

Docket Item # 4  
BAR CASE #2006-0160

BAR Meeting  
July 26, 2006

**ISSUE:** Alterations  
**APPLICANT:** Jeremy and Eliza Brewer  
**LOCATION:** 921 Oronoco Street  
**ZONE:** RB/Residential

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the applicant work with staff to further expose the wood siding and to assess its condition;
2. That if the applicant in consultation with staff determines that repair and retention is not possible, the siding be replaced with wood siding that closely matches the appearance and dimensions of the original siding; and,
3. That the vinyl shutters be removed or replaced with operable and correctly sized wood shutters.

However, should the Board approve fiber cement siding, staff recommends that the siding be installed so that the nails are not visible.

**\*\*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.

(Insert sketch here)

**I. ISSUE:**

The applicant is requesting approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness to replace the existing masonite siding with Hardiplank siding, a paintable fiber cement material. The two story frame house is attached on the west side. The south (front), east and north (rear) sides are currently clad in masonite. The proposed Hardiplank siding would be beveled with a 5" exposure. The siding would be smooth, rather than wood grained. The applicant proposes to paint the new siding a medium grey similar to the existing and to repaint the existing shutters and front door a dark green/olive green.

**II. HISTORY:**

The construction date of the two story frame house at 921 Oronoco Street is not known. According to the real estate records, the house dates to 1880. The house is not present on the 1877 Hopkins Atlas, but is present on the 1902 Sanborn map, the first year the Sanborn company mapped this area. At that time the two story main block had three single story additions connecting it to a two story outbuilding at the rear. The property was labeled as a bakery. The 1912 Sanborn map shows the same configuration and use. In 1921, the back building and rearmost of the single story additions is gone and the building is shown as a dwelling. By 1941, there is only one single story rear addition. This frame addition has a masonry rear wall. In 1965, a number of renovations were undertaken to bring the property into compliance with the housing code (Building permit #22402, 10/4/1965). One of the items refers to repairing the masonry rear wall, suggesting that the one story rear addition was still standing in 1965. Another item referenced in the 1965 permit refers to replacing broken asbestos shingles. The current appearance of the house, with masonite siding, multi-light windows, a six panel door and (fake) shutters most likely dates to a renovation in the 1970s or early 1980s, undertaken before the Parker Gray district was established. Perhaps the one story rear addition was removed at the same time.

Staff has not located any previous Board review of alterations to this property.

**III. ANALYSIS:**

The proposed alterations comply with the zoning ordinance requirements.

The *Design Guidelines* note that siding is one of the principal character defining elements of a building and that brick and wood are the predominant exterior wall materials in the historic districts. It is a central tenet of historic preservation that original historic materials should be retained and repaired rather than replaced. The *Guidelines* recommend an "informed and careful analysis of the existing condition" be undertaken before determining to replace and encourage repair and retention of historic materials whenever possible. Wood siding has been shown to remain on the front and side of the historic house at 921 Oronoco Street. The applicant removed a small area of masonite siding in three locations: one on the front elevation, one on the side and one on the rear. Staff was able to inspect these areas (each measuring approximately 1' by 2'). In

the front, under a layer of masonite and then asbestos shingles, two board widths of wood siding were revealed. One board was split but there was no evidence of rotting. On the side, two board widths of wood siding were revealed. Both boards appeared to be in good condition. There was no siding at all under the masonite in the area that had been exposed for inspection on the rear of the house. This may be due to the removal of the rear single story addition.

The applicant describes the siding as “in severe disrepair.” Based on an examination of the two small areas of siding which were exposed, staff believes the siding is in good to fair condition. Staff strongly recommends more extensive removal of the overlaying masonite and asbestos in several areas in order to adequately assess the condition of the original wood siding (Siding - Pages1-2). Thus, in accordance with the *Design Guidelines*, staff recommends a treatment plan which calls for the applicant to more fully expose the wood siding and to assess its condition in consultation with staff. If the applicant and staff determine that repair and retention is not possible, the siding should be replaced with wood siding that closely matches the appearance and dimensions of the original siding, which appears to be beveled lap siding with an exposure of approximately 5".

The applicant has requested approval of fiber cement siding. The *Guidelines* discourage the use of synthetic sidings such as vinyl and aluminum but do not address fiber cement siding, as it was not widely used until after its publication in 1993. Subsequent to the publication of the *Design Guidelines*, the Board has adopted the following policy with respect to fiber cement siding:

1. That fiber cement siding not be installed on an historic structure;
2. That historic materials should not be removed to install fiber cement siding;
3. That fiber cement siding replace other artificial or composite siding;
4. That the nails not show in the installation of the siding;
5. That smooth siding be installed; and,
6. That BAR Staff may administratively approve the installation of fiber cement siding on *non-historic* buildings (those constructed in 1975 or later).

Staff does not believe this case conforms to the Board’s policy. The house is historic and there is historic siding present (conditions 1 and 2 above). The applicant has proposed to use smooth finish Hardiplank primed siding with a 5" exposure. Thus, if the Board should approve Hardiplank, the only applicable condition would be to require that the nails not show in the installation of the siding (condition #4 above).

Staff is aware that the Board has approved Hardiplank siding in the Parker Gray district in a number of cases over the past six or so years. The Board has considered each case on its own merits within the context of the *Design Guidelines* and the above policy. The applicant has cited two cases in which the Board approved Hardiplank siding:

921 Oronoco Street - This corner property is four houses to the west of the subject property. The Board approved fiber cement siding in 2001 (BAR Case #2001-146, 7/11/2001). Staff has reviewed the staff report and minutes for this project. Regrettably, these records do not explain why the Board approved fiber cement in this case. The staff report describes the house as dating to 1920 and being clad in masonite. It is possible that no wood siding remained beneath the masonite and thus the Board believed the use of a non-historic siding was acceptable.

522 North Alfred Street - The Board approved Hardiplank siding to replace masonite siding on the sides and rear of this house in 2004 (BAR Case #2004-0147, 7/28/2004). The house was built in 1963 with additions and alterations in 1988 and 1990. In this case, the masonite siding and, more recently, the Hardiplank siding, was applied over CMU walls of the non-historic house.

In addition to these examples, there have been several recent cases where the Board required careful analysis of the condition of the wood siding and retention and or replacement in-kind with wood siding for historic houses:

425 North Alfred Street (BAR Case #2005-00279, 12/14/2005)

1018 Queen Street (BAR Case #2005-0053, 3/23/2005 and #2005-0239, )

325 N Patrick Street (BAR Case #2004-0146, 7/28/2004 and #2005-0174, 7/27/2005)

813 Oronoco Street (BAR Case #2004-0201, 10/27/2004)

Lastly, staff notes that the applicant proposes to paint and reinstall the non-operable vinyl shutters on the three front windows. The *Design Guidelines* call for shutters to be operable wood and sized to fit the openings. Vinyl shutters are not appropriate (Shutters - Page 2). Staff notes that shutters were not often not present on late 19<sup>th</sup> century houses. Thus staff recommends that the applicant either leave the shutters off or install operable wood shutters sized to fit the openings.

#### **IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the applicant work with staff to further expose the wood siding and to assess its condition;
2. That if the applicant in consultation with staff determines that repair and retention is not possible, the siding be replaced with wood siding that closely matches the appearance and dimensions of the original siding; and,
3. That the vinyl shutters be removed or replaced with operable and correctly sized wood

shutters.

However, should the Board approve fiber cement siding, staff recommends that the siding be installed so that the nails are not visible.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

No comments.

Historic Alexandria:

Request seems appropriate although the current black color for the shutters would be more compatible with the medium gray house color.