

Docket Item # 5  
BAR CASE #2010-0316

BAR Meeting  
December 1, 2010

**ISSUE:** Alterations (Door Replacement)

**APPLICANT:** Mimi Volberg

**LOCATION:** 111 Pommander Walk Street

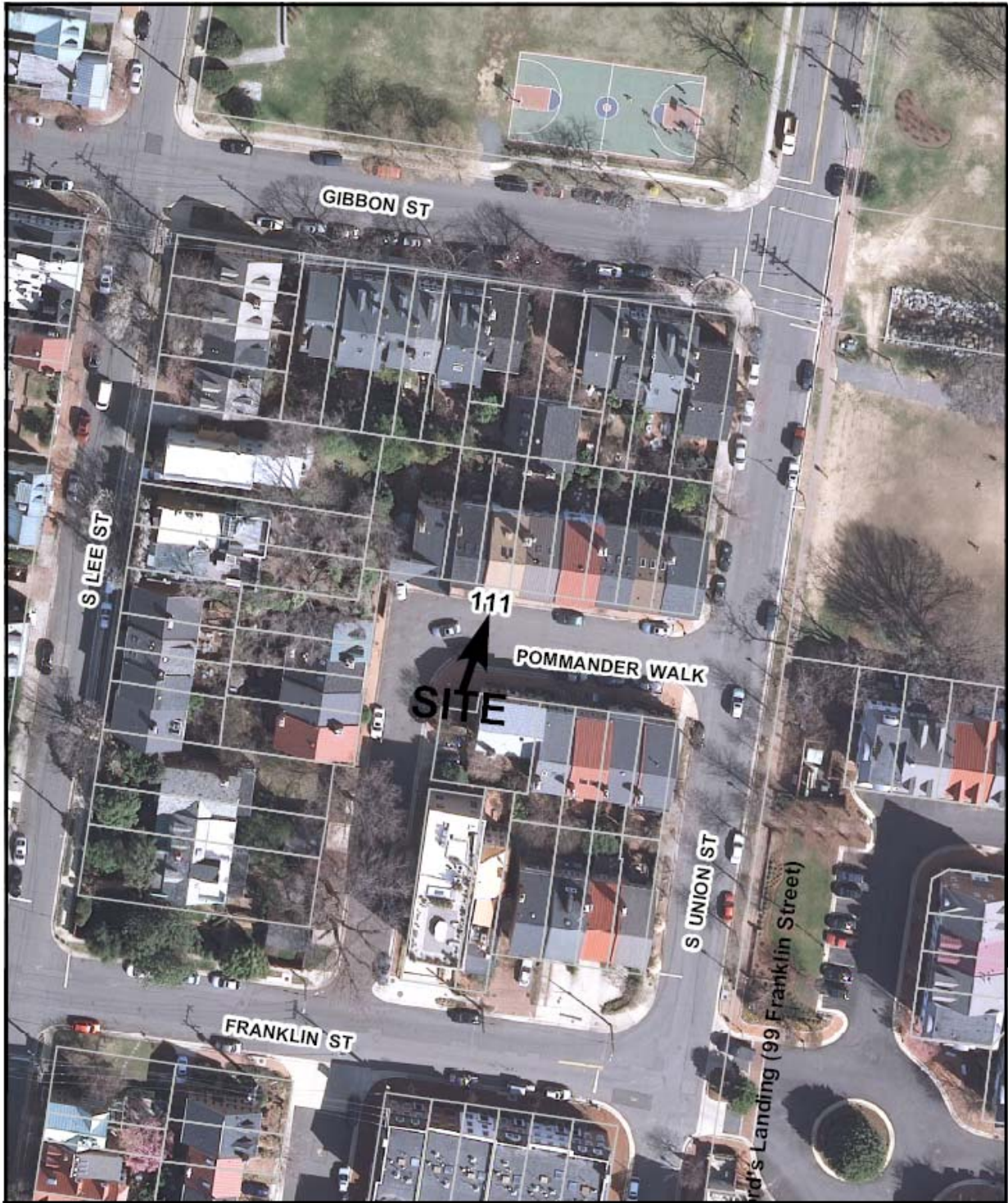
**ZONE:** RM/Residential

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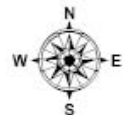
**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

**\*\*EXPIRATION OF APPROVALS NOTE:** In accordance with Sections 10-106(B) and 10-206(B) of the Zoning Ordinance, any official Board of Architectural Review approval will expire 12 months from the date of final approval if the work is not commenced and diligently and substantially pursued by the end of that 12-month period.

**\*\*BUILDING PERMIT NOTE:** Most projects approved by the Board of Architectural Review require the issuance of one or more construction permits by Building and Fire Code Administration (including signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Administration, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-746-4200 for further information.



**BAR CASE #2010-0316**



## **I. ISSUE**

The applicant is requesting after-the-fact approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for a painted fiberglass door at 111 Pommader Walk Street. The six panel, field painted fiberglass door has glazing in the two upper panels. The applicant has stated that the past two wood doors installed by the applicant have warped and cracked due to the southern exposure of the townhouse. The smooth fiberglass door was manufactured by Therma-Tru.

## **II. HISTORY**

111 Pommader Walk Street is a three-story, three-bay brick townhouse that was constructed in 1971 as part of the Pommader Square subdivision. The project was approved in concept by the Board on March 31, 1971 and final details were approved on May 21, 1971. The architect for the subdivision was Henry S. Sliwka, AIA of Springfield, Virginia.

Staff did not locate any previous BAR approvals for the subject property; however, the Board did approve a new four panel wood door for the applicant's neighbor at 113 Pommader Walk Street (BAR CASE #2002-0234, September 18, 2002).

## **III. ANALYSIS**

The proposed alterations comply with Zoning Ordinance requirements.

As the *Design Guidelines* note, exterior doors are a prominent visual detail of the main façade of a building; therefore, they should complement the architecture of the building, not detract from it. While the *Guidelines* do not address the use of synthetic or composite materials for entrance doors, they do discourage the use of flush or paneled metal doors.

As the Board is aware, a roof materials policy and a windows policy were adopted at the October 27, 2010 hearing to help clarify and streamline the Certificate of Appropriateness and Administrative Approval process and to supplement the existing *Design Guidelines*. Staff expects to bring forward an additional policy at the beginning of next year which incorporates some of the small, but common, alterations in the historic districts, such as front doors constructed of synthetic materials.

The Board has maintained in the past that a front door is regularly used by residents and their guests and should be constructed of natural materials because this tactile quality is important in a historic district – even on modern buildings. However, Staff conducted a site visit to the property and found the smooth fiberglass door to be nearly indistinguishable from a field painted wood door. Although Staff has been told that there are a number of other townhomes in this immediate area that have fiberglass doors, they are visually difficult to locate when they have been field painted. Even the “stained” woodgrain fiberglass doors now promoted by some manufacturers are difficult to distinguish in the field, although these would not be recommended by Staff because stained wood doors were not historically common until clear finishes that could withstand weather were invented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From what research Staff has done thus far, high-quality fiberglass doors can be molded to have the same crisp lines and panels as wood doors, yet have greater lifespan and increased thermal efficiency. Because they are filled with foam, they have a density and sound very similar to wood when one knocks on them. Staff also notes that high quality versions of these doors are not inexpensive and should be more durable than doors constructed of modern, fast growth

wood.

However, Staff has found that the use of glazing within fiberglass doors is less convincing due to the fact that the trim piece necessary to frame the thicker insulating glass is unusually large and out of character with historic wood doors. In addition, the leaded and stained glass panels offered by manufacturers are often inappropriate to the architectural style of the door or the dwelling. Staff will continue to research the topic of fiberglass doors and may ultimately recommend that the Board adopt a policy which allows for the installation of high-quality fiberglass doors, which have no glazing and are field painted, although **only** for buildings post-dating 1965, when fiberglass doors became commercially available in the U.S.

Given the age of the building and the variety of door styles and materials within the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Pommander Walk development, Staff believes the proposed 6-panel, Colonial Revival style door is high quality and compatible with the other townhouses in the development. A site visit to the development reveals a significant variety of door styles (4-panel, 6-panel, imitation leaded glass), only a few of which were approved by the Board. Furthermore, the Board has already approved the use of synthetic materials within the development when they approved an AZEK door surround at 105 Pommander Walk Street in 2006 (BAR Case #2006-0295).

**STAFF**

Stephanie Sample, Historic Preservation Planner, Planning & Zoning  
Al Cox, FAIA, Historic Preservation Manager, Planning & Zoning

IV. IMAGES



Figure 1: Fiberglass door at 111 Pommander Walk Street



Figure 2: Photos of other six panel doors in the historic district.