

Docket Item #7  
BAR CASE# 2004-0143

BAR Meeting  
July 28, 2004

**ISSUE:** Demolition/encapsulation

**APPLICANT:** Vanna So

**LOCATION:** 1204 Princess Street

**ZONE:** RB/Residential

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**\*\*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 deferral of the Permit to Demolish to study how the extent of demolition/capsulation can be reduced.

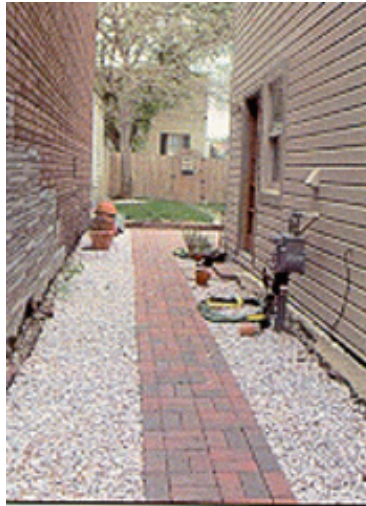
NOTE: This docket item requires a roll call vote.

**I. ISSUE:**

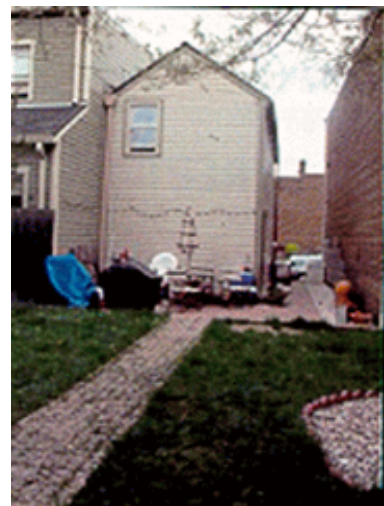
The applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish and Capsulate portions of the detached house at 1204 Princess Street. The areas to be demolished/capsulated include the entire rear wall, approximately the back half of the east side wall and approximately three-quarters of the existing gable roof. The proposed demolition/capsulation is to allow for the construction of a new two story addition on the rear and east side of the existing house.



**Figure 1** North elevation



**Figure 2** East elevation



**Figure 3** South elevation

**II. HISTORY:**

According to tax records, the 1½-story Italianate residence at 1204 Princess Street was erected in 1881 or 1882 possibly by the first owner, Benjamin Williams, a laborer. An inspection of the interior several years ago by BAR Staff indicated that the framing may have been older, possibly circa 1850, which suggests that the building was actually moved to its current location circa 1882. Based on map evidence, the front porch was added between 1921 and 1931. The house is unusual in that it has a false front which conceals its modest height and a front facing gable. This form can be seen in several other locations in the historic districts, but more typically on double houses with the gable spanning both units, as at 908 and 910 Princess Street. Even in the Parker Gray District, which is characterized by modest building stock, the house at 1204 Princess Street is unusual for its small size (809 square feet including the porch). Houses of similar or even lesser size were once much more prevalent in both the Parker Gray and Old and Historic Alexandria Districts, serving to house many on the lowest end of the economic scale, but as redevelopment occurred over time, they have largely disappeared.

The property has a somewhat complicated history with the Board of Architectural Review. At the March 25, 1999 hearing, the Board approved demolition of a one-story, 1960s concrete block rear addition and of the rear elevation of the main block of the building and deferred for restudy the proposal for alterations, a rear addition and garage (BAR Case #99-0038 & 0039).

Subsequently, at the April 28, 1999 hearing, the applicant proposed demolishing the rearmost 7' of the existing house and capsulating the west slope of the roof for an addition to the rear and side, but at the hearing asked for a deferral of both applications in order to propose complete demolition and the construction of a new house (BAR Case #99-0038 & 0039). At the May 26, 1999 hearing the Board approved demolition of the entire house, based on observations which suggested that there would be little historic fabric remaining once the house was rehabilitated (BAR Case #99-0077PG). On June 9, 1999, the Board deferred for restudy the plans for a new single family house on the lot (BAR Case #99-0078PG). On August 11, 1999, the Board approved a revised proposal for partial demolition and a new addition to the side and rear (BAR Case #99-0038PG and BAR Case #99-0039PG). The demolition and addition approved by the Board on August 11, 1999 is very similar to that which is now before the Board.

For reasons unknown to Staff, the applicant did not construct the addition which the Board had approved. Instead, the rear concrete block addition was removed and the house was renovated. BAR Staff gave administrative approval to the renovation on November 16, 1999. The building permit was issued on July 25, 2000 and the work completed on 8/1/2001 (BLD99-03393). The current owner purchased the building on July 23, 2003.

### **III. ANALYSIS:**

In considering a Permit to Demolish/Capsulate, the Board must consider the following criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, Sec. 10-205(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 and protect an historic place or area of historic interest in the city?
- (5) 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?
- (6) Would retention of the building or structure help maintain the scale and character of the neighborhood

In the opinion of Staff, criteria 1, 4 and 6 are met. The house at 1204 Princess Street is an unusual form, with gable end roof hidden by a parapet and is representative of the small scale worker's housing that was once much more common in the historic districts, and particularly in the Parker Gray District, but which has been lost over the years. The proposed

demolition/capsulation will be extensive, leaving only the front and a portion of the east side wall intact and exposed. Furthermore, the distinctive gable form of the roof will be lost to roof alterations made necessary by the addition of the flat roofed addition at the rear and side. Staff believes this extensive demolition is contrary to the Board's policy. According to the *Design Guidelines*:

It is the policy of the Boards that the absolute minimum demolition of an existing structure should take place. For example, in the case of an addition to the rear of a property, the Boards prefer that the amount of demolition be limited to that necessary to accommodate access to the addition rather than wholesale demolition and replacement of the rear facade. (Demolition of Existing Structures - Page 1)

The Guidelines also state that:

The Boards actively seek to retain the existing fabric of the historic districts and strongly discourage the demolition of any portion of an 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century structure. (Demolition of Existing Structures - Page 2)

Staff notes that while the Board previously approved similar demolition for this building, it did so with some reluctance. Nearly five years have passed since the prior approval and in that time, the rarity of the building type represented by 1204 Princess Street has only increased.

**IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Therefore, Staff recommends deferral of the Permit to Demolish to study how the extent of demolition/capsulation can be reduced.

## CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

### Code Enforcement:

C-1 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.

### Historic Alexandria:

“No comment.”

### Alexandria Archaeology:

There is low potential for significant archaeological resources to be present on this property. No archaeological action is required.