

Docket Item #7
BAR CASE #2003-0255

BAR Meeting
August 25, 2004

ISSUE: After-the-fact approval of a shed and fence

APPLICANT: David Armstrong

LOCATION: 401 North West 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 the following:

1. approval of the fence with the condition that it be painted or stained as soon as is possible; and,
2. approval of the shed with the condition that it is reduced in height so that it is not visible above the fence.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting a certificate of appropriateness for the existing frame gable-roofed storage shed. The property is located on the corner of North West and Queen Streets and the shed is located at the rear of the property on the Queen Street side. The shed measures 8' by 7' and is approximately 8' high at the peak of the gable. The shed walls are clad in wood and the trim is wood. The gable roof is clad in asphalt shingles. The east, north and south walls are without fenestration. The west facade, facing the rear of the house, has double doors with large strap hinges and a small four-light wood window with shutters and a window box. The shed is painted grey with white trim, matching the house.

The fence, located along the Queen Street (south) side of the property and along the rear (east) adjacent to the alley, is a 6' high board on board fence. It replaced a 6' high staggered board fence. The fence is not painted or stained.

401 West Street is located at the corner of West and Queen Streets and the fence and top of the shed are readily visible from Queen Street.

II. HISTORY:

The house at 401 North West Street is a pair with 403 North West Street. It is one of three pairs on North West Street (401 - 411 North West Street) and a pair around the corner on Princess Street (1315-1317 Princess Street) that appear to have constructed from the same plans and at the same time. The two story, three bay wide, frame houses feature front mansards and Italianate cornices and door surrounds. The building permit for 401-403 North West Street appears to have been lost, but the permits for the three other pairs were issued to W. H. Peck on September 1, 1909. The permit lists W. Leon Clark as the architect. In the first decade of the 20th century, Peck developed numerous similar houses in the immediate neighborhood and built and operated the frame grocery store on the southeast corner of Queen and Payne and the two story brick warehouse at 1210 Queen Street. Clark was a prolific Alexandria architect at the turn-of-the century and designed many other buildings for Peck.

The Board approved the addition of the rear porch at 401 North West Street on August 14, 1996 (BAR Case #96-188PG). More recently, the Board approved demolition and an addition at 403 North Payne Street (BAR Case #2003-0253 & 0254, 11/12/2003). In addition, the Board recommended approval of an after-the-fact shed at 319 North West Street at the last hearing (BAR Case #2004-0083, June 23, 2004). Staff notes that, unlike the shed at 401 North West Street, the shed at 319 North West Street is barely visible from the street and fully visible only from the end of a dead end alley.

III. ANALYSIS:

The applicant applied to the Board of Architectural Review for approval to erect a shed in October 2003. A review of the application by zoning Staff revealed that there was insufficient open space for the proposed shed. The applicant was notified and encouraged to work with zoning Staff to resolve the zoning issues. The applicant did not make application to the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) to request a variance for reduction in open space and in April 2004 Staff observed the shed and new fence being installed. The applicant then filed with BZA for after-the-fact approval of the variance. The RB residential zone requires a minimum of 800 square feet for each residential parcel. Prior to the erection of the shed, the property was substandard in complying open space with 763 square feet existing. With the shed, there is 634 square feet of open space. Staff recommended denial of the application. At the July 8, 2004 hearing, the BZA approved the request for variance.

Staff believes the replacement fence is acceptable, if painted or stained. It should be noted that direct replacement of a fence with a new fence of appropriate design, such as in this case, can be administratively approved by Staff, avoiding the BAR hearing. However, as the applicant erected the fence without requesting administrative approval, Board approval of the replacement fence is necessary.

On the other hand, Staff does not believe the shed is acceptable. Firstly, Staff does not on principle support variances for reduction in open space, believing that such approvals will over time lead to the erosion of the character of the district. Secondly, the shed is distinctly pre-fabricated, modern and suburban in character and thus unrelated to the architectural character of the house at 401 North West Street or the surrounding neighborhood. The *Design Guidelines* state that, "pre-fabricated late 20th century storage sheds and greenhouses are generally not appropriate in the historic district" (Accessory Structures - Page 3). Fortunately, the lower portion of the shed is blocked from view by the fence.

In conclusion, rather than requiring the removal of the shed, Staff recommends that the Board require that it to be reduced in height. This solution will restore the appearance of open space and eliminate the problem of the shed's inappropriate architectural character. This could be accomplished by simply reducing the height of the gable roofed shed or by changing the roof to a "shed" roof with a minimal slope.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the following:

1. approval of the fence with the condition that it be painted or stained as soon as is possible; and,
2. approval of the shed with the condition that it is reduced in height so that it is not visible above the fence.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

C-1 All exterior walls within 3 feet from an interior property line shall have a fire resistance rating of 1 hour, from both sides, with no openings permitted within the wall. As an alternative, a 2 hour fire wall may be provided.”

C-2 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).

Historic Alexandria:

“Please review guidelines for appropriate shed construction. I am concerned that this structure not look too ‘rustic’ or farm like.”