

Docket Item #s 2 & 3
BAR CASE #s 2004-0226
2004-0227

BAR Meeting
October 27, 2004

ISSUE: HVAC & waiver of rooftop screening

APPLICANT: Steve Collins

LOCATION: 417 North Fayette 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 the ductwork is removed from the roof; or
- 2) That a simple wood railing be installed across the front and along a portion of the sides to screen the rooftop equipment, with the design of the railing to be approved by Staff;
- 3) That the applicant complete one or the other of the above options within 3 months of this hearing.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the installation of a HVAC unit and ductwork (including a run to the front and a run to the south side) on the rooftop of the two story brick house. The roof on the freestanding house is flat with a minimal parapet at the front and sides. The HVAC unit is located near the center of the roof but the ductwork extends nearly to the edge of the roof on the front and south sides.

The applicant is also requesting a waiver of the requirement for rooftop screening.

II. HISTORY:

The freestanding two story Colonial Revival-style brick dwelling at 417 North Fayette Street was the first house built on this blockface. A building permit for its construction was issued in November 1940 to Dr. H.S. Chissell (Building Permit No.2772). Designed by local architect, R.W. Farrell and built by Norman B. Simpson, the building was originally constructed to serve as both a dwelling and an office for Dr. Chissell at a cost of approximately \$6250. The office was located in the basement and was accessed by an exterior stairwell at the front of the building.

In 2001, the Board approved a number of alterations to the house including new windows and new front and side porticos. The rooftop alterations proposed at that time included a new HVAC unit in the same general location as the existing and a 2 ½' wood railing at the rear of the roof enclosing a roof deck. No ductwork was shown (BAR Case # 2001-145, 6/27/2001). A perspective drawing submitted with the 2001 application and labeled, "the purpose of this sheet is to show the exposure of roof top appurtenances (railing, AC unit) to the street," indicated that the HVAC equipment would not be visible at all. Based on that information, the Board approved the alterations and waiver of screening. Subsequently, BAR Staff approved the mechanical permit for the HVAC installation, noting that per the BAR of 6/27/2001, the equipment was "not to be visible from the public right of way" (MEC 2001-02819, 10/3/2001).

As built, the rooftop railing was omitted and ductwork was installed in addition to the HVAC unit. The discrepancy between the approvals and the installation was brought to the attention of BAR Staff by Code Enforcement Staff at the end of this past summer. Mr. Collins, the owner in 2001 and the applicant for this case sold the property on September 9, 2004. It is Staff's understanding that he has agreed with the new owner to take responsibility for the outstanding BAR issues.

III. ANALYSIS

Section 6-403(B)(1) of the zoning ordinance requires that rooftop mechanical appurtenances be screened with architectural materials or features of the same type of quality used on the exterior walls of the building. Section 6-403(B)(3) of the zoning ordinance allows the Board to waive the screening requirement if the Board finds the requirement to be architecturally inappropriate.

Staff regrets that the original plans were not followed in the installation of the HVAC system. The addition of ductwork on the flat rooftop so close to the edge of the freestanding house is unfortunate and appears to have been done with no thought to its impact on the exterior appearance of the house. This is clearly contrary to the *Design Guidelines* which state:

- HVAC should be located in a visually inconspicuous area of a building.
- HVAC equipment which is prominently visible from a public way is strongly discouraged.
- HVAC equipment which must be located in the front or in a visually prominent area of a building should be screened.
- Rooftop HVAC equipment is generally discouraged on small scale structures and the front roofs of buildings because they create visual disruption of the historic streetscape and are difficult to screen effectively.
- HVAC equipment should not disrupt the architectural character of a structure. (HVAC Equipment - Page 3).

Clearly the present condition is contrary to the guidelines and should be addressed. Staff would prefer that the ductwork be relocated to the interior of the house, if at all possible. If not possible, Staff believes the ductwork should be screened with a simple wood railing, similar to that approved for the rear of the house in 2001. The railing should extend across the front of the roof and turn back along the sides. The point at which the side parapets step down, approximately 12' back from the front, would be a logical end point for the railing on the sides.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

- 1) That the ductwork is removed from the roof; or
- 2) That a simple wood railing be installed across the front and along a portion of the sides to screen the rooftop equipment, with the design of the railing to be approved by Staff;
- 3) That the applicant complete either of the above options within 3 months of this hearing.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 Structural calculations are required to verify the ability of the existing roof to support the additional weight of the HVAC unit.
- C-2 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-3 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-4 Construction permits are required for this project. Plans shall accompany the permit application that fully detail the construction as well as layouts and schematics of the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems.

Office of Historic Alexandria:

“No comment.”