

Docket Item # 6
BAR CASE# 2005-0279

BAR Meeting
December 14, 2005

ISSUE: Alterations

APPLICANT: Dorthea Campbell by Henry L. Frazier Jr.

LOCATION: 425 North Alfred Street

ZONE: CL/Commercial

****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 original siding be exposed and reused or that new German wood siding with an exposure of no more than 4.5" be used on the front facade;
2. That every effort be made to retain the decorative roof elements and cornice;
3. That the front planter reconstruction be deleted from the application;
4. That the front door be either a four panel or half glazed wood door; and
4. That the applicant work with Staff to finalize the plans for the project.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for various alterations to the two story frame house:

Siding

Install 3/4" x 6" bevel cypress siding. The front of the house is currently clad in artificial stone siding and the sides in aluminum siding. The rear addition is painted CMU.

Roof

Install standing seam copper roofing on the front mansard roof. The roof currently appears to be clad in slate shingles that have been painted to match the trim.

Front steps and wall

The front stairs are of brick with two steps. The replacement stairs will also be brick. No plans were provided. The application also mentions a "short wall." Staff assumes that this refers to replacing the front wall of the brick planter bed which at one time ran across the front facade of the house. The planter collapsed and only the rear and side walls remain.

Front door

The current front door is a modern door and is largely obscured by the existing cross-buck style storm door. The proposed replacement door is a three panel wood door. The application does not mention the storm door.

II. HISTORY:

The two story, frame, vernacular Second Empire house at 425 North Alfred was present in 1896, the first time the area was included in the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Atlas*, and may well date to the 1880s.

It is an example of the modest, middle class rowhouse that typifies both the history and historic fabric of the Parker-Gray District. These homes were not and are not high style pieces of "Architecture" meant to be sculptural objects, but were intended to be comfortable and respectable—the hearth and home and the backdrop for the lives of thousands of people, mostly African Americans, from Reconstruction to the present. They represent the emergence of a black middle class in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and the first opportunity for many African Americans to own their own property. The subject property was part of a parcel owned by African American master carpenter and builder George L. Seaton. Seaton was

probably the most prominent and wealthiest free black resident of Alexandria from the 1850s until his death in 1880. Because of his death, however, he never developed the land. Seaton's property was adjacent to the Alfred Street schoolhouse he built for the Freedmen's Bureau for the purpose of educating newly freed slaves during and after the Civil War. This important institution immediately became one of the centers of the new Freedmen's neighborhoods which sprang up between 1863 and 1865 and later developed and coalesced into the "Uptown" area.

The house at 425 North Alfred Street was renovated in 1967. The 1967 work included the installation of new window sash and the application of "Amerox" simulated stone siding on the front and aluminum siding on the sides and rear (Building permit #24794, 10/18/1967). More recently, in 1998, the Board reviewed an application for alterations at 425 North Alfred Street, including the replacement of the front steps, replacement of the storm door and door surround and the application of a brick veneer to the front facade. The Board approved the application with amendments, including the condition that the brick veneer not be constructed (BAR case #98-43, 3/25/1998). The applicant appealed the Board's decision. City Council approved the applicant's request for brick veneer. Apparently, none of the work requested in the 1998 application was undertaken.

In 2002, the Board approved the renovation of the adjacent circa 1880s building at 423 North Alfred Street (BAR case #2002-00215, 8/28/2002). The inappropriate brick veneer was removed and wood German siding was installed.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed alterations comply with the zoning ordinance requirements.

Staff commends Mrs. Campbell, the long-time owner of the property, for the proposed renovations which should do much to restore this handsome late 19th century house to its historic appearance. In general, the work proposed is appropriate. However, Staff does have a number of questions that remain unanswered by the submitted materials and has several recommendations intended to improve the project.

Siding

Staff strongly endorses the proposed installation of wood siding and is pleased to see that the applicant is proposing to use cypress siding, which has a longer life than pine siding. However, Staff is not convinced that the proposed siding type is the most appropriate choice in terms of appearance.

In a case such as this, the preferred course of action would be to remove an area of siding on the front and sides at the outset to determine the specific type of siding originally installed on this house. Frequently, the original siding will remain under subsequent layers. In fact, in a number of instances the uncovered siding has been in good condition and has been retained with minimal repairs. Alexandria houses of this period typically had German siding or narrow novelty siding on the front elevation with a standard bevel siding on the sides. The 1998 Staff report mentions that "the applicant has indicated that the subject property has German lap siding beneath the exterior cladding." The proposed 6" bevel siding is probably wider and simpler than the original

siding. Wider bevel siding of this type is more appropriate to an early to mid-19th century house than a late-19th century house. If the applicant is unwilling to remove the current siding to investigate the original siding, Staff would be willing to approve a more typical late 19th century siding type, such as a Germain siding, with no more than a 4.5" reveal on the front and the wider bevel siding on the sides.

The application does not address how the existing window and door openings will be handled. The existing trim is not original. If the applicant chooses, the existing trim can be retained. However, a more historically appropriate treatment would be to trim out the window openings with 4" flat casings and traditional sills. The door would be trimmed in a similar flat casing. The adjacent buildings at 423 and 421 North Alfred Street which have historically appropriate trim can serve as a model. Staff notes that the house retains an unusually detailed cornice and requests that care be taken to ensure that the cornice is not damaged or removed in this process. The bottom trim of the cornice backband appears to have been partially removed or covered by the stone siding. If possible, this piece should be repaired or replaced in-kind.

Roof

Staff would prefer that the roof be replaced in kind with slate shingles or with a material of similar character, such as pressed metal shingles, which were also typical for these decorative front mansards. However, Staff will not object to the use of standing seam copper as it was commonly used in the period, if not for this particular roof type. Staff requests that the greatest care be used to ensure that all original decorative roof elements, including the cap and cornice be retained in the re-roofing process.

Front steps and wall

No plans were provided for the proposed new brick front steps and wall. Staff assumes that the new steps will be similar to the existing and recommends that the builder check with the Code Enforcement Office to ensure that the replacement steps will comply with code requirements. Building permits indicate that the front steps have been brick since at least 1936 (Building Permit #1663, May 18, 1936). Staff has no objection to replacement brick steps similar to the existing, provided that they conform to code.

Staff is not certain of the location of the proposed "short wall". If the intent is to repair the brick planter, Staff is unable to recommend approval. The rebuilt planter will likely to encroach on city property. Staff would be unable to approve its reconstruction without one of the following:

- Evidence that the rebuilt planter would not encroach (such as a survey plat with the proposed planter drawn in within the property lines);
- Evidence of an existing encroachment ordinance for a planter of the dimensions proposed; or,
- Application for and approval of an encroachment for the proposed planter.

Even if the planter did not encroach, it would be inadvisable to reconstruct it, as its proximity to the wood siding could be detrimental to the maintenance of the siding.

Door

Staff is pleased that the applicant is requesting a wood panel door. Unfortunately the three panel configuration proposed is not appropriate to the historic character of the house. Staff recommends that the applicant consider a door that is either four panel (two pairs of panels vertically aligned above each other) or half glazed with panels below. Staff would be happy to work with the applicant to select a more historically appropriate door type. Staff notes that in 1998, the applicant sought to replace the storm door. If the applicant still wishes to replace the storm door, a full view storm door without ornamentation could be approved and would allow the proposed new wood front door to be more readily appreciated.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the original siding be exposed and reused or that new German wood siding with an exposure of no more than 4.5" be used on the front facade;
2. That every effort be made to retain the decorative roof elements and cornice;
3. That the front planter reconstruction be deleted from the application;
4. That the front door be either a four panel or half glazed wood door; and
4. That the applicant work with Staff to finalize the plans for the project.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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