

Docket Item #s 10 & 11  
BAR CASE # 2009-0016 &  
BAR CASE # 2009-0017

BAR Meeting  
March 4, 2009

**ISSUE:** Addition and alterations and Waiver of HVAC Screening Requirement

**APPLICANT:** Patrick Camus for Ken and Esther Carpi

**LOCATION:** 117 South Lee Street

**ZONE:** RM/Residential

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends deferral of the application with the following considerations:

1. That the applicant restudy the height and massing of the proposed addition so that it fits within the wall plane of the historic building and is no taller than the portion of the historic house immediately adjacent;
2. That the applicant continue to study the proposed window and shutter scheme;
3. That the applicant eliminate any alterations or demolition to the historic garden wall on the south (alley) elevation and should reuse all historic brick on the altered garden wall located at the west (rear) property line;
4. That the applicant revise the new garden wall on the north property line to be no more than 6' in height from grade by stepping the wall down accordingly with existing grade; and,
5. That the applicant should continue to work with Staff in developing design details as they relate to the shed, addition and other alterations.



**BAR CASE #2009-0015, 0016, 0017 3/4/2009**



Note: While the standard practice of the Board is to approve a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate prior to considering the Certificate of Appropriateness, because of the concerns of Staff related to this project and the desire of the applicant to receive feedback from the Board, Staff encourages the Board to couple for discussion both the Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate (BAR Case #2009-0015) and the Certificate of Appropriateness/Waiver of rooftop HVAC screening requirement (BAR Case #2009-0016/2009-0017) in this instance

### **I. ISSUE:**

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for an addition and alterations and a waiver of the HVAC screening requirement at 117 South Lee Street.

#### Addition

The applicant proposes to construct a two-story rear addition measuring approximately 21' by 14.5' on the rear (west) elevation of the existing house which currently measures approximately 56.3' in length by 20' in width at the main block and 14.7' in width at the rear ell. The height of the proposed addition will be 23.5' in contrast to the height of the existing rear ell which is approximately 21'. On the south side, the proposed addition will wrap a 2' wide portion of the south elevation of the brick rear ell. On the north elevation, the proposed addition will extend 2' beyond the wall plane of the existing house. On the side (south) elevation an open pergola will be constructed adjacent to the existing rear ell connecting the main block of the house with the addition. There will also be a simple iron railing under the pergola at the basement stairs. The proposed addition will have the general architectural expression of an enclosed two-story porch and have a classical revival vocabulary with Tuscan half columns and a pronounced entablature. The proposed addition will be clad with wood trim and columns, as well as have MDO panels below the windows. The portion extending beyond the north building plane and the north elevation are proposed to be clad in cementitious siding. The proposed windows will be two-over-two, true divided light, double-hung wood windows. The doors will also be true divided light, four light wood doors. Adjacent to the windows will be single fixed louvered wood shutters.

#### Alterations

The applicant is proposing a number of alterations to the property.

The applicant is proposing to remove the existing side-oriented front stoop. The proposed stoop will encroach 4' into the public right-of-way. The stoop will be limestone with an iron railing, curving outward at the bottom tread. New light fixtures on either side of the door are proposed and will be a simple metal framed lantern measuring 10.5" by 11.5" by 18.75". The applicant proposes new ironwork at the basement windows.

The applicant proposes several alterations to the historic brick wall. On the front (east) elevation, the applicant proposes to construct a new 6' brick pier at the corner and install a new painted wood gate. Along the length of the entire wall, the applicant proposes to increase the height by 18" to approximately 6'. On the south elevation of the brick wall, the applicant proposes to remove a portion of the wall and to install a new painted wood gate flanked by new brick piers.

On the north property line the applicant is proposing to remove a dilapidated wood fence and construct a new brick wall measuring 8.5' in height at its highest and 6' at its lowest, near the rear of the property. The applicant has proposed to remove a non-historic brick wall adjacent to the parking area as well as an angled portion of the historic brick wall. In its place, the applicant proposes to construct a new brick wall, curved at the corner, and measuring 6' in height from the grade of the parking area. A new brick wall is proposed to be constructed at the rear (west) property line. A wood pergola at least 80% open and measuring 8.5' in height will be constructed over the parking area.

As part of the alterations but beyond the purview of the Board, the applicant will be reducing the grade of the yard. As a result the height of the proposed wall adjacent to the parking area and yard will be 6' from grade at the parking area and 8.5' from grade in the yard. In the yard, adjacent to this wall and at the southwest corner, the applicant proposes a shed measuring 7.5' in height by 7.25' in width by 6.75' in depth, approximately 45 square feet in area. In the northwest corner, the applicant proposes a short set of stairs with wood gate leading to the parking area.

#### Waiver of HVAC Screening Requirement

The applicant has requested a waiver of the HVAC screening requirement for a new rooftop unit. The new unit will be located adjacent to an existing rooftop HVAC unit for which the Board approved an after-the-fact application for waiver of the HVAC screening requirement.

#### **II. HISTORY:**

The dwelling at 117 South Lee Street is a two-story, three-bay frame townhouse which City real estate records dates to 1902, though Staff and historical maps date it to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The G.M. Hopkins *City Atlas of Alexandria* depicts a building, similar in configuration to the existing dwelling but without a rear ell, at this location in 1877. The building appears on the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* from 1891 (the first year which covers this area). Only the main block is depicted on the 1891 map. The two-story brick rear ell first appears on the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* from 1896. A one-story frame addition attached to the rear ell first appears on the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* from 1896 but does not appear in 1902. A two-story rear porch addition (attached to the rear ell) was constructed by 1941 and continued to appear in 1958, according to *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* from those years.

In 2001, the Board approved an after-the-fact application for a waiver of the rooftop HVAC screening requirement (BAR Case # 2001-0084). In 1958, the Board approved a "spraycrete" application to the exterior.

#### **III. ANALYSIS:**

The proposed rear addition, walls, gates, pergola and stoop comply with Zoning Ordinance regulations.

In the opinion of Staff, the application for a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate, Certificate of Appropriateness for an addition and alterations, and waiver of HVAC screening requirement should be deferred for further study.

### Addition

The proposed addition will be highly visible from both South Lee and South Fairfax streets due to the property's location adjacent to an alley.

Staff has expressed concerns to the applicant regarding the height and massing of the proposed addition. Specifically, Staff finds that an addition should be no wider than the existing historic house (21' at the addition, 14.7' at the rear ell and 20' at the main block). While appropriate, and even encouraged, to differentiate new construction from historic fabric, Staff finds that the extension of the addition beyond the historic building's wall plane is inappropriate and overwhelms the existing structure. A more common form of differentiation would be offsetting the addition to have it step in from the historic house. Moreover, the addition is already appropriately differentiated from the historic house through the change of materials and shift in architectural vocabulary. Generally, additions should be subordinate to a historic building, specifically in regard to height. As proposed, the addition is approximately 2.5' higher than the rear of the house. The pronounced entablature on the addition likely will draw attention to the increased height of the addition. Staff has no objection to the proposed pergola adjacent to the rear ell and connecting the addition and main block and finds that it will not overwhelm the historic building and serves as a transitional element between the new construction and historic fabric.

In terms of architectural expression, the proposed addition is appropriate and compatible with the two-story townhouse at 117 South Lee Street in respect to its general architectural vocabulary and selection of materials. The proposed addition evokes the traditional architectural form of an enclosed porch, common for rear and side additions. The *Design Guidelines* state that "the design of an addition should respect the heritage of the historic building to which it is attached as well as adjacent buildings...or which echo the design elements of the existing structure." Staff finds that the proposed addition complements the architectural style of the dwelling.

While the use of true divided light wood windows and doors are preferred for the addition and consistent with the *Design Guidelines*, Staff recommends that a different light pattern be studied for the windows. The two-over-two windows, intended to relate to the two-over-two historic windows on the dwelling, have a slightly different proportion than what would typically be found on a classically detailed addition such as this. Staff recommends that other windows be considered before making a decision to continue with the two-over-two light pattern.

Regarding shutters, the *Design Guidelines* state that "decorative window and door shutters that are not operable are strongly discouraged" and that "shutters should be appropriate to the period of the structure." The use of fixed shutters in this manner is a unique design solution for the treatment of the solid wall space. Shutters are appropriate for an enclosed porch and represent traditional building patterns. While the use of inoperable shutters as proposed may ultimately be acceptable in this circumstance, Staff finds that this treatment should be further studied.

### Alterations

The existing side-loading front stoop, made of brick and concrete, does not appear to be historic. The proposed limestone stoop is consistent with the *Design Guidelines* which state that “stoops, steps and railings should be made of materials which are sympathetic to the building materials generally found in the historic districts” and “should be appropriate and compatible with the historic architecture of the building.” Staff finds that the proposed limestone stoop is compatible.

Regarding the demolition of the brick flue, the *Design Guidelines* indicate that “existing chimneys should be maintained *in situ* and not removed without a compelling reason and substantial justification.” The applicant has not provided a compelling reason for demolition of the chimney/flue. While the flue is not original to the building, Staff finds that it possibly is still considered historic (50 years or older) and should be retained as part of the evolution of the building.

The *Design Guidelines* pronounce that “an important visual feature of the historic districts are the fences, garden walls and gates that define property lines...[and] serve as a distinctive feature of the streetscape and individual yards.” Staff is very concerned regarding the proposed demolition and alterations of the historic garden wall on the alley (south) property line. In Staff’s opinion, the proposed additional height to the historic garden wall and the proposed piers are inappropriate. Adding 18” of brick to the existing wall not only erodes the historic integrity of the existing garden wall but also disrupts the distinct vantage points resulting from looking through alleyways from streets – a definitive characteristic of block porosity in the historic district. Furthermore, Staff finds that the new brick garden wall on the north and west property lines should be no higher than 6’ at grade at the property line. Specifically, Staff does not support the height of the new garden wall at 8.5’ on this property line. Section 7-802 of the Zoning Ordinance permits the BAR to waive the requirements of fence height as stated in the Zoning Ordinance “where to do so would be consistent with the historic character of the district.” The applicant has not presented a compelling argument as to why an 8.5’ garden wall at this location is consistent with the historic character of the district. Staff recommends restudy of this garden wall to step it down with existing grades along the property line.

Staff finds the proposed pergola over the parking area to be appropriate in design, scale and materials. The proposed alterations to the garden area, including the shed, are generally appropriate. Due to the reduction in grade in the rear yard, the shed will be minimally visible. With the exception of the proposed new gate on the alley elevation, the proposed painted wood gates are appropriate. Staff recommends elimination of the gate on the alley elevation to minimize demolition of the historic wall.

### Waiver of HVAC Screening Requirement

Staff has no objection to the request for waiver of the HVAC screening requirement since the Board has already approved an after-the-fact application for waiver of the HVAC screening requirement for the existing unit. In addition, Staff notes that the units will be minimally visible from the public right-of-way. Staff recommends approval of the waiver but finds that it is best

deferred until both the Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate and Certificate of Appropriateness are also approved.

Staff notes the comments and recommendations from Alexandria Archaeology and Transportation and Environmental Services.

**IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends deferral of the application with the following considerations:

1. That the applicant restudy the height and massing of the proposed addition so that it fits within the wall plane of the historic building and is no taller than the portion of the historic house immediately adjacent;
2. That the applicant continue to study the proposed window and shutter scheme;
3. That the applicant eliminate any alterations or demolition to the historic garden wall on the south (alley) elevation and should reuse all historic brick on the altered garden wall located at the west (rear) property line;
4. That the applicant revise the new garden wall on the north property line to be no more than 6' in height from grade by stepping the wall down accordingly with existing grade; and,
5. That the applicant should continue to work with Staff in developing design details as they relate to the shed, addition and other alterations.

## **V. CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS**

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

### Code Enforcement:

- 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 Additions and Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-7 Additions and Alterations to the existing structure and/or installation and/or altering of equipment therein requires a building permit. Five sets of plans, bearing the signature and seal of a design professional registered in the Commonwealth of Virginia, must accompany the written application. The plans must include all dimensions, construction alterations details, kitchen equipment, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical layouts and schematics.
- C-8 Construction permits are required for this project. Plans shall accompany the permit application that fully details the construction as well as layouts and schematics of the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.
- C-9 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-10 A wall location plat prepared by a land surveyor is required to be submitted to this office prior to requesting any framing inspection.



- C-11 Structural calculations are required to verify the ability of the existing roof to support the additional weight of the A/C unit.
- C-12 Guardrail structural design and construction must comply with USBC.
- C-13 Where appliances are located  $\leq 10'$  from a roof edge or open side with a drop  $\geq 24"$ , guards shall be provided (USBC 2801.1)

Historic Alexandria:

No comments received.

Alexandria Archaeology:

**Archaeology Finding**

1. Tax records indicate that houses were present on this street face by 1810. The 1877 Hopkins insurance map shows a structure on the lot at 117 S. Lee. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into activities in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Alexandria.

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

3. 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 Basement/Foundation Plans, Demolition, Erosion and Sediment Control, Grading, Landscaping, Utilities, and Sheet piling and Shoring) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirements.

Transportation and Environmental Services:

**FINDINGS**

F1. An approved grading plan may be required at the time of building permit application. Insufficient information has been provided to make that determination at this time.

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 than 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>**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- R1. 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)
- R2. Applicant shall be responsible for repairs to the adjacent city right-of-way if damaged during construction activity. (T&ES)
- R3. All improvements to the city right-of-way such as curbing, sidewalk, driveway aprons, etc. must be city standard design. (T&ES)
- R4. 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)
- R5. 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)
- R5. 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)

VI. IMAGES

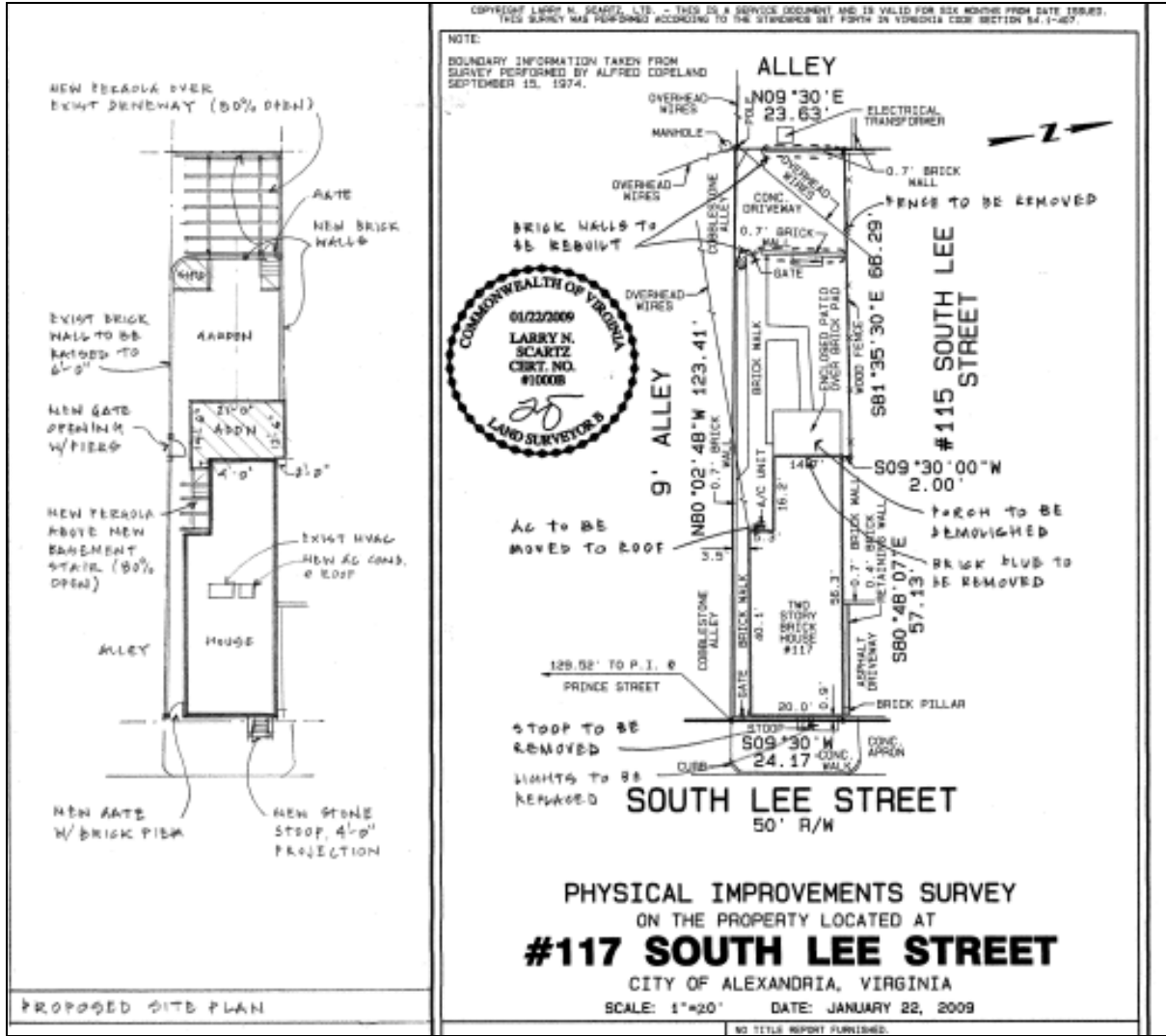


Figure 1. Proposed site plan and site plan with existing conditions and proposed demolition.



Figure 2. Front (east) and side (south) elevations, 117 South Lee Street.



Figure 3. Rear (west) and side (south) elevations, including existing porch to be demolished.





Figure 4. View showing non-historic brick wall adjacent to parking area and historic brick wall on alley.



Figure 5. Parking area with brick walls and wood fence proposed to be demolished.



Figure 6. Existing wood fence to be demolished and stepped down in height according to grade.

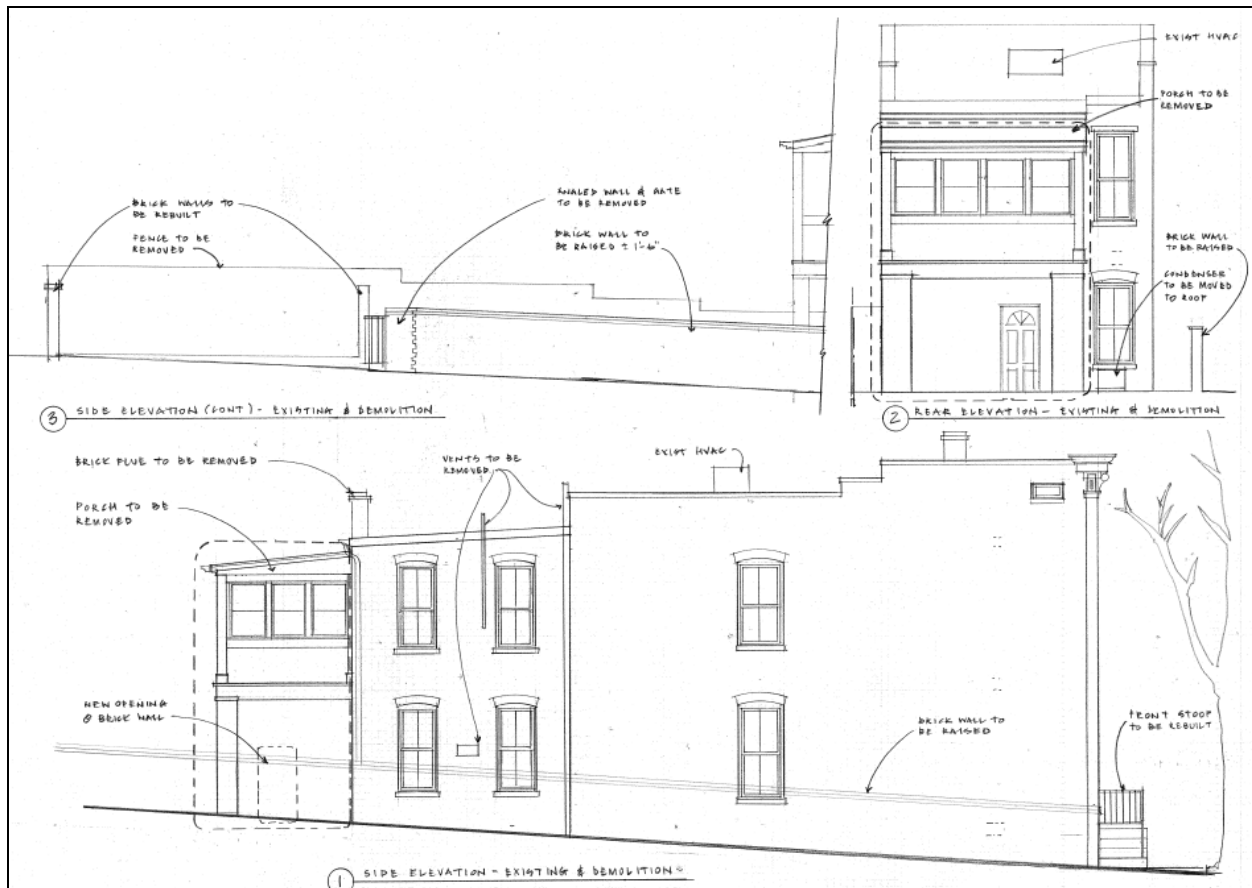


Figure 7. Proposed demolition in elevation.



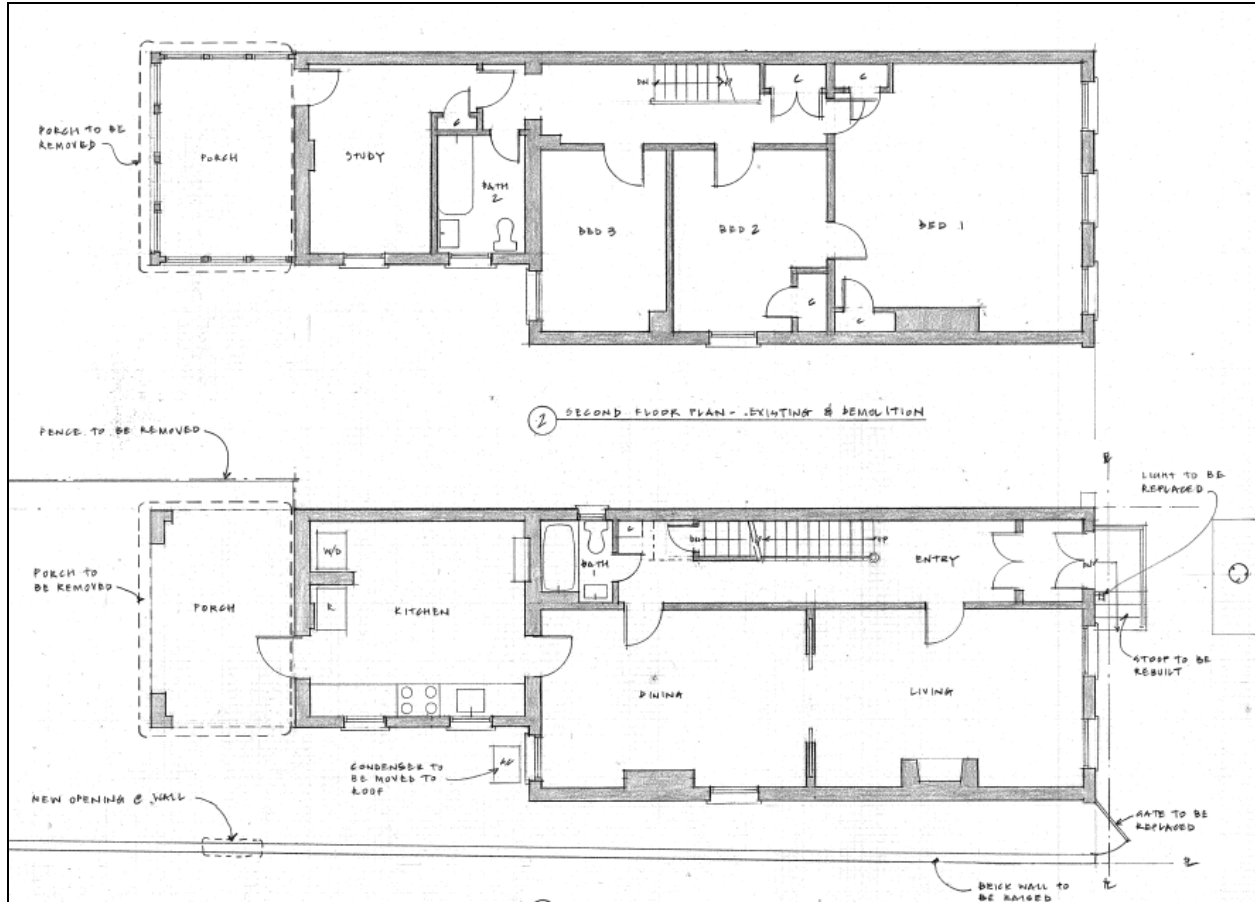


Figure 8. Proposed demolition in plan.

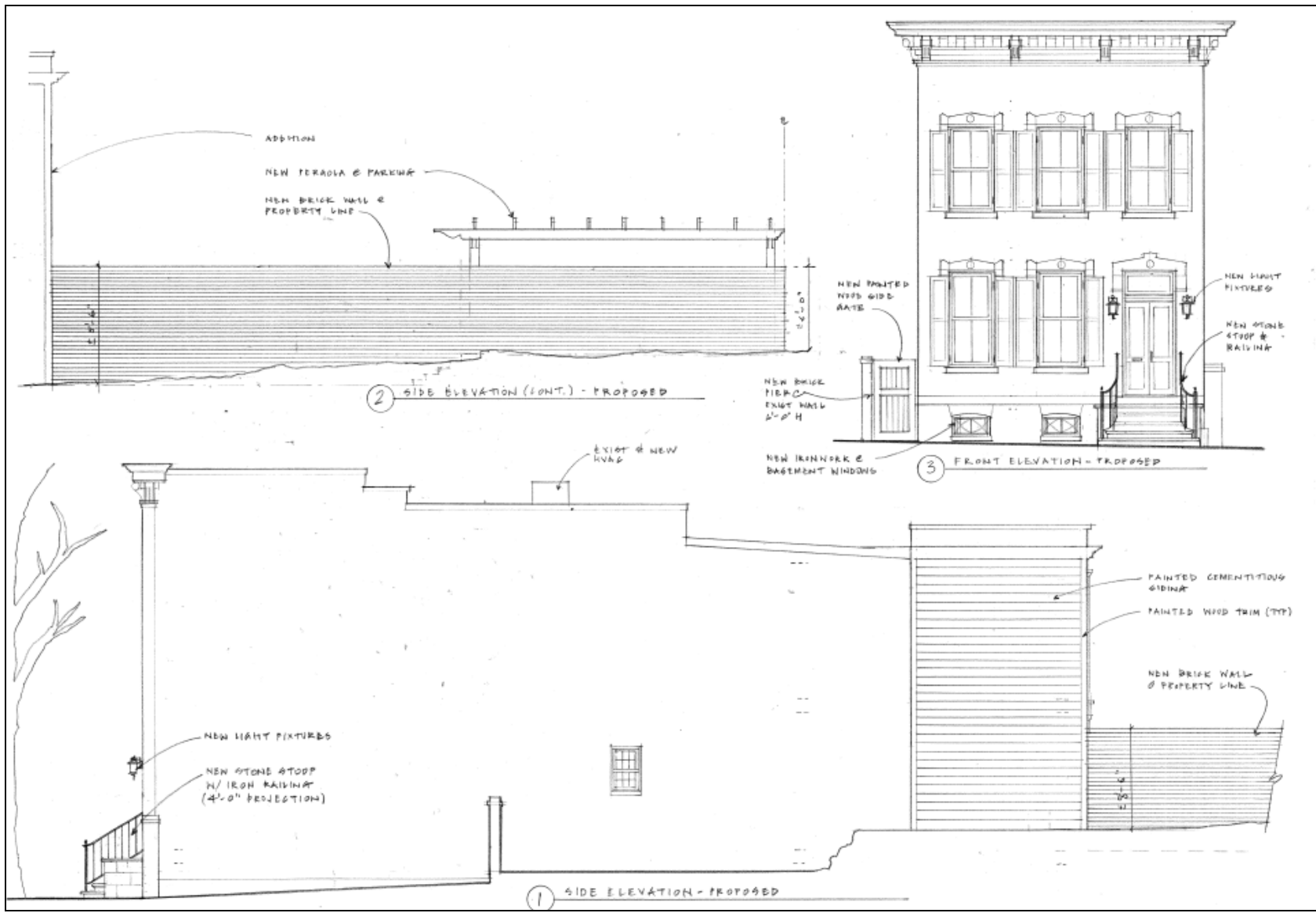


Figure 9. Proposed elevations: front (east) and side (north).





Figure 10. Proposed elevations: side (south) and rear (west).

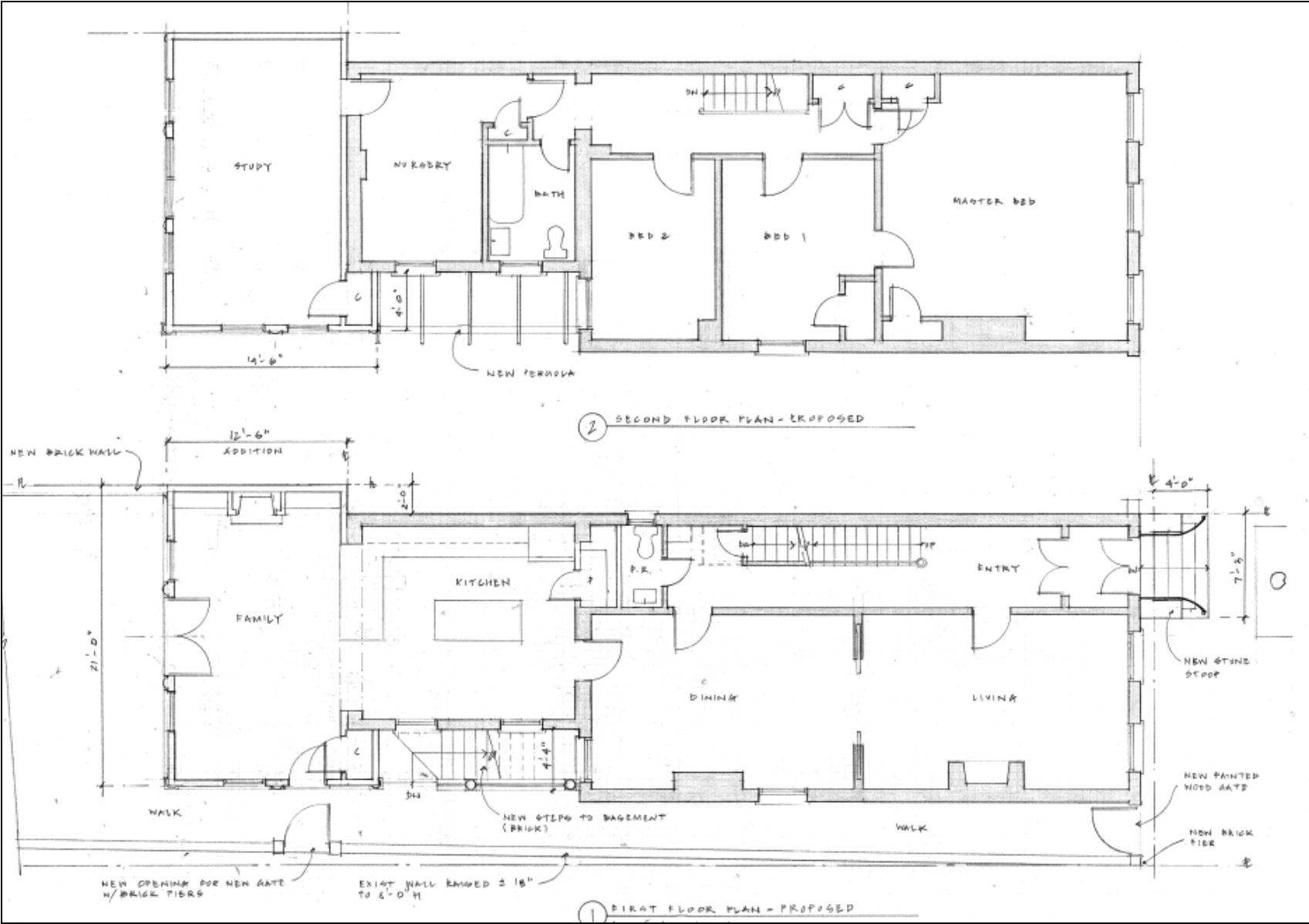


Figure 11. Proposed floor plan.

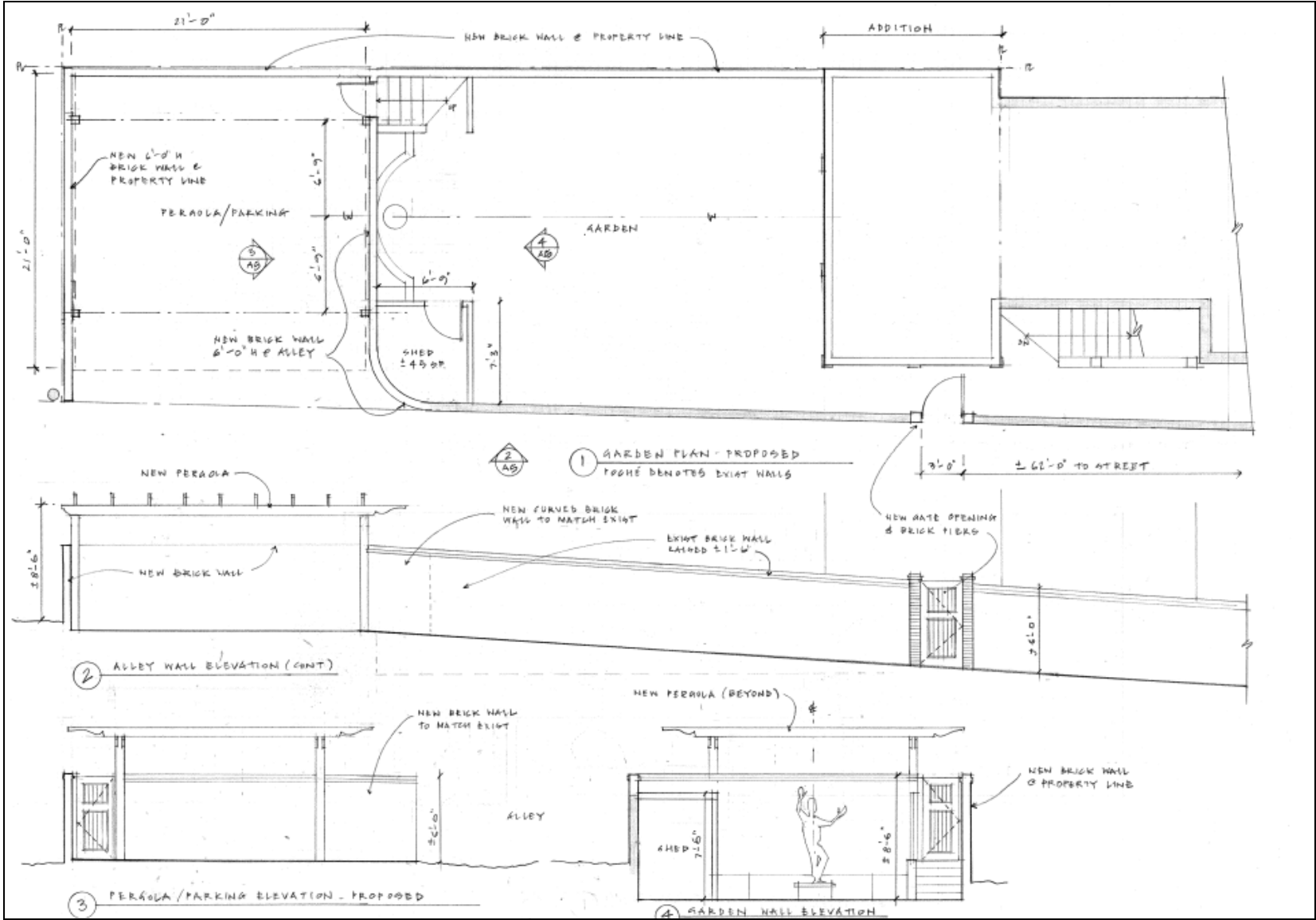


Figure 12. Proposed alterations to rear yard area including garden walls, pergola and shed.

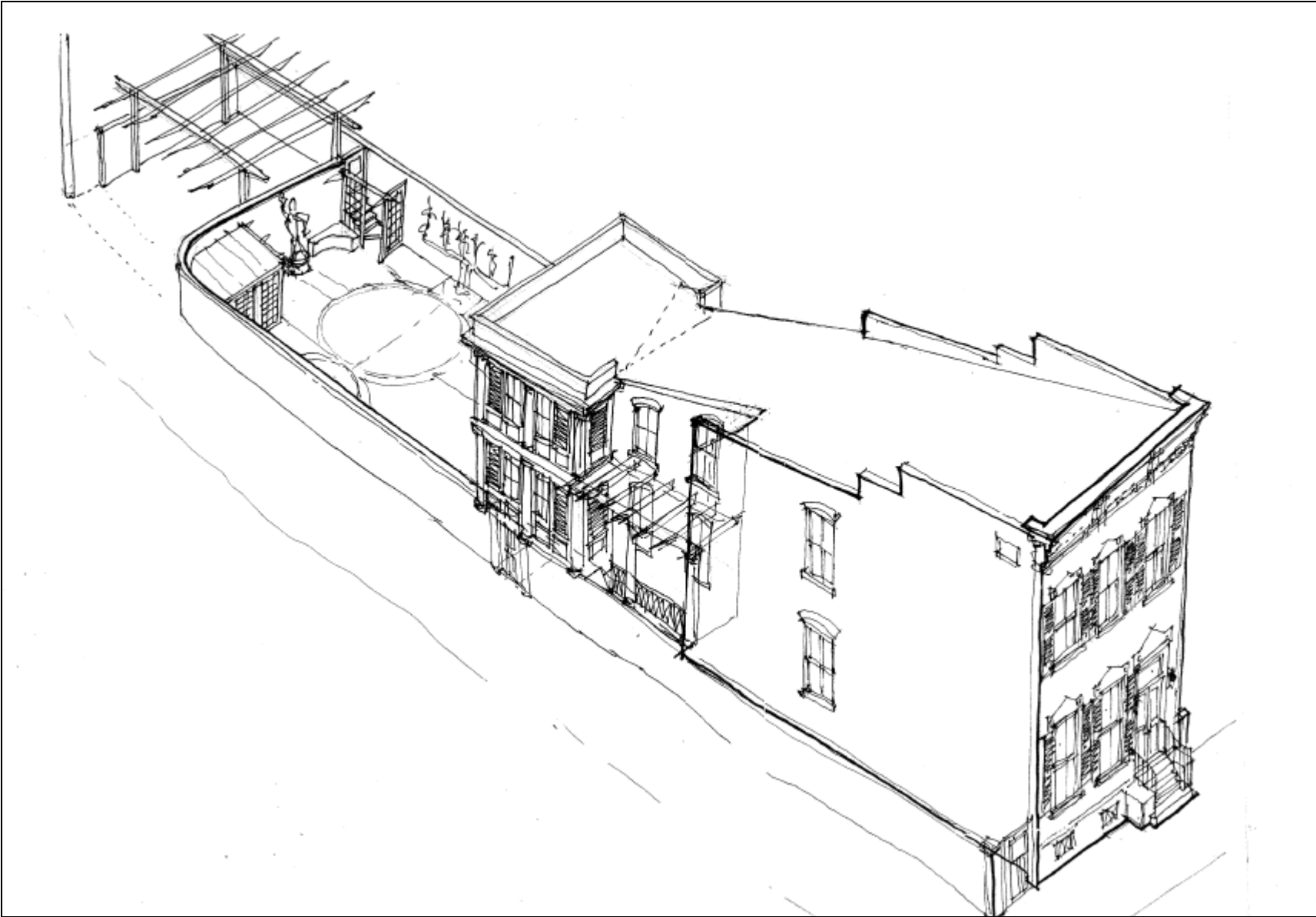


Figure 13. Axonometric view of proposed addition and alterations.