank siding. The windows, trim, door surrounds, and deck are proposed to be wood and painted a darker beige color (Duron Sandy Lane). The cornice is proposed to be made of Fypon, a synthetic material.

The windows and doors are proposed to be wood. The windows are either one-over-one, double-hung with a tilt sash or awning windows. The proposed windows are the Jefferson 100 Double hung wood series by MW.

Wall lanterns are proposed at the front and rear entrances. The propose fixtures will be hand-wrought iron with a round bulb. The fixture will measure W11" x H19" x L13" and is described as the Hunter/Kenroy Vidalia Small Wall Lantern.

The fence is proposed to be of wood, in a shadowbox style and measuring 6' in height. The applicant is proposing a lamp post at the rear of the property adjacent to the parking area. The lamp post is 12' in height and made of cast aluminum in what is described by the manufacturer as "classic turn of the century."

II. HISTORY:

By 1896, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps depict a two-story house with projecting bay set back from the street at this location. By 1902, an enlarged house and an outbuilding at the rear property line were located on the site. By 1958, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps depict the site as an almost empty lot with two small outbuildings located at the rear of the property. The site is currently a paved surface parking area with a total lot area of 4,902 square feet and is surrounded by a ten foot public alley.

The applicant has been investigating with Staff the various options for developing this property for a number of years. The development options have included an office building, a multi-unit condominium development and the current proposal of two semi-detached, single-family residences. Staff encouraged the applicant to choose a development that would make the best use of the subject property with the least negative impact on the community. Planning Department BAR and Development Staff have met with the applicant over the past two years to review and revise the proposal.

In September 2008, the Planning Commission voted to approve a request to subdivide the subject property (SUB #2008-0002). The property was subdivided into two lots, each with two parking spaces, to accommodate the proposed development.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed project complies with SUB #2008-0002 and Zoning Ordinance regulations. If the HVAC or mechanical equipment on the roof is visible from a public right-of-way, it must be screened or a Waiver of Rooftop Screening Requirement must be obtained from the Board. The applicant may be required to file a grading plan administered by T&ES.

Staff notes that since the subject property does not front onto Washington Street the Washington Street Standards and Guidelines do not apply to this project. However, due to the proximity of the project to Washington Street, Staff has taken into consideration the project's compatibility with the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

In considering the application of the *Design Guidelines* to this project, Staff has considered *Chapter 6: New Construction-Residential* as well as guidelines for specific architectural elements. The proposed building will be two townhouses but will appear as a single, larger building.

Staff finds that the proposed building generally meets the *Design Guidelines* set forth for new construction for residential buildings. The *Guidelines* note that "designs should complement and

reflect the architectural heritage of the City." The proposed building is reflective of architectural styles found in the city, most notably a Colonial Revival style. The *Guidelines* also note that "new and untried approaches to common design problems are encouraged and should not be rejected out of hand simply because they appear to be outside the common practices outlined in the guidelines." This location has a unique design setting in that it is surrounded by a public alley on three sides, requiring special consideration.

In addition, the *Guidelines* advise that "the Boards favor contextual background buildings." At this location, on Wythe Street between Washington and North Columbus streets, the architectural character of the surrounding buildings is varied. Across the street, fronting on Washington Street, is a late 1950s motel, and across the street fronting on North Columbus Street, is historic St. Joseph's Catholic Church. To the east, fronting on Washington Street, are a series of early twentieth-century rowhouses that have been converted to commercial use. To the west, fronting on North Columbus Street, are nineteenth-century two-story rowhouses, generally still residential in nature. Thus, the adjacent properties reflect a range of architectural styles, forms and uses, allowing for a broad interpretation of what would be considered an appropriate contextual background building at this location. Staff finds that the proposed design—a brick building with a frame rear portion and traditional fenestration patterns—appropriately serves as a background building.

In general, Staff finds that the proposed building satisfies the *Design Guidelines* for new residential construction as it relates to: style, massing, width, siting, roof, spacing between buildings, building orientation, architectural detailing, directional expression, materials, utilities, and color. The proposed building has many architectural elements and features that contribute to its compatibility with the historic buildings found in the district. Staff finds that the proposed building is responsive to the needs and tastes of the current time while also maintaining compatibility with the district. Staff notes that this building illustrates how certain "green" building measures can successfully be incorporated into a design for a building in a historic district.

Staff is generally supportive of the revised scheme. What follows is a discussion and analysis of each elevation.

Front (North) Elevation

Staff finds that the style, massing, height and fenestration of the front elevation are generally appropriate. The three-story building reads as a two-story-plus-attic building and reflects the general architectural patterns found throughout the historic district. The first story windows are taller than the second story windows, reflecting traditional fenestration patterns. The *Design Guidelines* note the following about dormers: "dormer sashes should be operable and should be the same type as the other window sashes on the structure," "shed dormers are strongly discouraged," and "dormers should match the existing proportions of the building and the windows." Staff has informed the applicant that shed dormers on prominent elevations are generally not approved by the Board. The applicant has studied various dormer configurations and styles and concluded that the shed is most appropriate for this design as it is minimizes height and prominence on the third story. The applicant provided studies of various dormer types and configurations to BAR Staff and the City Architect. While the *Guidelines* discourage shed dormers, it is important to note that the *Guidelines* encourage reviewing each design on a

case-by-case basis and to acknowledge that the *Guidelines* are general directions rather than strict prescriptives. Staff also notes that there are some examples of front elevation dormers on historic buildings within the district. As a result, Staff finds that the proposed shed dormers, smaller and more refined than those originally proposed, are the most supportable design solution for this project.

In the earlier analysis, Staff noted that a more historically appropriate approach to this type of building (two townhouses as one building), was to slightly delineate the two dwellings through the application of a small amount of ornament or detailing. Staff does not object to the central entrance and finds that the differentiation of the two townhouses provides a more accurate reading of the building from the street. Staff finds that the use of a recessed piece at the center of the limestone lintel, a vertical line of recessed brick at the second story, and a break in the cornice at the center property line successfully differentiates the building as two townhouses. Staff does not find that the use of a line of different color synthetic slate appropriately differentiates the buildings at the roof. Staff recommends that the applicant remove the different color slate at the roof. While a projecting decorative metal coping at the center dividing line on the roof would be most appropriate, Staff does not find it essential to differentiate the two townhouses at the roof.

Staff finds that the proposed front door, a six-panel oak door, is acceptable for the architectural style of this building.

Side (East and West) Elevations
The side elevations are both bounded by public alleys, making the side elevations highly visible. Staff finds that the transition on the side elevations from the brick portion to the frame portion is appropriate. As houses evolve and change over time, the introduction of a new building material, such as siding on a rear frame addition to a main block of brick, often occurs. However, what generally makes such different materials and forms successful is that the rear portion is lower than the main block. The applicant has revised the design to extend the depth of the brick portion, thereby reducing some of the original bulk of the frame portion. In addition, the applicant has reduced the height of the rear portion and eliminated the penthouse roof access hatch that was projected several feet above the roofline of the frame section. Initially, Staff was concerned that the proposed fenestration on the frame portion was disjointed from the front elevation and generally inappropriate. The applicant has since revised the fenestration of the side elevation to be more historically appropriate through the use of single windows and a reduction in size of the third story windows. The *Design Guidelines* discourage awning windows. Although discouraged, Staff notes that they are acceptable in the minimally visible location of the small rear projection on this building.

Staff has no objection to the use of porous grass pavers running along the side elevations. Staff finds that the use of foundation plantings is more appropriate on the side elevations than the plastic bollards originally proposed.

Rear (South) Elevation
The rear elevation will be visible from the alleys and from Pendleton Street. The rear yard will also have a 6’ high wood fence, making the first story less visible. The reduced ornamentation on this elevation and the simple fenestration and reinforces the hierarchy of elevations.

Materials
The applicant has proposed several materials that the Board has approved on new construction in the historic district. Non-traditional materials proposed include HardiPlank, Fypon, and EcoStar synthetic slate. Staff finds no objection to these proposed materials. Regarding the HardiPlank, Staff notes that, in conformance with the Fiber Cement Policy, that the nails not show in the installation of the siding and that smooth (non-simulated wood grain) siding be installed. Staff has no objection to the proposed wall lanterns. Staff notes that the applicant desires a lamp post at the rear of the property for safety concerns and finds that the proposed selection is generally acceptable and will be minimally visible.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application for new construction with the following conditions:

1. That the applicant remove the different color synthetic slate at the center roof line.
2. *The applicant/developer shall 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.
3. *The applicant/developer shall 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.
4. *The applicant/developer shall not allow any metal detection to be conducted on the property unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.
5. The statements in archaeology conditions above (marked with an asterisk) shall appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including Erosion and Sediment Control, Grading, Utilities and Sheeting and Shoring) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirements.

V. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Administration:

C-1 All exterior walls within 5 feet from an interior property line shall have a fire resistance rating of 1 hour, from both sides of the wall. As alternative, a 2 hour fire wall may be provided. This condition is also applicable to skylights within setback distance. Openings in exterior walls between 3 and 5 feet shall not exceed 25% of the area of the entire wall surface (This shall include bay windows). Openings shall not be permitted in exterior walls within 3 feet of an interior lot line.

C-2 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-3 Roof drainage systems must be installed so as neither to impact upon, nor cause erosion/damage to adjacent property.

C-4 A soils report must be submitted with the building permit application.

C-5 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

C-6 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-7 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-8 A wall location plat prepared by a land surveyor is required to be submitted to this office prior to requesting any framing inspection.

Alexandria Archaeology:

Archaeology Findings:

F-1 Tax records indicate that a small house owned by Captain James Campbell stood on 1/4-acre of this city block facing Columbus Street in 1810. The property was valued at $250.00 at that time. The exact address of the house is not known, and the structure appears to have been gone by 1830. Subsequent historical documents indicate that the current development property is located on the site of the stables of the Washington Street Corral built by the Union Army during the Civil War. By 1896, a house was present on this lot. Construction and demolition of the 1890's house would have caused some disturbance to the previous resources, which were fairly ephemeral. Given the scale of this project and the post-Civil War disturbance, the property

has limited potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into residential life in 19th-century Alexandria, and into military activities during the Civil War. The applicant must fulfill the requirements below to insure that significant information about the past is not lost as a result of this development.

Recommendations:

*1. The applicant/developer shall 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.

*2. The applicant/developer shall 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.

*3. The applicant/developer shall not allow any metal detection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.

4. The statements in archaeology conditions above (marked with an asterisk) shall appear in the General Notes of all site plans and on all site plan sheets that involve demolition or ground disturbance (including Erosion and Sediment Control, Grading, Utilities and Sheeting and Shoring) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirements.

Transportation and Environmental Services:

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. An approved Grading Plan must be attached to the building permit application. The Grading Plan is required because the submitted documentation indicates the construction of a new home. In summary, City Code Section 8-1-22(d) requires that a grading plan be submitted to and approved by T&ES prior to the issuance of building permits for improvements involving:

- the construction of a new home;
- construction of an addition to an existing home where either
  - the addition exceeds the area of the existing building footprint by 100% or more; or
  - the construction of the addition results in less that 50% of the existing first floor exterior walls, in their entirety, remaining;
- changes to existing grade elevation of 1-foot or greater;
- changes to existing drainage patterns;
- land disturbance of 2,500 square feet or greater.

Questions regarding the processing of grading plans should be directed to the T&ES Site Plan Coordinator at (703) 838-4318. Memorandum to Industry No. 02-08 was issued on April 28, 2008 and can be viewed online via the following link.
http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/tes/info/gradingPlanRequirements.pdf

R2. 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.]. (T&ES)

R3. Applicant shall be responsible for repairs to the adjacent city right-of-way if damaged during construction activity. (T&ES)

R4. All improvements to the city right-of-way such as curbing, sidewalk, driveway aprons, etc. must be city standard design. (T&ES)

R5. 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. (T&ES)

R6. An erosion and sediment control plan must be approved by T&ES prior to any land disturbing activity greater than 2,500 square feet. (T&ES)

R7. 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. (T&ES)

CODE REQUIREMENTS

C-1 Roof, surface and sub-surface drains be connected to the public storm sewer system, if available, by continuous underground pipe. Where storm sewer is not available applicant must provide a design to mitigate impact of stormwater drainage onto adjacent properties and to the satisfaction of the Director of Transportation & Environmental Services. (Sec.8-1-22) (SUB2008-0002)

C-2 All utilities serving this site shall be placed underground. (Sec. 5-3-3) (SUB2008-0002)

C-3 Pay sanitary sewer tap fee prior to release of Grading Plan. (Sec. 5-6-25.1) (SUB2008-0002)

C-4 Any work within the right-of-way requires a separate permit from T&ES. (Sec. 5-3-61) (SUB2008-0002)

Historic Alexandria:
No comments received.

City Architect:
S-1 The Fypon cornice shown on Sheet 6 looks oversimplified/undetailed for the architecture—it should have more detail without being too historicist. It would appear more in keeping with the rest of the design if it had some subtle historical detailing but was not overly ornate.

F-1 As we have discussed, the use of shed dormers on the front slope of the roof is unusual. Their argument in this case is that it helps minimize the visual bulk of the houses (particularly the roof.) While this is probably a valid argument, gabled dormers would be more typical. I prefer to leave this debate up to the Board.

VI. IMAGES

Figure 1. Existing site conditions at 714 Wythe Street.

Figure 2. Looking southeast toward site from North Columbus Street, with St. Joseph's Church on left.

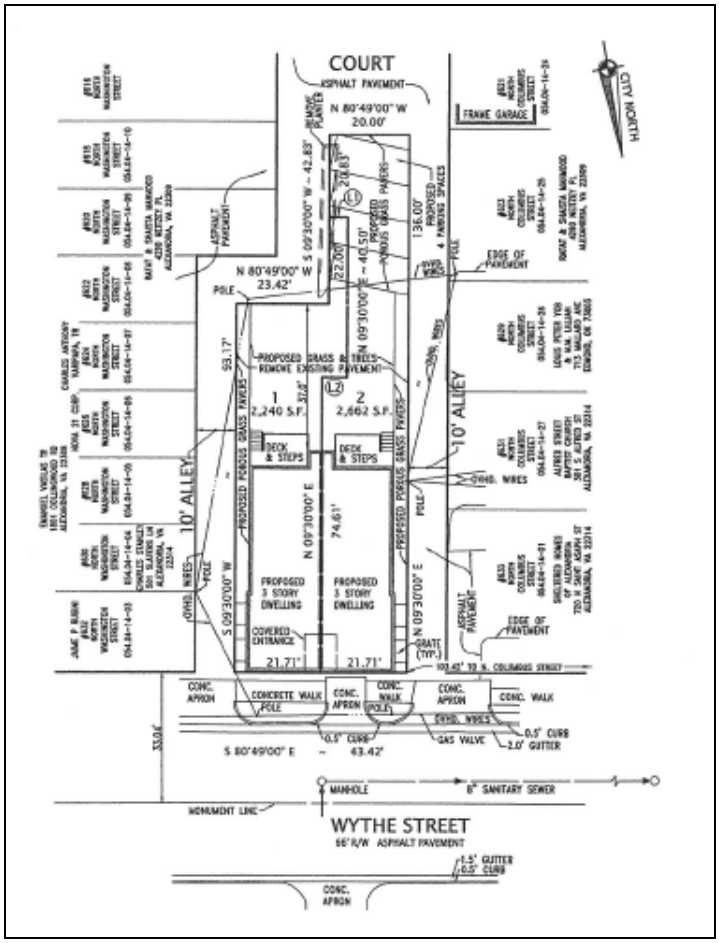

Figure 3. Plat showing subdivided lots and location of proposed dwellings.

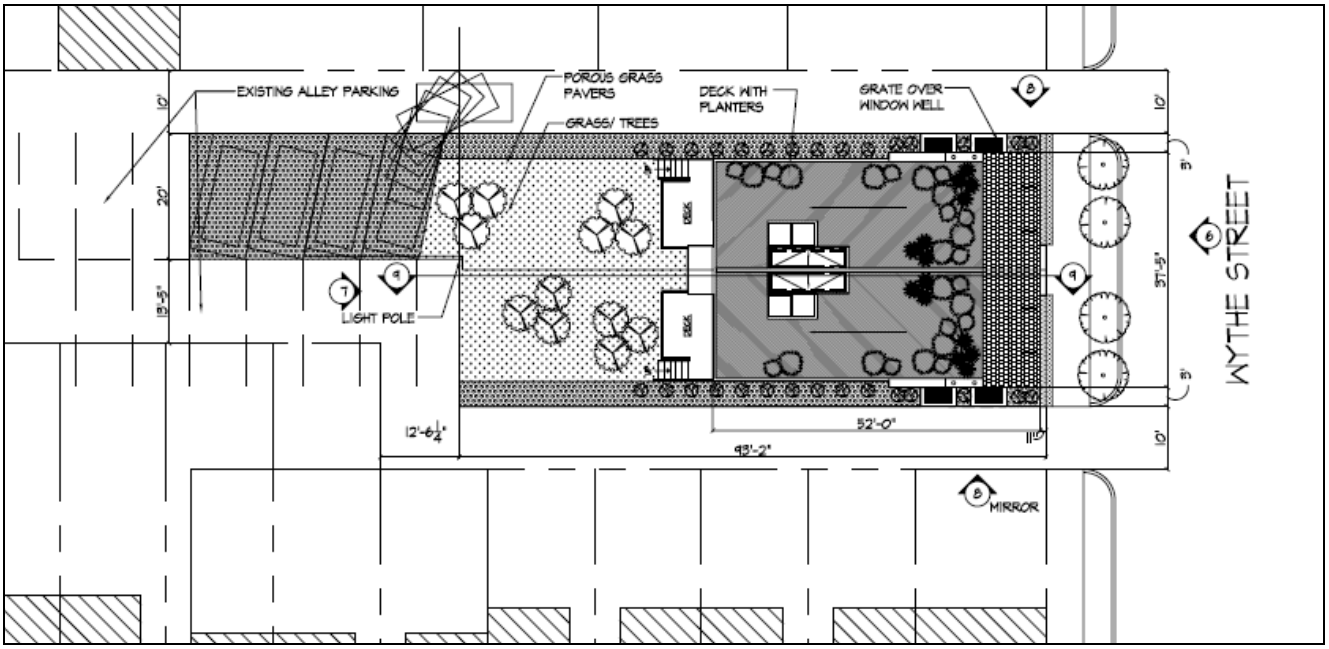

Figure 4. Proposed site plan and roof plan.

Figure 5. Proposed front (north) elevation.

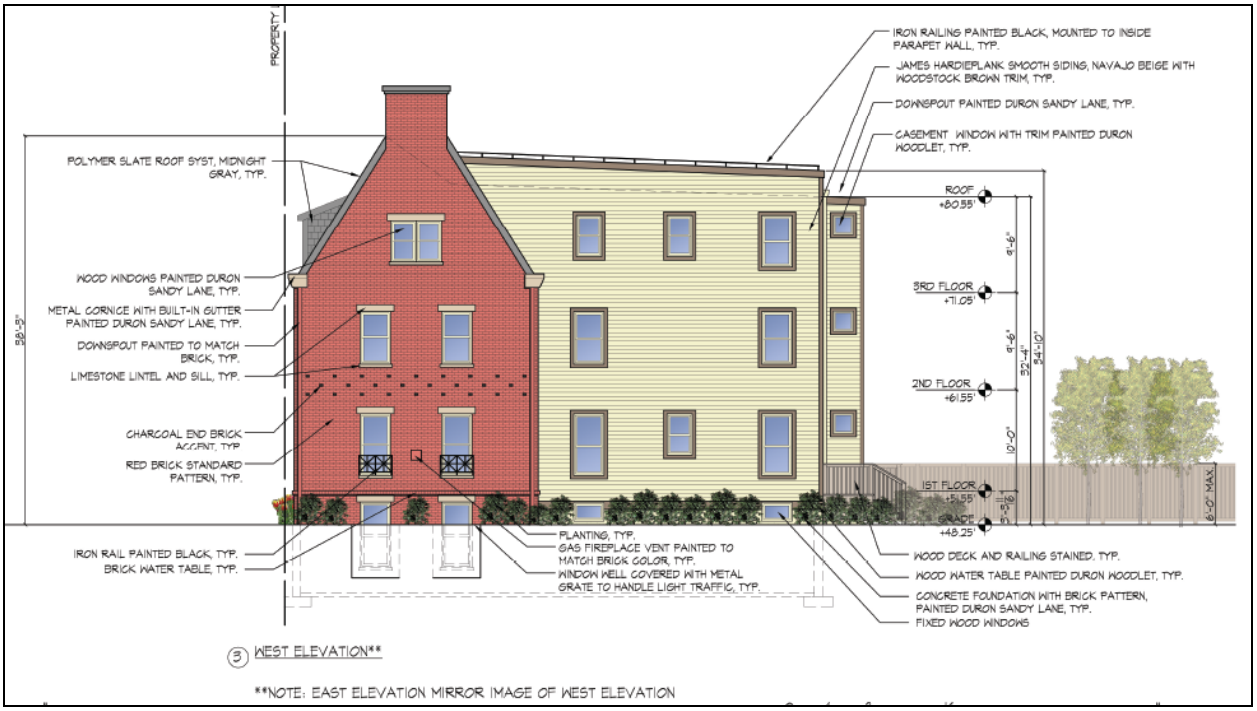

Figure 6. Proposed side (east and west) elevations.

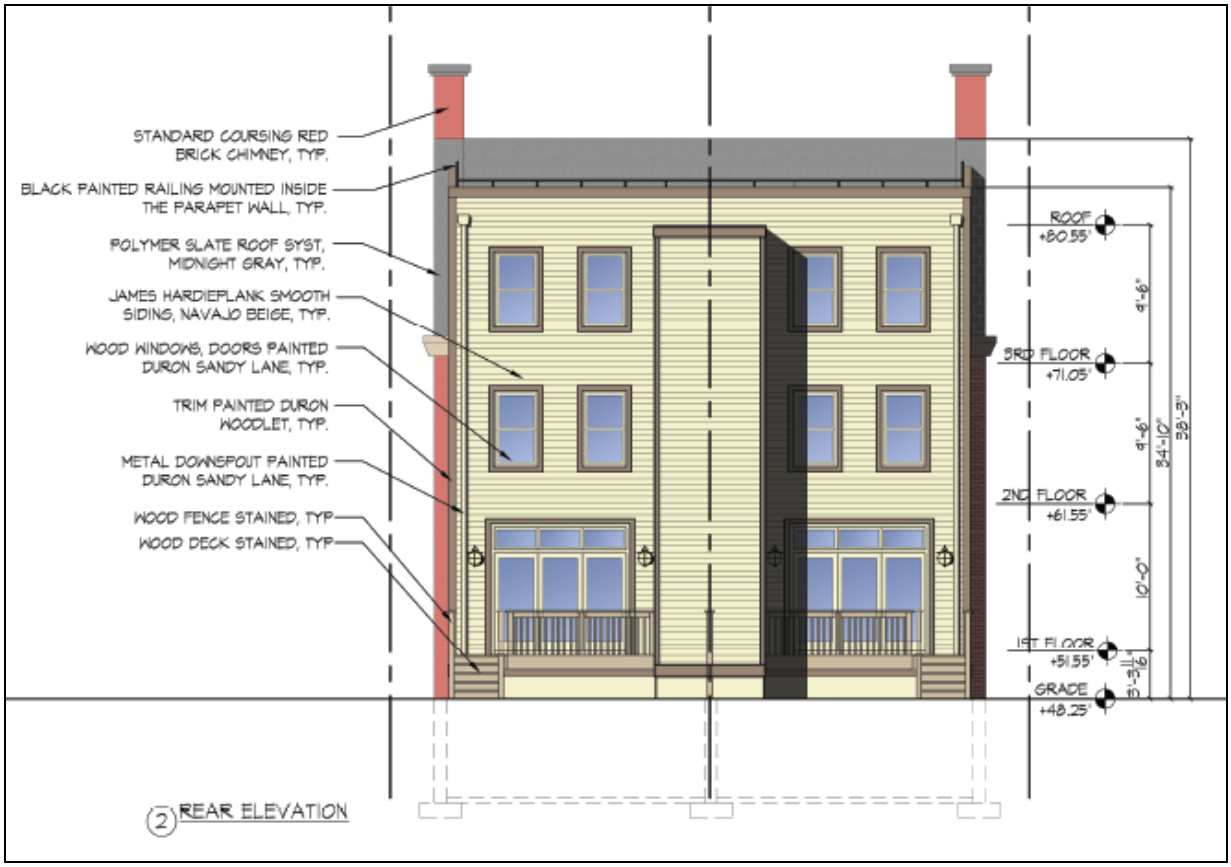

Figure 7. Proposed rear (south) elevation.

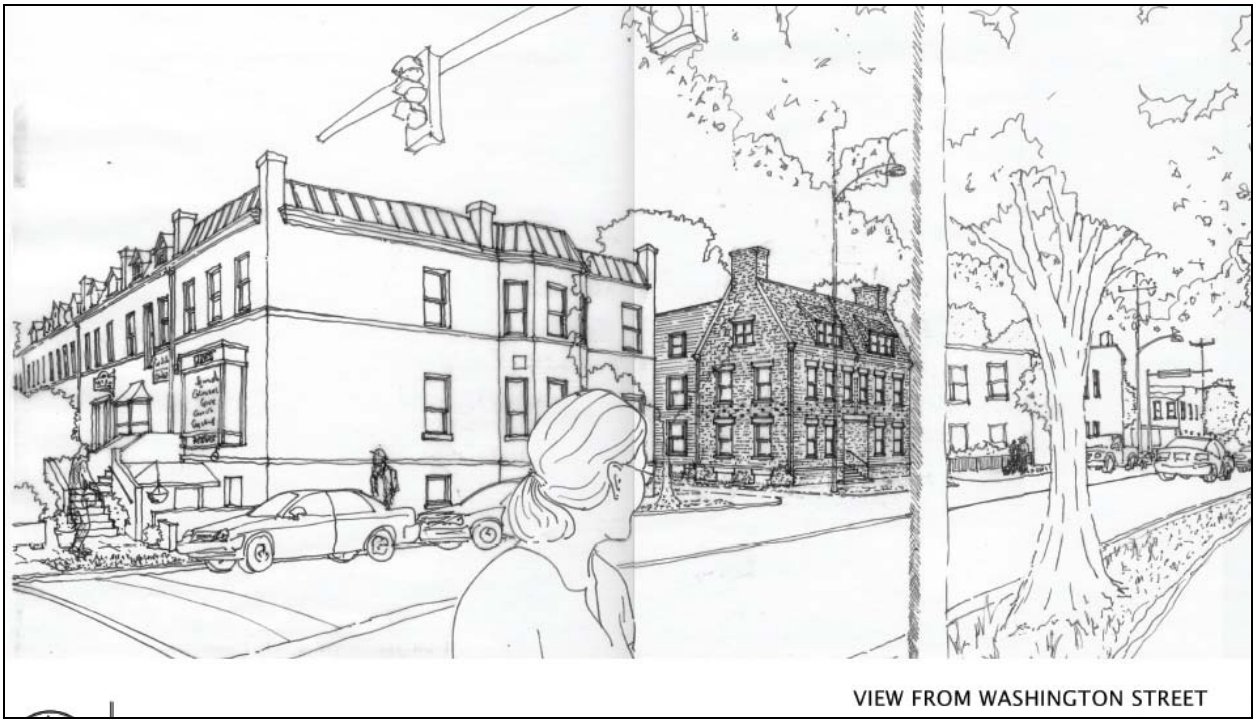

Figure 8. Perspective from Washington Street.

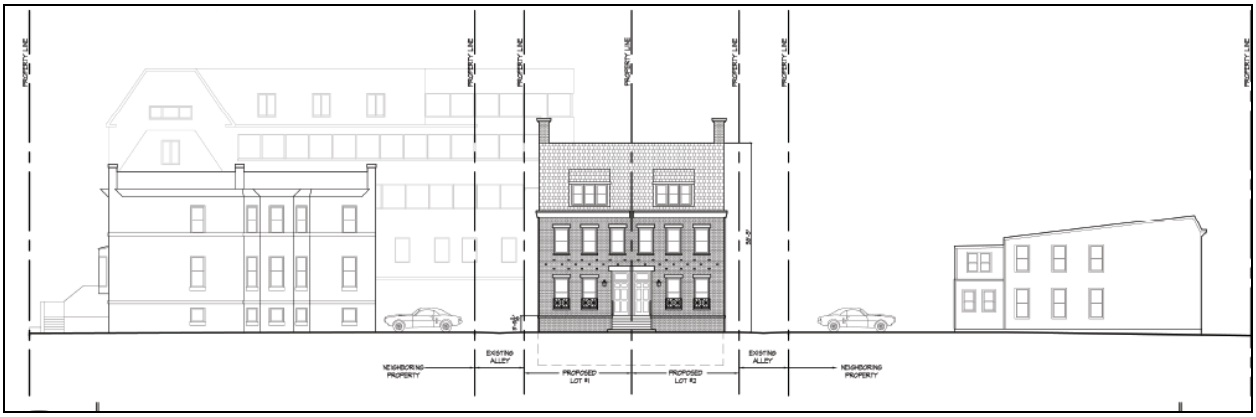

Figure 9. Proposed construction in context of adjacent buildings.

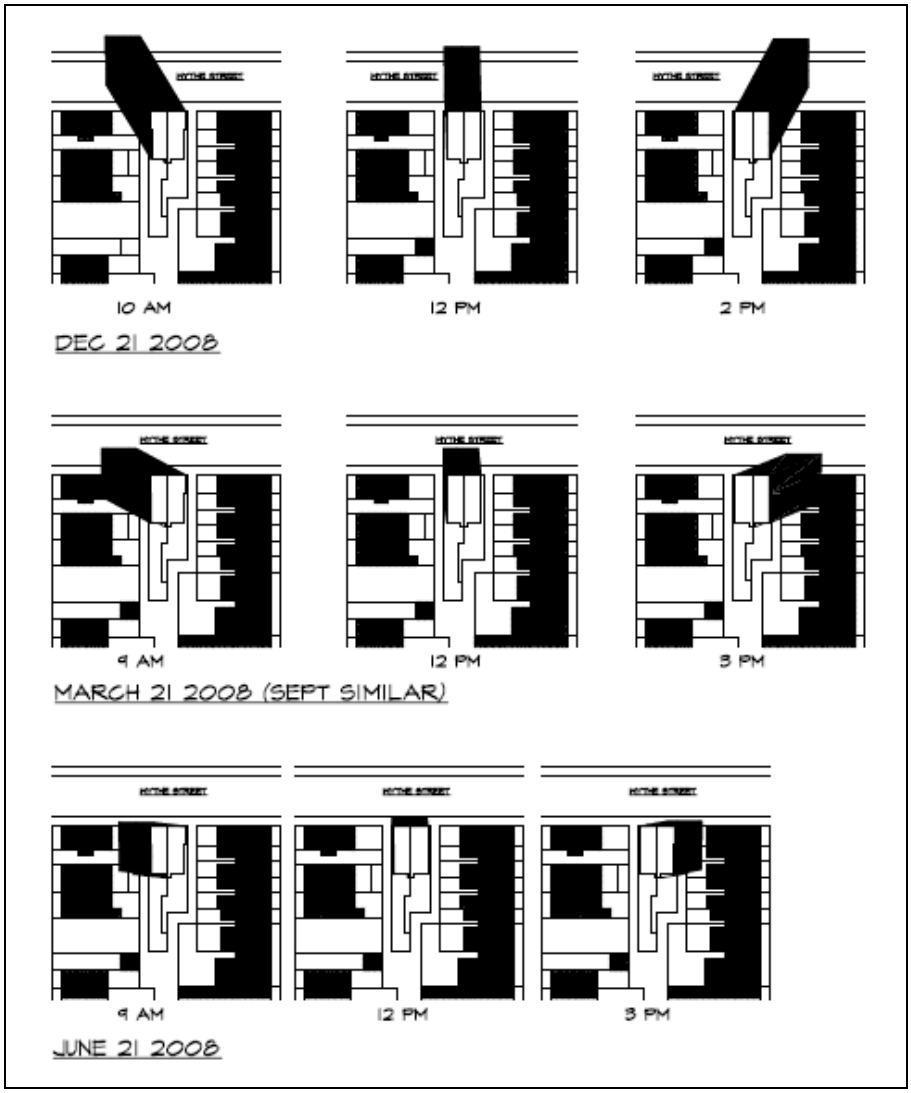

Figure 10. Shadow study.

Figure 11. Proposed wall lantern.

Figure 12. Proposed lamp post.