

Docket Item #7
BAR CASE # 2005-0124

BAR Meeting
June 22, 2005

ISSUE: Decorative Embellishment of principal entry

APPLICANT: Denice Bracey

LOCATION: 1204 Oronoco St.

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, for the pilasters and colors as presented, with condition that these elements be constructed of wood.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations and embellishment of the principal entry of the brick house located at 1204 Oronoco St.

The applicant has proposed to add entablature at the main entry consisting of a pediment resting upon plain pilasters flanking the masonry opening. The pediment as proposed measures 47" wide x 13-5/8" high. The pilasters are 6" wide, 7'-6" tall, with plain plinths, 13" high. The new entablature would be painted white and the existing door painted dark blue. Among several options including a flat denticulated lintel, the applicant expressed a preference for a broken pediment with an acorn finial. The applicant further proposes that the entablature be made of a synthetic material.

II. HISTORY:

1204 Oronoco Street and its adjoining neighbors were constructed in 1942 and are typical of the mid-20th c. manifestation of the solid yet simple masonry row house developments which arose to accommodate the population surges in this area during and after WWII. Each of the individual units was three bays wide, with a brick and concrete stoop. The punched door and window openings had no decorative treatment originally and the only distinguishing features of this group of houses was an alternating roof termination treatment of parapets and simple cornices.

The applicant points out that this house has had an awning installed on one 1st floor window, as well as a metal canopy on steel supports, both prior to the designation of the historic district.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed alteration complies with the zoning ordinance.

A fundamental objective of most preservation design guidelines is to ensure retention and protection of character-defining architectural features and materials, such as strongly articulated door or window surrounds which characterize many earlier periods and styles of architecture found in Alexandria's historic districts. Conversely, a parallel premise of the *Guidelines* is to state that *adding* such features in a context which originally had none is generally discouraged. Also, the use of synthetic materials is generally discouraged where such installation may be closely inspected or actually touched, such as would the case in this application at the first floor entry.

The simple but strong massing and stark character of this house and its neighbors is characteristic of the emerging ethic of the International Style of the 1930's as applied to modest residential units. A distinguishing tenet of that movement was to eschew ornamentation of any type. On this basis alone, there is sufficient justification to suggest that this application does not comply with the spirit or intent of the preservation design guidelines.

The fundamental question then is to consider whether this application will adversely affect the character and integrity of the larger context, or will it lead to a false sense of historicism pertaining to the architectural character of the house. With the caveat that if a simple solution, designed to be reversible in terms of obviating the need to alter the basic fabric of the building is adopted, and that it is made of wood, it is Staff opinion that this alteration will not adversely affect the integrity of the historic district. Staff also believes that consideration should be given to utilizing a simple pediment in lieu of the broken pediment requested by the applicant.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the application, for the pilasters and colors as presented, with condition that these elements be constructed of wood.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

No comments.

Historic Alexandria:

“This request needs to be reviewed in relationship to the streetface that 1204 is a part of.”