

Docket Item #5
BAR CASE #2004-0141

BAR Meeting
July 28, 2004

ISSUE: After-the-fact fence and wall

APPLICANT: Deborah Frye

LOCATION: 716 North Patrick Street

ZONE: RB/Residential

****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 issuance 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 the Code Enforcement Bureau (including signs). The applicant is responsible for obtaining all necessary construction permits after receiving Board of Architectural Review approval. Contact Code Enforcement, Room 4200, City Hall, 703-838-4360 for further information.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That within 3 months from the date of this hearing the lattice is removed from the top of the south side brick wall; and,
2. That within 3 months from the date of this hearing the applicant return to the Board with a revised design for a more compatible front fence.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting an after-the-fact certificate of appropriateness for several alterations to the property at 716 North Patrick Street. A large two story frame house is located on the north side of the large lot. The entire lot is surrounded by fencing and/or walls. The current application concerns the brick wall on the south side of the property and the frame wall located approximately two-thirds of the way back from the front (Patrick Street) side of the property. These were recently rebuilt in new materials, with a new appearance and, as best Staff can determine, at a greater height than the structures they replaced.

South side wall:

This wall is visible in a through-the-block view from Wythe Street and minimally from Patrick Street. It consists of a brick wall topped by a panel of wood lattice. According to the applicant, the brick wall is 7' high and the diagonal pattern lattice panel is 3' high. The current wall replaced a wood fence resting on a brick retaining wall and topped with lattice. According to the applicant that construction was 13' in height.

Staff has no record of approval for any fence at this location, but notes that the 1995 hearing for the rear addition, the property owner described the north and south side fences as 6' high (September 13, 1995 BAR Minutes, Case BAR #95-28PG). In 2001, Planning and Zoning Staff investigated a complaint regarding alterations to the south side fence. That case was closed in April 2001, at which time, the zoning inspector described the fence as a 4' high wood fence topped with a 2' high lattice panel on a 2' brick retaining wall, for a total of 8' (COM2001-23, 4/11/2001). According to the applicant, the fence was damaged by Hurricane Isabel. On March 30, 2004, the applicant applied for a building permit to "repair/replace existing rear wall/fence using same materials, same footings, brick and frame" (BLD 2004-01037). Planning and Zoning Staff approved the building permit for "direct replacement and repair of existing wall, same size, location & materials only." On May 12, 2004, Planning and Zoning Staff received a complaint regarding the replacement structure (COM2004-00100). According to the complainant, the new wall differed from the previous fence in both height and material. The current application for after-the-fact alterations is a result of that complaint.

Front (Patrick Street) wall:

A frame wall approximately 9' in height extends from the south property line to the south wall of the house. The wall is approximately 36' or one-third of the way back from the front property line. A brick driveway leads from the front of the property to this wall. A set of brick pillars with an ironwork gate is located on either side of the drive, approximately 7' from the front of the property and well in front of the subject wall. The area between the metal gate and the frame

wall is used for parking. When not obscured by a vehicle, the frame wall is highly visible. It is clad in “wood composition” siding and has a cornice at the top. A Victorian style “wood-grained” door with curved panels, an oval leaded glass window and brass decorative plate reading “Welcome” is located in the wall facing Patrick Street.

There is no record of a building permit for the current front wall which came to the attention of Staff when investigating the complaint for the new south side wall. The applicant states that the current front wall was constructed in 2001, replacing pre-existing brick pillars and wooden gate. Photographs and drawings from 1995 indicate that there were brick pillars at or near the location of the wall, but do not indicate the presence of a gate of any sort. The pillars appeared to be approximately 6' high.

The brick wall and wood fence on the north side of the house and extending along the north property line appears to be unchanged from at least 1995 and is not included in the current case. Similarly, the brick pillars at the front of the property have been extant from at least 1991. The addition of the black metal gates attached to the pillars was approved by the Board in that year (BAR Case #91-30PG, 10/23/1991). Thus the front pillars and metal gate are also not part of the current application.

II. HISTORY:

The two story, detached frame house at 716 North Patrick Street appears to have been constructed circa 1900. With its front gable form and full front porch, the house is more typical of suburban development of the period than of the urban rowhouse form that was typically built in the Parker-Gray District at this time. However, when built, it was located at the outer limits of development. The area around 716 North Patrick Street was not included in Sanborn Mapping until 1912. The house appears on the 1912 map. Between 1921 and 1941, it was expanded with a small one story addition on the south side. More recently, in 1991, the Board approved a garage at the rear of the property (BAR Case #91-30, 10/23/1991). In 1995, the Board approved a large rear addition (BAR Case #95-27PG, 9/13/1995 and BAR Case #95-28PG, 9/27/1995). The applicant has owned the property since 1990.

III. ANALYSIS:

Section 7-303(B)(3) of the zoning ordinance permits any fences in a required yard to be either open or closed fences as long as they are no greater than 6 feet in height. Section 7-200(C) of the zoning ordinance permits the BAR to modify or waive the fence requirements if the Board finds that a proposed fence will be architecturally appropriate and consistent with the character of the district. Therefore, as the existing south side and front walls are over 6' in height, they require Board approval for the height as well as the appearance.

Staff believes both walls are inconsistent with the character of the Parker-Gray District and the house itself. The district has historically been characterized by modest, vernacular buildings and informal landscaping. The fences tend to be wood, board-on-board fences or lower and open picket type fences. Brick walls historically have been used only for the most high style and prominent buildings in town. The frame wall at the front of the house is highly unusual in appearance. The height and use of horizontal siding, cornice and door make it appear to be an

appendage to the house. In addition, the ornate door and cornice are overly high style for the house and neighborhood. The overall effect of the house with its many walls, gates, fences and railings is inappropriately busy.

Moreover, both walls are excessively high, blocking light and air and creating an unfriendly atmosphere. Staff notes that historically many rear yards in Parker-Gray were separated by low fences of 4' or less, allowing open views through the block and, presumably, promoting communication between neighbors. While understanding that times have changed, Staff is troubled by the increasing propensity to wall off properties.

Given that the neighbor has apparently consented to the south side brick wall, based on documentation provided by the applicant, and that the wall is at some remove from the public right-of-way, Staff recommends that the wall remain but that the lattice be removed to bring it to a more reasonable height. On the other hand, Staff believes the front frame wall to be unacceptable. A simpler and lower wood or metal fence would be more compatible. The replacement fence should relate to an existing element on the house, such as the various railings, or in the yard, such as a simplified version of the front metal gates, so as not to introduce further visual clutter .

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Therefore, Staff recommends the following::

1. That within 3 months from the date of this hearing the lattice is removed from the top of the south side brick wall; and,
2. That within 3 months from the date of this hearing the applicant return to the Board with a revised design for a more compatible front fence.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

C-2 Construction permits are required for this project.

Historic Alexandria:

“Style of door does not seem appropriate. Style of gate/design does not seem appropriate.”