

Docket Item # 14 & 15  
BAR CASE # 2009-0301 &  
2010-0011

BAR Meeting  
December 1, 2010

**ISSUE:** Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate & Addition

**APPLICANT:** S. Lee & Debra Parker by Lewis & Associates, LTD

**LOCATION:** 626 South Lee Street

**ZONE:** RM/Residential

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends deferral of the Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate and the Certificate of Appropriateness for restudy of the architectural details.



**BAR CASE #2009-0301  
#2010-0011**

A compass rose is located in the bottom right corner of the text box, showing cardinal directions: North (N), South (S), East (E), and West (W).

**Note:** Staff coupled the reports for BAR #2010-0011 (Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate) and BAR #2009-0301 (Certificate of Appropriateness) for clarity and brevity. This item requires a roll call vote.

### **I. ISSUE:**

The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish and a Certificate of Appropriateness for the construction of a new front entrance, balconies, dormers and renovations at 626 South Lee Street, as listed below and described in the attached drawings.

#### Demolition

The application for demolition describes the following scope of work:

1. Demolition of existing screens and doors
2. Demolition of 2<sup>nd</sup> story windows & wall below windows
3. Demolition of 1<sup>st</sup> floor shed roof
4. Demolition of existing dormers & portion of gable roof
5. Demolitions of portions of 3<sup>rd</sup> floor siding & skylight

#### Addition and Alterations

The application for alteration describes the following scope of work:

1. Brick & wrought iron fence
2. New Windows & front door
3. New Balcony & doors
4. New dormer
5. New balconies & stairs
6. New 3<sup>rd</sup> story door & window alterations

### **II. HISTORY:**

The townhouse at 626 South Lee Street is the center unit of three attached dwellings constructed between 1941 and 1958 according to the Sanborn Insurance maps and ca **1948** according to the City's real estate records. BAR files indicate that approval, with stipulation, was granted to erect a freestanding garage at the rear of the lot on 4/14/65. Staff can find no permits or Board approvals for the Art Deco style front fence or for replacement of the windows on this property. The 8" high masonry planters are in the public right-of-way and require approval of an encroachment ordinance from City Council.

The three, 2 ½ story red brick townhomes with slate roofs are designed as a unified composition in the Colonial Revival style. The dwellings flanking the subject property at 626 S. Lee are more formally composed, with a front facing gable tympanum and heavy entablature. The unit at 626 S. Lee is recessed in plan behind the street façade of the other two townhomes and the façade design is much simpler and less formal, acting as a stylistic hyphen between its neighbors. The topography falls significantly from Lee Street down to Pommander Walk toward the east and the entry level of these homes are several feet below Lee Street, set well back from the sidewalk and screened behind dense evergreen landscaping. The rear of the property has a walk-out basement and is four stories tall.

#### **IV. ANALYSIS:**

Staff has no objection to the proposed demolition.

#### **Permit to Demolish**

In considering a Permit to Demolish, 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?

In the opinion of Staff, while this mid-20<sup>th</sup> century townhouse is a successful background building and compatible with nearby historic structures, it is without individual historical interest or uncommon architectural merit and none of the criteria for demolition and encapsulation are met and the Permit to Demolish should be granted.

#### **Alterations**

The proposed alterations to the townhouse comply with the RM zone as defined in the City's Zoning Ordinance. However, the applicant also requested a second floor addition to the existing garage, located on the rear property line. The garage is legal by variance as to the required rear yard setback but the applicant must request a variance to enlarge the existing garage by constructing the second story and dormers. Review of alterations to the garage is, therefore, not a part of this BAR application, pending review by the BZA.

Staff met several times with the applicant's original architect in early 2010 and expressed concerns about proposed alterations to the dormers and the architectural detailing which mixed high-style and vernacular elements. The present architect has submitted the same designs and Staff continues to have the same reservations. Staff has no objections to the proposed alterations, in concept, but believes they are not appropriately detailed for this townhouse in this location.

#### **Entrance and Front Facade**

The existing front entrance to 626 S. Lee Street is through a one story, shed-roof screened porch. The applicant proposes to replace the screen porch with double hung painted wood windows and a French door flanked by fluted pilasters. The existing copper shed roof over the entry porch

will be replaced with a second floor deck with a simple metal railing and the windows replaced with French doors. The space between the two existing hip roof dormers will be filled in with a large, shed roof clad in matching slate. A new stair to the basement will be added adjacent to the main entrance to the dwelling and two 8" tall masonry planters are proposed in the public right-of-way adjacent to the sidewalk.

Staff believes that the proposed alterations to the front porch and dormer are architecturally inappropriate for this dwelling and are incompatible with the formal character of the adjacent houses. It is highly unusual to have the main entrance of a three story brick and slate roof Colonial Revival style townhouse in Alexandria via what appears to be an enclosed, side utility porch. For instance, even the light fixture shown above the door is characteristic of a utility fixture and not a Colonial Revival style entrance. The informal, asymmetrical layout of the first floor façade contrasts strongly with the traditional symmetry of the existing windows and dormers above. The fluted pilasters shown on either side of the glassed-in porch lack capitals and bases and do not continue to the south end of the porch, leaving the beam visually unsupported. Staff suggests that the design of the first floor be symmetrical in a Colonial Revival style reflecting the upper floors of this house and that it be either be a columned porch filled with windows across its entire width or a brick first floor façade with pilasters and a Georgian style doorway flanked by punched windows. The part glass and part brick proposal with randomly applied pilasters is neither fish nor fowl and is not a traditional Alexandria street facade. The new porch railing at the second floor should then reflect the architectural order of the first floor using a Neo-Classical vocabulary.

The newels, or plinths, of the second floor porch railing would normally be aligned over columns below and the width would be subdivided into two or three bays with turned balusters between. The proposed utilitarian iron rail without these intermediate visual supports is insubstantial and lacks the visual weight of the main body of the house. It is also unusual to have French doors on the front elevation of an Alexandria townhouse. These less formal doors are more common on rear facades or sunrooms.

The proposed basement entry stair is also something which is more commonly associated with a rear, or service, elevation. Where they do exist on the front, they are smaller and more typically used on vernacular dwellings to enter a raised basement. This basement level of this dwelling is easily accessed at grade in the rear and Staff does not believe access to the basement from Lee Street is worth the loss of garden space or the adverse architectural impact on the main entrance to the house.

Although Staff can find no BAR approval or building permits for the existing brick and iron fence and gate at the front property line, Staff has no objection to matching this design along the north and south sides of the garden. However, the proposed 8" tall brick planters along the sidewalk are in the public right of way and would require approval of an encroachment ordinance by City Council. Staff sees no aesthetic or public benefit in removing the attractive existing, grade level planting area to construct masonry planters and opposes this alteration.

Finally, the Board has generally opposed any type of shed roof dormers on Colonial Revival style buildings because they are stylistically inappropriate. The existing dormers are well proportioned and detailed and would not have the same handsome appearance if the infill were constructed. The architect has indicated that the existing dormers would have to be demolished

and rebuilt to construct the new roof structure. If the infill is approved and the dormers are demolished, staff recommends that the existing dormer detailing be matched exactly. Where large dormers have been constructed on the street façade of a building in the past, the Board has almost always later agreed that they have not been visually successful and said that several past examples farther south on Lee Street should not be repeated. In this case, there is a significant amount of space available above the existing flat roof on the east side of the house, facing the Potomac River and Staff believes that it may be possible to expand a third floor addition in this direction.

Staff, therefore, recommends a restudy of the front elevation to:

1. Eliminate the basement stairs;
2. Create a more symmetrical and formal Colonial Revival style front façade;
3. Leave the existing front dormers and slate roof in place; and
4. Push the mass of the third floor addition toward the east (rear).

### **Rear (East) Elevation**

The far less formal rear elevation is difficult to see behind the garage and existing trees, though it would be much more visible from Franklin St. and Pommander Walk in the future if the trees were to die. Nevertheless, it is historically common for the rear elevation to use less expensive materials and to be more irregular than the front. Staff has no objection to metal railings on the suburban style decks at the first floor or the fourth floor roof deck, as they are minimally visible. However, like the railings on the front elevation, these railings still need more visually substantial and architecturally integrated corner and intermediate posts. As noted above, Staff believes that it would be more appropriate to enclose a portion of the existing flat roof area on the top floor than to expand toward Lee Street. This is a common way to enlarge attic rooms and several similar applications have recently been approved nearby.

Staff recommends deferral of the Permit to Demolish/Encapsulate and the Certificate of Appropriateness for restudy of the architectural details described above.

### **STAFF:**

Al Cox, FAIA, Historic Preservation Manager

#### **IV. 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 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the 2006 edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-6 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-7 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-8 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-9 A wall location plat prepared by a land surveyor is required to be submitted to this office prior to requesting any framing inspection.
- C-10 A Certificate of occupancy shall be obtained prior to any occupancy of the building or portion thereof, in accordance with USBC 116.1.

**Historic Alexandria**

No comments received.

**Alexandria Archaeology**

**Finding**

Research has indicated that his property was within an African American neighborhood from 1870 to 1910. The property therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into domestic activities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, perhaps related to African Americans.

**Recommendations**

The following statements 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 Sheeting and Shoring) so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirements.

- a. 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.
- b. The applicant/developer shall not allow any metal detection or artifact collection to be conducted on the property, unless authorized by Alexandria Archaeology.

**Transportation and Environmental Services**

- R1. The building permit must be approved and issued prior to the issuance of any permit for demolition. (T&ES)

**Recommendations**

- R1. The building permit plans shall comply with requirements of City Code Section 5-6-224 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)
- R6. 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)
- R7. The building permit must be approved and issued prior to the issuance of any permit for demolition. (T&ES)



- R8. Construction of a new driveway entrance, or widening of an existing driveway entrance, requires separate application to; and approval from, the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services. (T&ES)

### **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 5-6-224 requires that a grading plan be submitted to and approved by T&ES prior to the issuance of building permits for improvements involving:
1. the construction of a new home;
  2. construction of an addition to an existing home where either:
    - a. the addition exceeds the area of the existing building footprint by 100% or more;
    - b. or, the construction of the addition results in less than 50% of the existing first floor exterior walls, in their entirety, remaining;
  3. changes to existing grade elevation of 1-foot or greater;
  4. changes to existing drainage patterns;
  5. land disturbance of 2,500 square feet or greater.

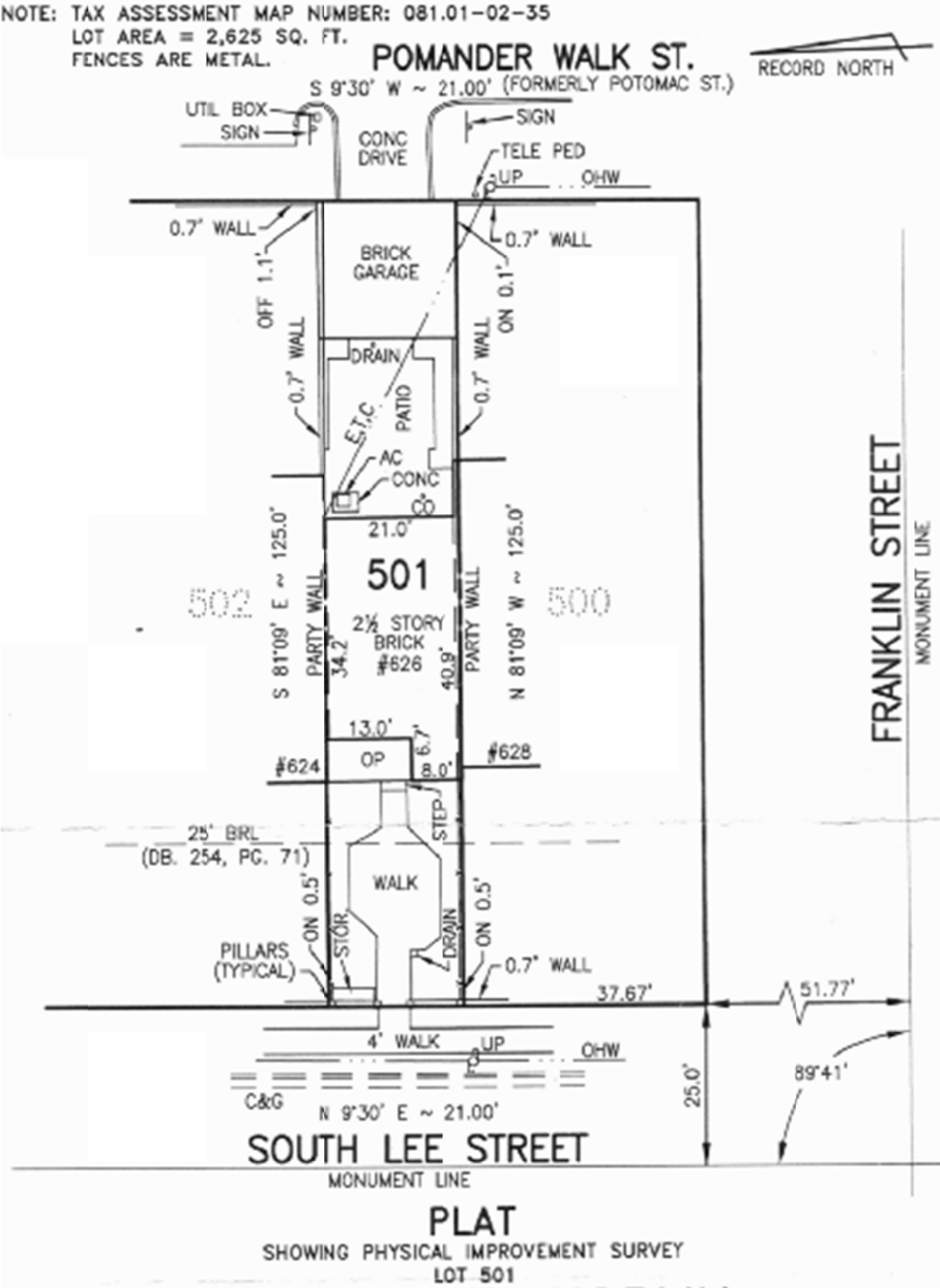
Questions regarding the processing of grading plans should be directed to the T&ES Site Plan Coordinator at (703) 746-4064. Memorandum to Industry No. 02-08 was issued on April 28, 2008 and can be viewed online via the following link.

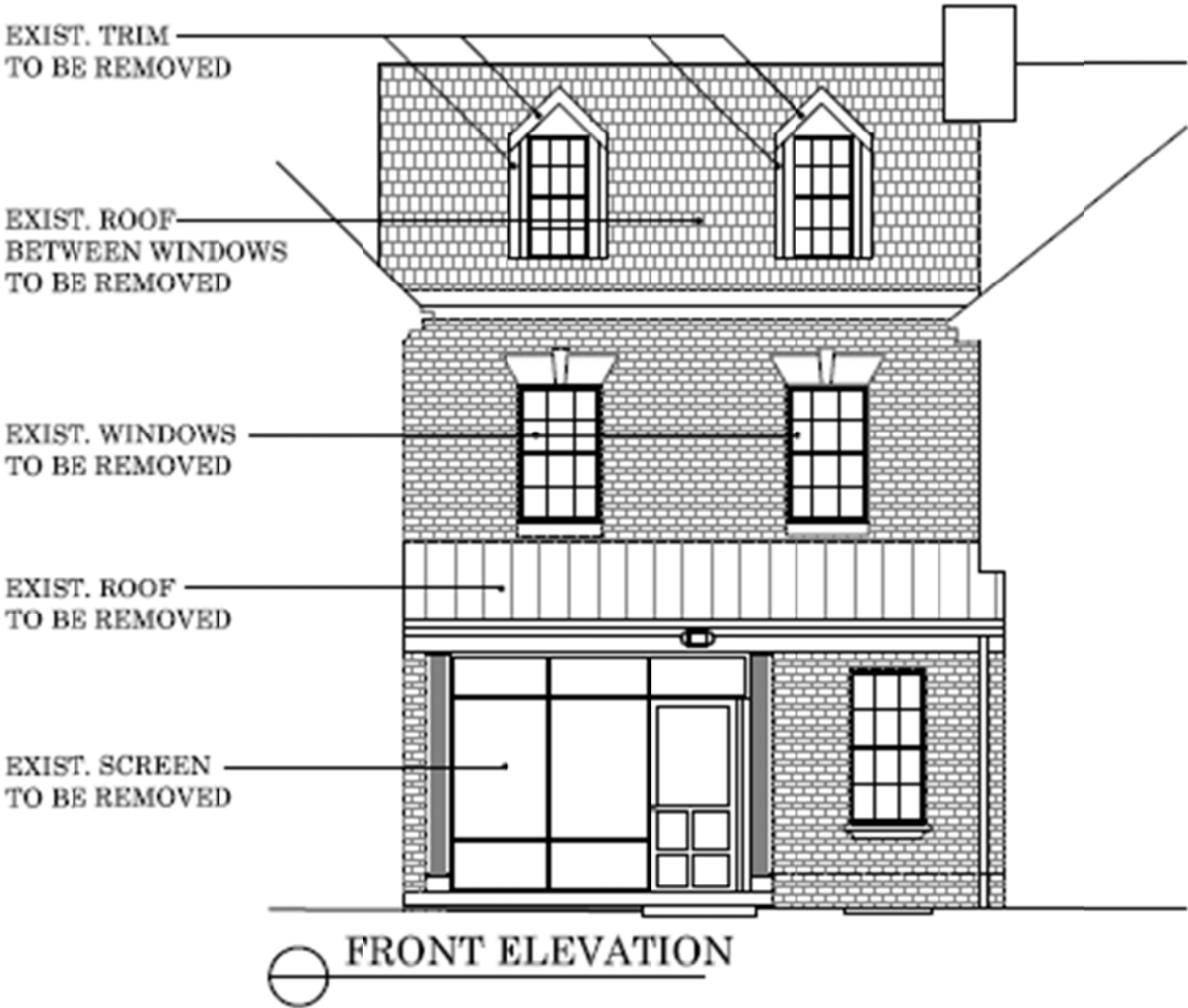
**<http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/tes/info/gradingPlanRequirements.pdf>**

### **City Code Requirements**

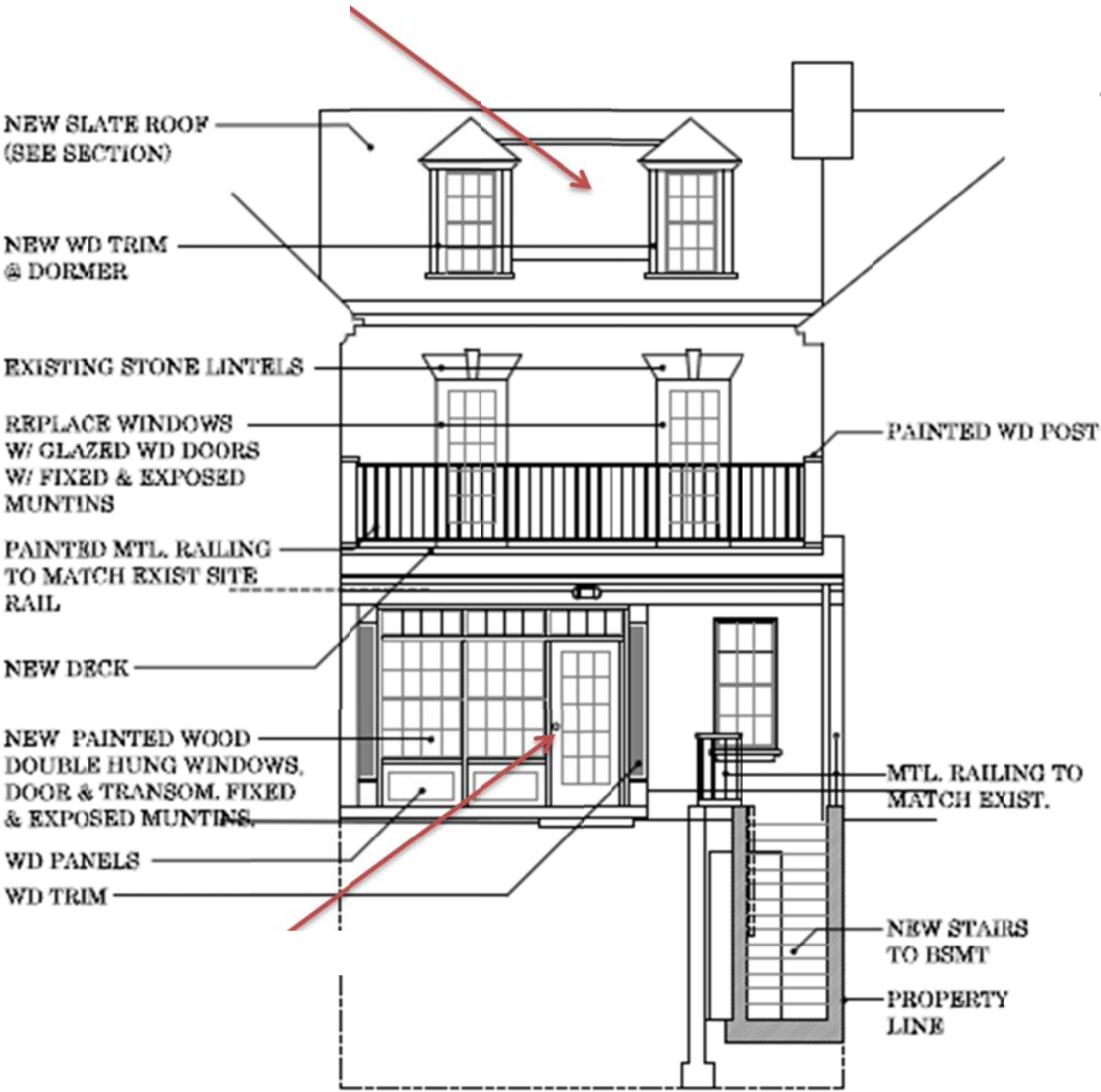
- C-1 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Solid Waste Control, Title 5, Chapter 1, which sets forth the requirements for the recycling of materials (Sec. 5-1-99). (T&ES)
- C-2 The applicant shall comply with the City of Alexandria's Noise Control Code, Title 11, Chapter 5, which sets the maximum permissible noise level as measured at the property line. (T&ES)
- C-3 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.5-6-224) (T&ES)
- C-4 All secondary utilities serving this site shall be placed underground. (Sec. 5-3-3) (T&ES)
- C-5 Pay sanitary sewer tap fee prior to release of Grading Plan. (Sec. 5-6-25) (T&ES)
- C-6 Any work within the right-of-way, to include public alleys, requires a separate permit from T&ES. (Sec. 5-2) (T&ES)

**V. IMAGES**



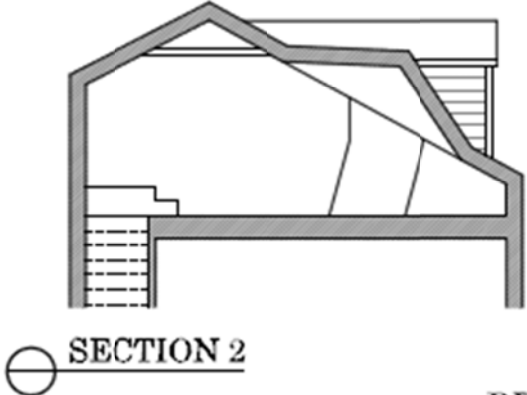
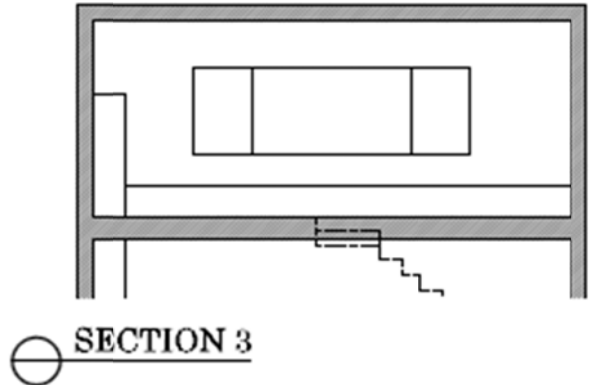
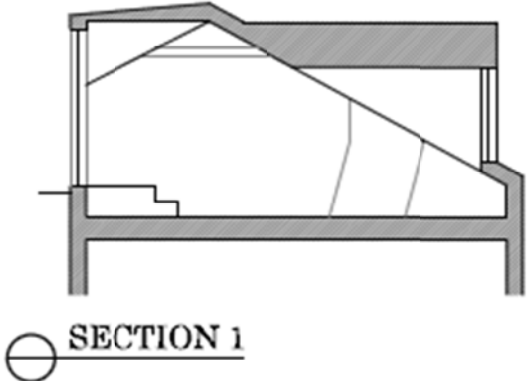
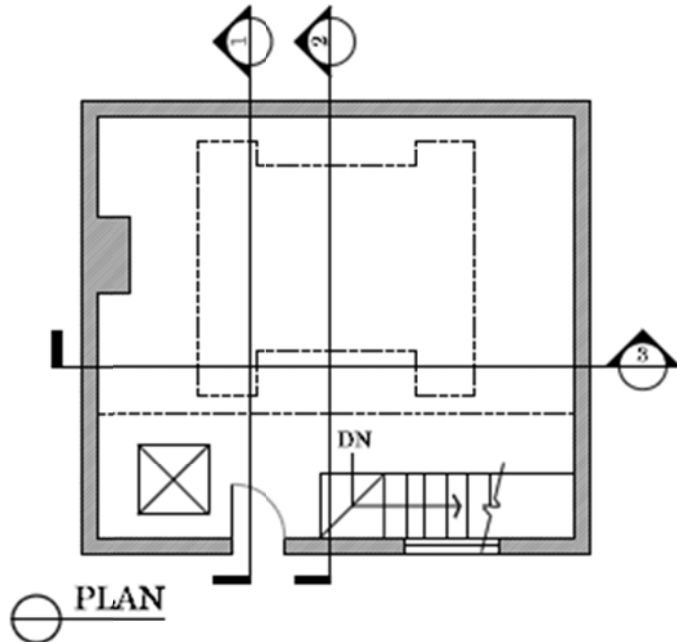


Existing Front Elevation

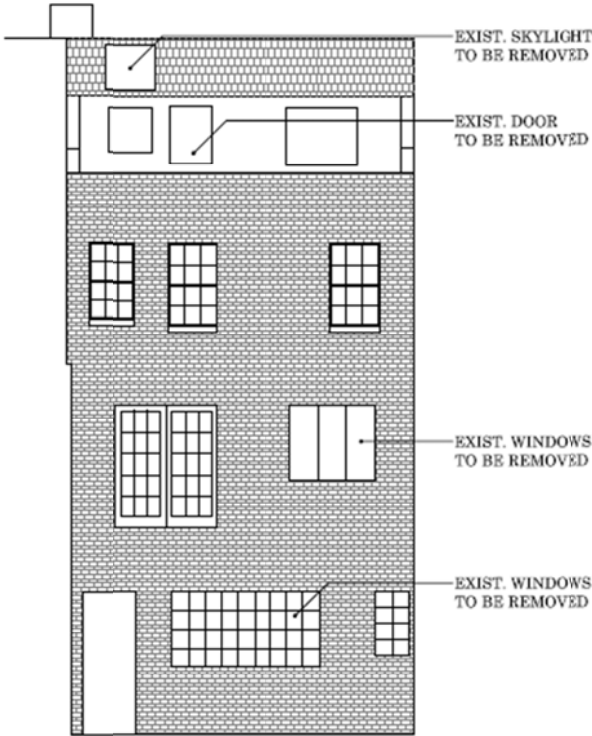


FRONT ELEVATION

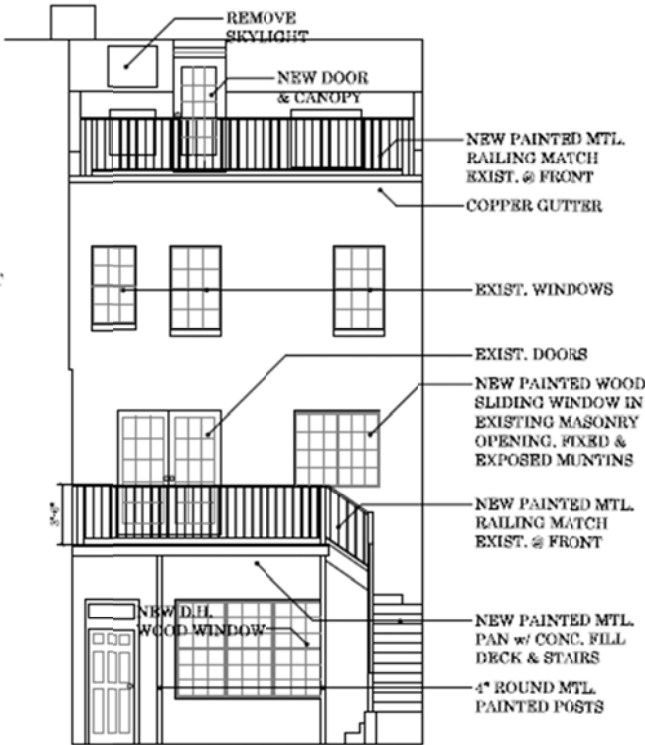
PROPOSED ELEVATIONS



**PROPOSED ATTIC SHOWING FRONT DORMER INFILL AND NEW REAR SHED DORMER AT DOOR**

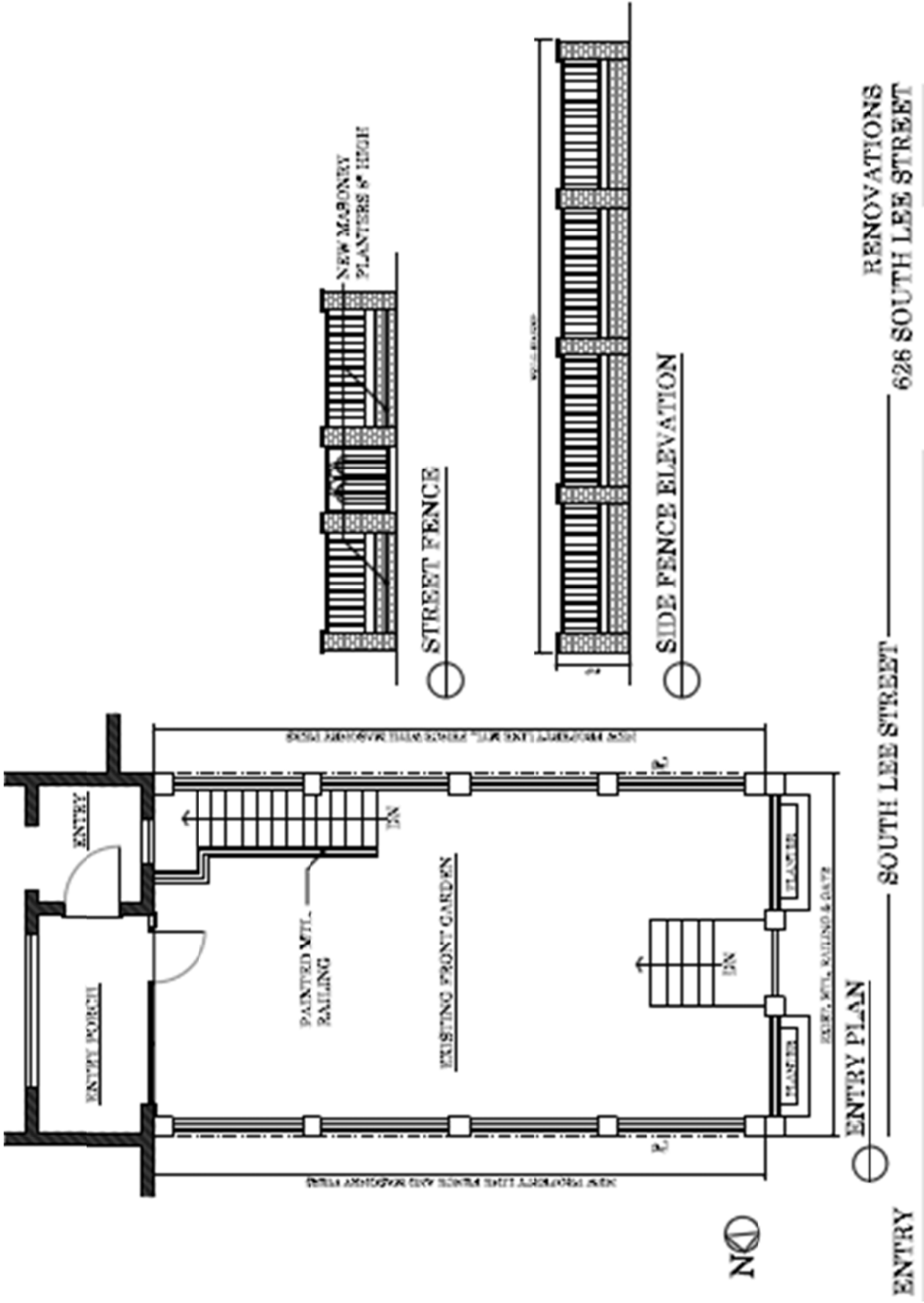


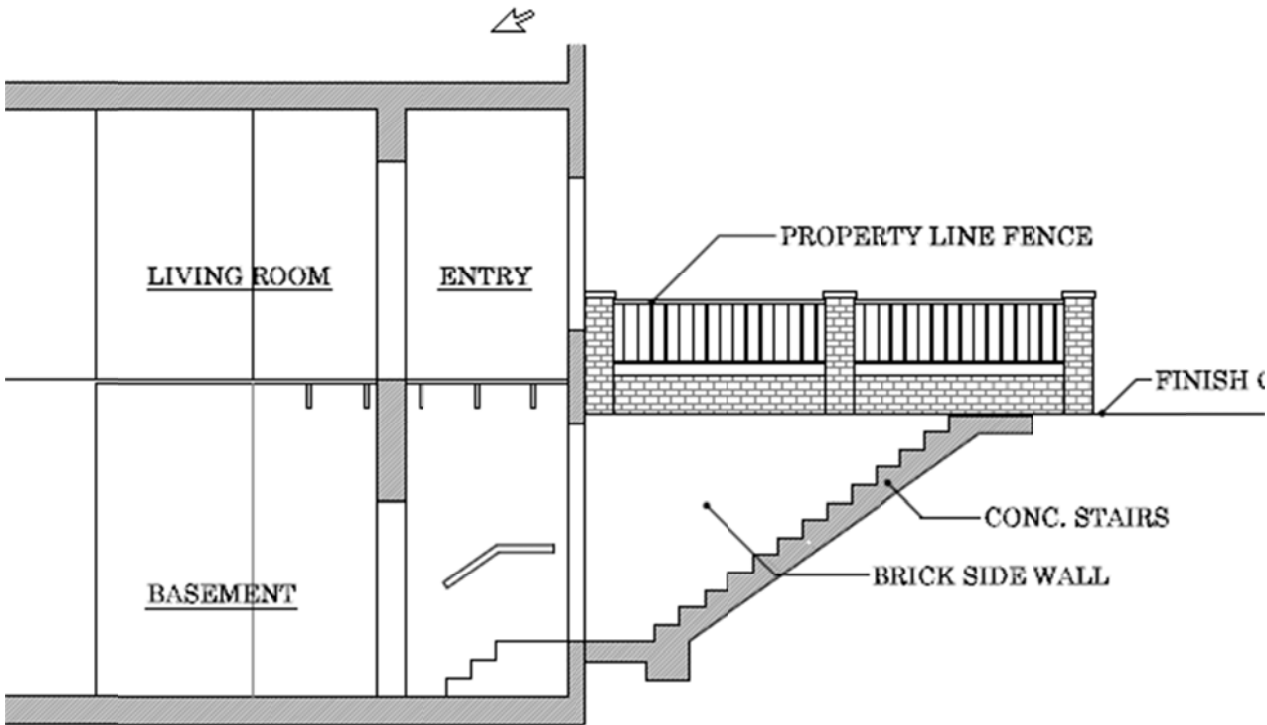
REAR ELEVATION



REAR ELEVATION

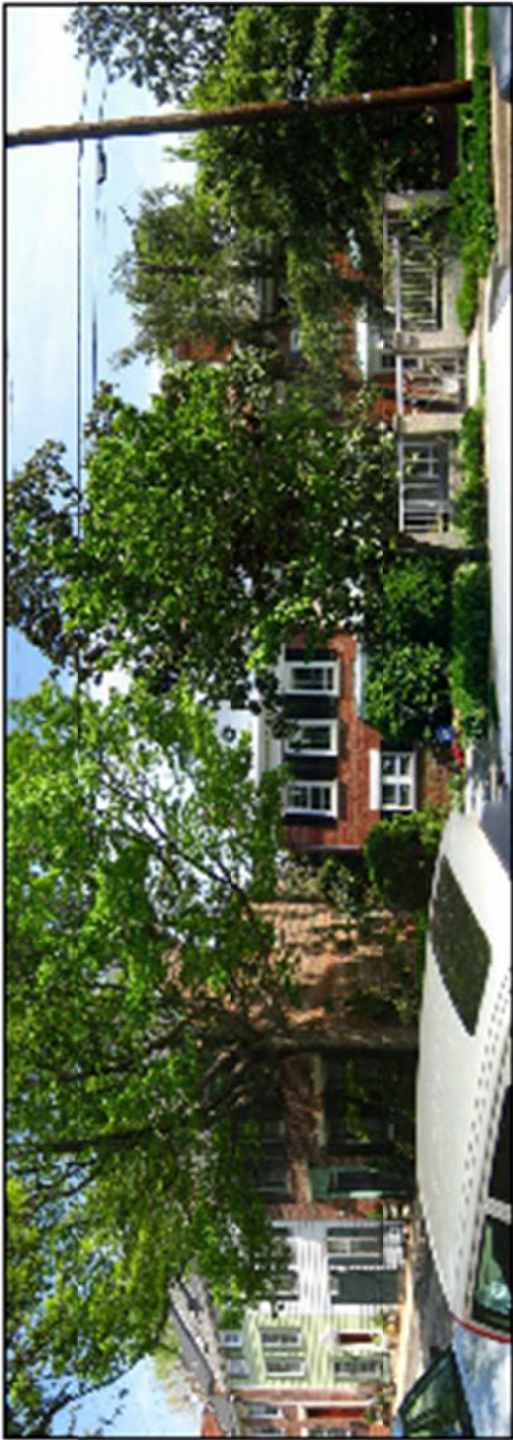
RENOVATIONS





○ BASEMENT SECTION





#28 SOUTH LEE



#30 SOUTH LEE

RENOVATIONS  
626 SOUTH LEE STREET

LOKLE & ASSOCIATED LTD., ARCHITECTS

EXISTING PHOTOS- EXTERIOR FRONT

NO SCALE  
DATE 10/1/10