

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 12, 2009

TO: Old and Historic Alexandria Board of Architectural Review

FROM: BAR Staff

SUBJECT: Consideration of a request for demolition at 428 North Columbus Street

Attached for your review please find information relating to the request by an applicant to consider a proposal for wholesale demolition of the building located at 428 North Columbus Street. The applicant has prepared supporting materials for your review. While Staff has not yet had the opportunity to do extensive research on this property, we offer analysis in response to the materials submitted and our understanding of the subject property.

Background:

The applicant, John Savage, approached BAR Staff for a discussion regarding the possible demolition of the building located at 428 North Columbus Street. BAR Staff conducted a site visit with the applicant and owner as well as met with them to advise on the process. Staff advised the applicant to take this item as a discussion item to the Board prior to formally filing an application for a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate and concept review of new construction.

History of 428 North Columbus Street:

The building located at 428 North Columbus Street is a simple, two-story, gable-fronted freestanding frame dwelling likely dating from the early to mid-nineteenth century. The building appears on the G.M. Hopkins Map from 1877. In this map, it is depicted as being located on the north property line and set back from the other three property lines. Immediately south of this property were two freestanding dwellings. The first Sanborn Fire Insurance Map depicts this block for the first time in 1896. In 1896, this building was a two-story frame building with a two-story frame porch on the south elevation and a one-story rear addition. By 1902, according to the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, the house had been altered: the one-story rear addition was now a two-story ell attached to the main block, with a small one-story porch on the south elevation, and a new one-story rear addition was added to the west elevation. On the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from 1941 and 1958, the building is slightly modified from the original form but maintains the same form of a two-story main block with rear ell, and a two-story side porch on the south elevation. The current configuration of the building features the former open two-

story porch as an enclosed element. At the rear (west) elevation, a two-story addition has been added with an exterior stair. The property was subdivided in 1992 and a party wall was constructed between 428 North Columbus Street and a new building constructed at 808 Oronoco Street.

Criteria for a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate:

In considering a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate, 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?
- (7) In the instance of a building or structure owned by the city or the redevelopment and housing authority, such building or structure having been acquired pursuant to a duly approved urban renewal (redevelopment) plan, would retention of the building or structure promote the general welfare in view of the needs of the city for an urban renewal (redevelopment) project?

Analysis:

The applicant posits that the existing building has no architectural merit and is therefore suitable for demolition. While it is clear that the building has been altered over time and may retain very little historic material in its current condition, Staff finds that the existing building retains its historic integrity as it relates to location, design, setting and association. Staff notes that there are many examples of buildings throughout the historic districts which no longer retain historic materials in their exterior sheathing and which have undergone extensive alterations including changes in fenestration, partial demolition, and new additions. The form and original design remain clearly articulated in this building. While the two-story side porch was enclosed after 1958, it remains expressed as an enclosed porch on the east and south elevations. Alterations have been made to the rear, including the addition and demolition of small rear additions, yet the

general gable-fronted form of the building as a whole remains. Although the building is now technically a semi-detached building (sharing a party well on the west elevation with 808 Oronoco Street), the setting and form of the building allow it to still generally read as a freestanding form. The applicant has noted that no ornament or decorative elements remain, detracting from its architectural merit. The architecture and form of this building suggest that it has likely always been a simple vernacular building with minimal decoration.

Staff finds that the existing building potentially meets Criteria 1, 5 and 6. As a freestanding vernacular frame building it relates to the earlier period of development of the district rather than the more common rowhouse form that dominates both districts. This building evokes a farmhouse form and style which makes it architecturally unique in the district. Further, this building relates to the adjacent property immediately to the south which is a freestanding frame building constructed circa 1858. The mature landscape setting of both properties is also relatively unique in the district, particularly in consideration of the modest size of the building at 428 North Columbus Street. At the intersection of North Columbus and Oronoco streets, each corner has a different architectural style and setting, making it challenging to conclude that one building is uncharacteristic of the immediate area.

The applicant has also noted that the existing building sits four feet over the property line in the public right-of-way. This situation does not impact the Board's review of the criteria for a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate

From a preliminary review of the building itself and supplementary materials by the applicant, Staff finds that the current proposal meets some of the criteria for a Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate as set forth in the Zoning Ordinance. Therefore, Staff cannot support the wholesale demolition of 428 North Columbus. However, due to the alterations to the building and apparent lack of historic materials, Staff would likely support alterations and an addition to this building.

Departmental Comments:

Alexandria Archaeology:

This report does not provide documentary information before the date of 1877 when the footprint of a structure is shown on the Hopkins Map. To make a determination of the archaeological potential of the property and what preservation measures are appropriate, information on this property prior to 1877 is required. The depiction of the structure on the 1877 map suggests that this structure was on this property even prior to this date. The property is considered to have archaeological potential, so prior to any demolition or other ground disturbance on the property, the applicant must have a Documentary Study completed and hire an archaeological firm to monitor the demolition to insure there is no ground disturbance. A contract firm would also need to complete all archaeological requirements prior to undertaking ground disturbance on the property.

Office of Historic Alexandria:

R- Table pending additional research on building's age and history.

Zoning:

- Subject property zoned CL, commercial low.
- Existing front façade facing Oronoco Street is built into the public right-of-way without City Council approval of a building encroachment.
- New construction cannot project into the public right-o-way without first obtaining City Council approval of an encroachment.
- Existing lot is substandard in lot area and lot width for a single-family dwelling. The existing lot is 2,524 square feet and the requirement is 5,000 square feet; the existing lot width facing North Columbus is 38.67 feet and the requirement is 50 feet. If applicant is approved for demolition, a new single-family dwelling may be built that complies with all CL requirements (FAR, yards and open space) within one year of the date of approval of the demolition.
- Grading plan required to build a new single-family dwelling. T&ES administers the grading plan process.

Images:

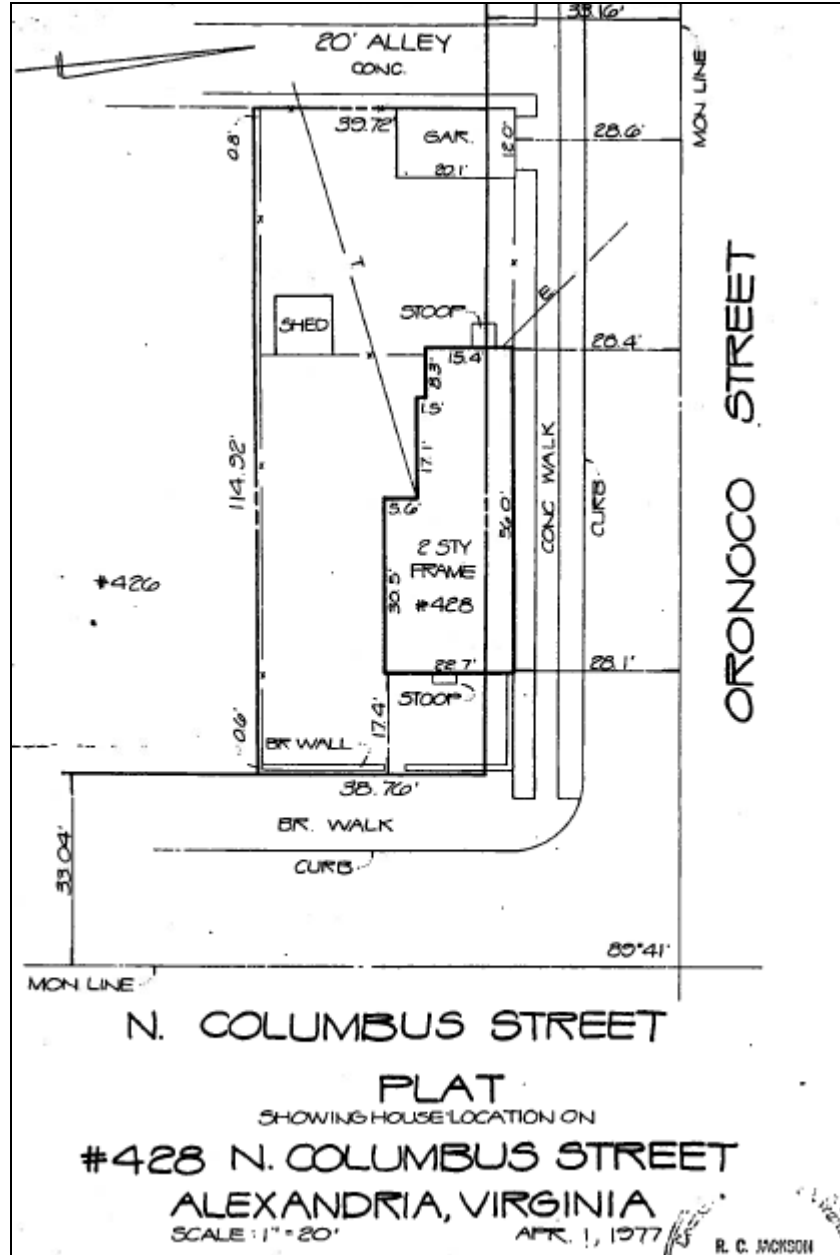


Figure 1. Plat prior to subdivision.



Figure 3. Front (east) elevation.



Figure 4. Oblique view showing enclosed porch on side (south) elevation.



Figure 5. Oronoco Street (north) elevation.



Figure 6. Context: relationship with 426 North Columbus Street on the left.



Figure 7. Context: East side of North Columbus Street.



Figure 8. Context: North side of Oronoco Street.

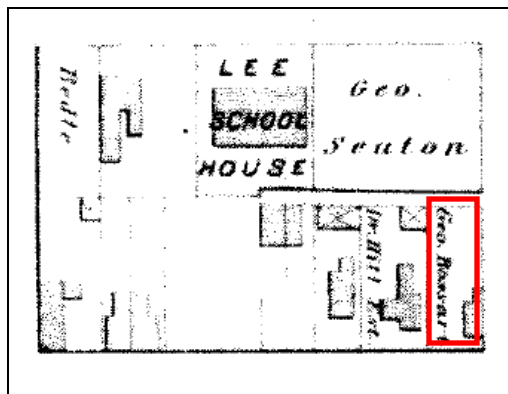
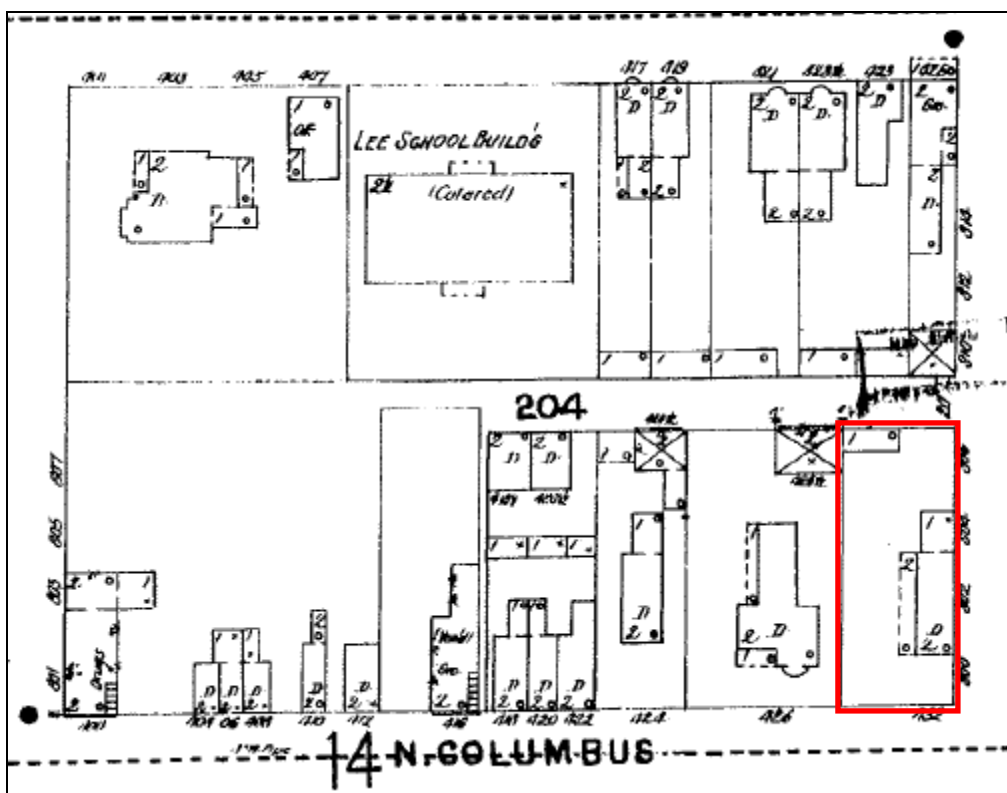


Figure 9. G.M. Hopkins Map, Plate 11, 1877.



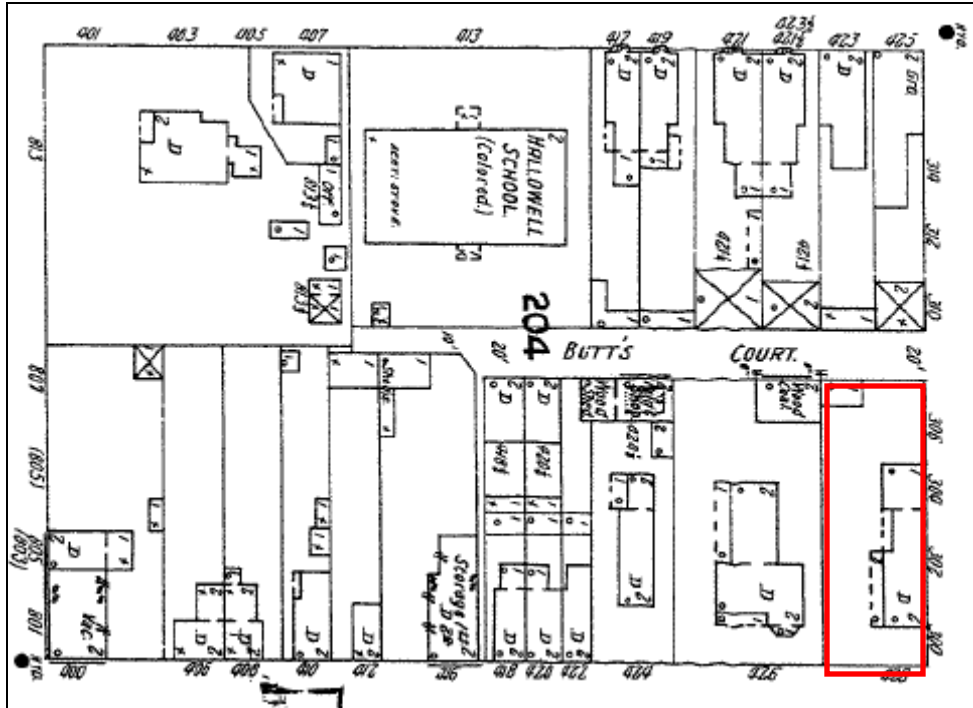


Figure 11. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 2, 1902.

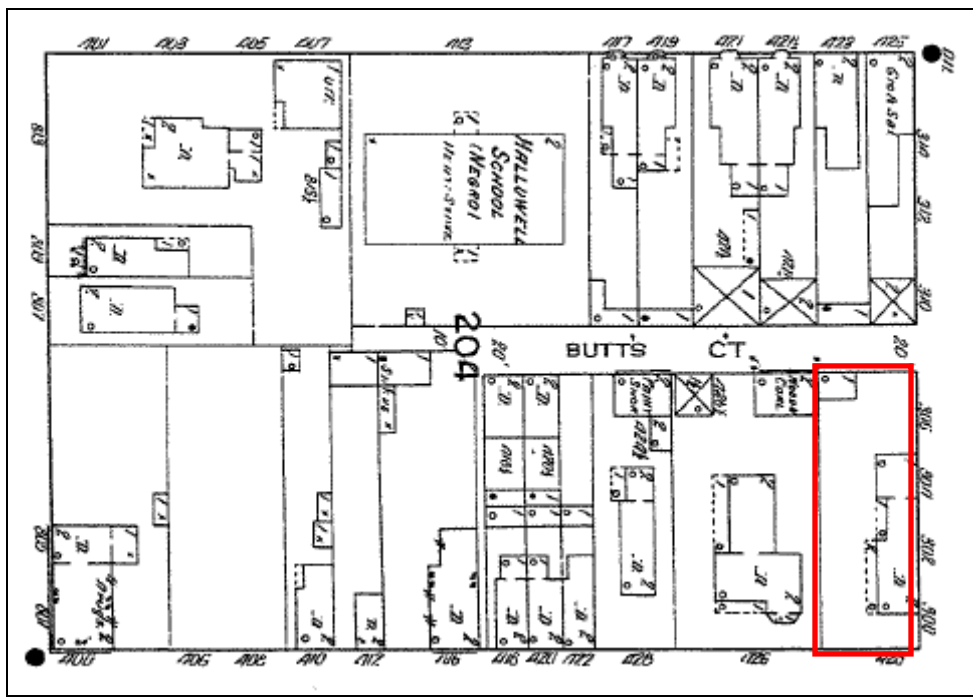


Figure 12. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 2, 1912.

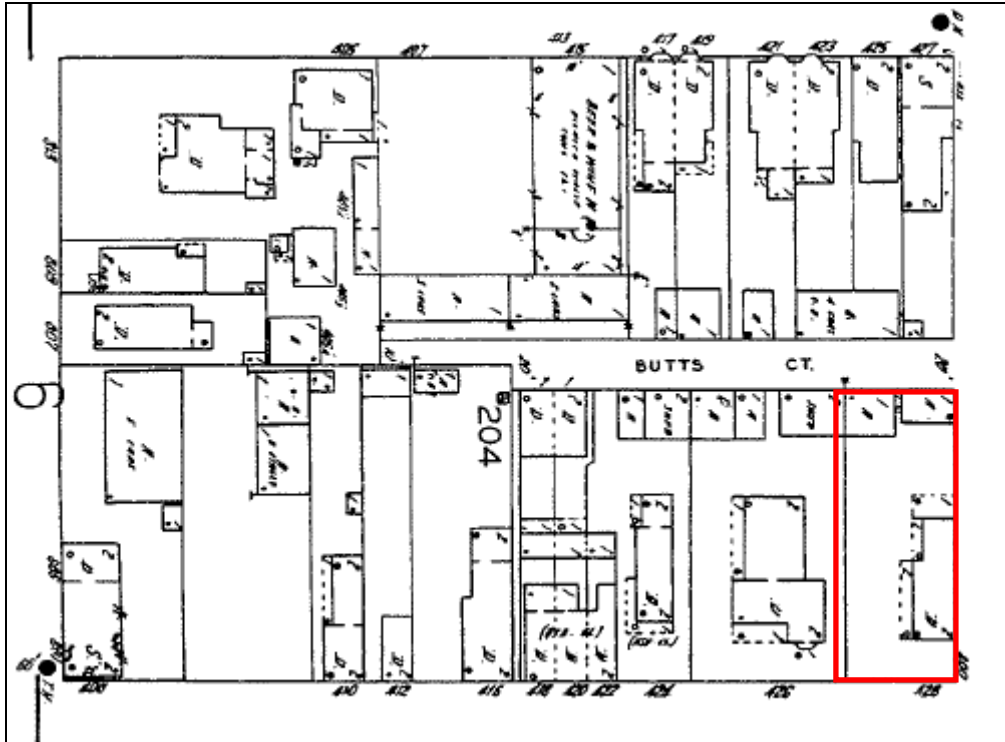


Figure 13. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1941.

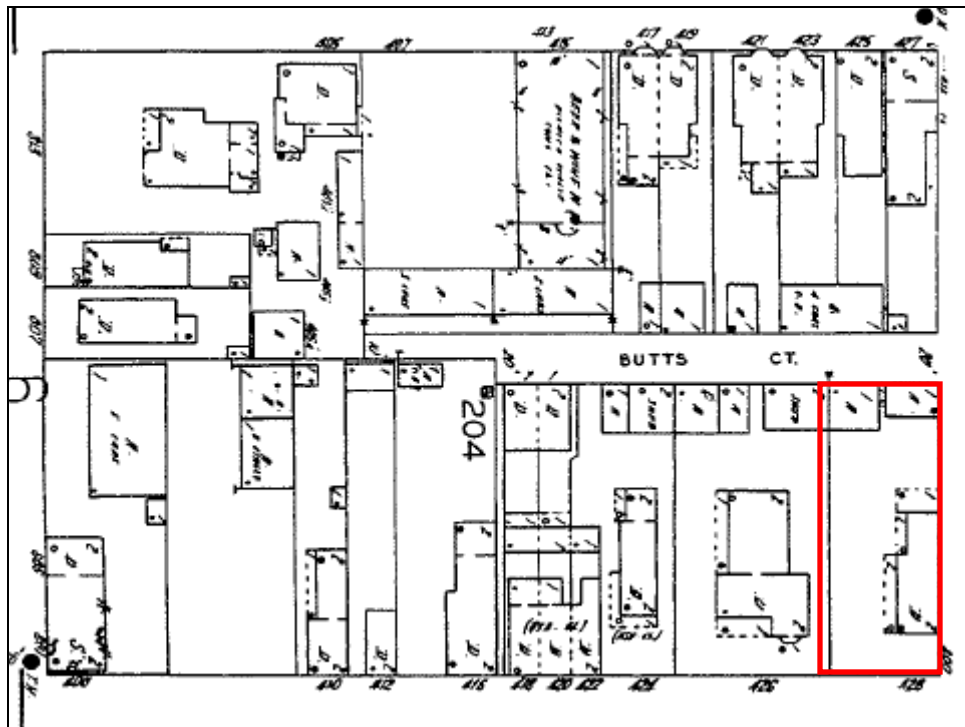


Figure 14. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 21, 1958.