

Docket Item # 6
BAR CASE # 2006-0164

BAR Meeting
July 26, 2006

ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Chris Cheek
LOCATION: 1202 Oronoco Street
ZONE: RB/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends:

1. Approval of the door surround with the condition that the base of the entablature not extend beyond the pilasters;
2. Approval of a full view replacement storm door; and,
3. Denial of the window headers.

****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 for alterations to embellish the principal entry and front windows of the brick house located at 1202 Oronoco Street.

The applicant proposes to add a door surround at the front entry consisting of a simple molded wood entablature with keystone resting on plain wood pilasters flanking the masonry opening. The entablature as proposed measures 55-1/2" wide at the top and 50" wide at the bottom and is 9" high. According to the applicant, the entablature and will extend 1" beyond the pilasters on either side. The pilasters are 5.25" wide and will be installed adjacent to the existing door opening. The new door surround will be painted white.

The applicant also proposes to add wood window headers at each of the five front windows. The window head will be a molded wood entablature similar to that proposed for the door surround. The window head will be 8-5/32" high and 37-1/4" wide at the top and 36" wide at the bottom. They will extend beyond the window openings 2" on either side. The window headers will be painted white.

Lastly, the applicant proposes to replace the existing storm door with a new full view storm door.

II. HISTORY:

1202 Oronoco Street is one of row of seven buildings on the east end of the block. An identical row is located on the west end of the block. 1202 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 World War II. 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 and the patterned brickwork on the facade.

The Board approved the addition of the broken pediment door surround at 1204 Oronoco Street on June 22, 2005 (BAR Case #2005-0124).

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed alterations comply 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 to a building that originally had none is generally discouraged.

The Guidelines discourage changes that give a false historical appearance. In general, current historic preservation philosophy posits that the architecture of each period should be recognized and appreciated on its own merits.

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. In the case of 1204 Oronoco Street, the staff and Board felt that the door surround could be approved on the basis that it was a simple and relatively minor alteration and could be applied and reversed without the need to alter the basic fabric of the building. The alterations proposed for 1202 Oronoco Street are more extensive. The applicant proposes to embellish not just the door, but also the windows. Staff feels that this proposal will have a substantially greater impact on the architectural character of the house and row, essentially erasing its forthright modern sensibility. No other house in this row or in the row to the west have added window headers. Staff notes that the proposed window headers would extend up into a header row that is part of a decorative brick pattern across the parapet at the top of the house. Alterations that obscure existing architectural features are generally discouraged by the *Design Guidelines*.

In addition, staff is concerned about the implications that approval of the proposed alterations would have for future projects. There is potential for a sort of "embellishment creep" with this type of housing stock. There are many similar mid-20th houses in the historic district that could be made to look "prettier" and older by the addition of not just door surrounds and window hoods, but also railings, awnings, shutters, cornices and any number of add-on architectural features. While it is not clear where to draw the line, staff believes that some sense of the original character of these buildings should be preserved.

Therefore, staff recommends approval of the door surround, but denial of the window headers. Staff further recommends that the base of the door entablature not extend beyond the pilasters, as such an extension would create an awkward and non-traditional appearance. Similarly, if the Board should approve the window surrounds, staff recommends that the base not extend beyond the edge of the window opening. Staff has no objection to the proposed full view replacement storm door as it complies with the *Design Guidelines* (Exterior Doors - Page 1).

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends:

1. Approval of the door surround with the condition that the base of the entablature not extend beyond the pilasters;
2. Approval of the storm door; and,
3. Denial of the window headers.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

A construction permit is required.

Historic Alexandria:

“No comment.”