

Docket Item #5
BAR CASE # 2006-0004

BAR Meeting
February 28, 2007

ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Steve & Rebecca Edwards by William Cromley
LOCATION: 1110 Cromley Alley
ZONE: RB/Residential

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

1. That the fiber cement be smooth and that the nails not show in the installation; and,
2. That the fence be wood, no higher than 6' and incorporate a more open top section with the final design to be approved by Staff.

****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)

NOTE: This docket item #4 must be approved before this docket item may be considered.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a certificate of appropriateness for the enclosure of the open, double story, north facing porch on the house at 1100 Cromley Alley/1115 Yeaton Alley and for a new six foot fence around the perimeter of the north yard. The house was built in 2000-2001 as two separate houses joined at the rear wall and facing opposite directions (north and south) within the interior of the square bounded by North Henry, North Fayette, Queen and Princess Streets. The two houses are now owned by the same owner. Interior alterations have been undertaken to combine the two houses into one, single-family residence (BLD2006-01048, 3/14/2006). The front of the house is now considered to be that part facing Yeaton Alley. All the proposed alterations will occur on the new rear, facing Cromley Alley.

The footprint of the porch will remain as it is. The square porch posts will remain, but the two center posts on each story will be pulled out slightly to create a wider central bay. The enclosure consists of inserting windows in the spaces between the porch posts on the north, east and west sides of the porch. The windows will be all wood windows with simulated divided lights manufactured by WeatherShield. The windows on the first story will be long casements with six lights. Below each casement, there will be a two-light awning type window. The center bay of the north façade on the first story will contain a recessed entrance. Narrower fixed windows will frame the full light entrance door. A three light transom will surmount the door. On the second story, the windows will be double hung with a two-over-two configuration. There will panels below each window. The panels will be constructed of fiber cement boards installed in the same manner as in the gable of the house. The panels will have a wood band around the perimeter.

The north façade of the house is readily visible from Princess Street and from Cromley Alley, the east-west public alley that enters the square from the north end of the Fayette Street. The yard of the house at the north end currently has a low, open picket fence that permits visual access. The applicant intends to use the north end yard as a rear yard and is proposing to install a 6' high solid fence around the perimeter of the property, eliminating the gravel parking spaces on this side. The parking spaces will remain on the south end of the property. The applicant has submitted photographs showing three similar flush board fences with square posts and top and bottom rails as alternative designs for the proposed fence. The applicant prefers the topmost fence which has a middle rail about 2/3 of the way up the fence.

II. HISTORY:

The two story, frame, gable roofed houses at 1100 Cromley Alley and 1115 Yeaton Alley were approved by the Board in 1999 (BAR Case #99-0134, 8/11/1999). A special use permit was approved to allow the construction on outlots with reduced lot area and a parking reduction for compact parking spaces (SUP#99-0086, 10/5/1999). Alterations to the design were approved in 2000 (BAR Case #2000-0013, 2/9/2000). The houses were completed at the end of 2000 and beginning of 2001.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed alterations comply with the zoning ordinance requirements. The existing open but covered porch is already counted in the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) calculation for the property. Enclosing the porch will not change the existing FAR.

Building code permits no openings in exterior walls within 3 feet of an interior lot line. The proposed porch enclosure calls for windows on the east and west side lot lines. However, as the owner of 1100 Cromley Alley has a prescriptive easement over half of each of the 10' wide private alleys adjacent to these lot lines, Code Enforcement in consultation with the City Attorney has determined that there is sufficient set back for the proposed windows.

Staff regrets the loss of the unique double-faced character of the original two houses and the fact that the building will now appear as one large house which "turns its back" on the north end of the block. However, the proposed alteration does more accurately reflect the current status of the structure as a single family home with a front and rear and certainly helps to make it more functional in its new use. The retention of the porch form, albeit enclosed with glazing, helps to retain a sense of lightness on the north end of the house. In addition, it ensures that the enclosed area does not overwhelm the house and that the overall perception of the mass of the house in the alley is not overly oppressive in relation to the surrounding small scale residences. While the house now has a back, it will present an attractive and finished appearance to those viewing it from the north.

Staff believes the detailing of the proposed porch is appropriate to the design of the house. The intent is for this element to appear as an enclosed porch, a common architectural phenomenon for rear and side porches in this and other historic districts. The infill maintains the strong symmetry of the original, Greek revival inspired design. The windows fit within the openings created by the porch posts, allowing the porch structure to read as the predominant element. The windows, which are longer on the first story than on the second story, reflect the proportions of classical design and the existing window pattern on the house.

The proposed windows will have simulated divided lights, matching those on the existing house. While the *Design Guidelines* state a preference for true divided light windows (Windows – Page 2), Staff believes the use of simulated divided lights is acceptable in this case as the house is of recent construction and already utilizes simulated divided lights. Strictly speaking, the windows will not be visible from the public right-of-way, as those on the north face are well set back from the public alley and those on the east and west sides are located on private alleys.

Use of fiber cement boards or siding for the panels below the window is also thought to be acceptable. The Board has adopted the following policy with respect to the product:

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; and,
5. That smooth (not grained) siding be installed.

6. That BAR Staff may administratively approve the installation of fiber cement siding on *non-historic* buildings (those constructed in 1975 or later).

As this is not an historic structure, but rather a building dating from 2000, the use of fiber cement is appropriate. Moreover, the house already utilizes the same material in the siding, trim and porch gable. Staff notes that, in accordance with the policy, the siding should be smooth and installed so that the nails do not show.

Staff regrets that the new higher fence will clearly establish the north end as the rear and as private domain. In the original Staff report for the Special Use Permit, the fact that the houses did not “turn their back” on the surroundings was cited as a positive factor (SUP#99-0086, 10/5/1999). The houses are a pleasant surprise in their unusual location at the center of a block. Visually accessible from a number of vantage points, the openness and attractiveness of both sides has made the structure a landmark in the Parker Gray neighborhood. Staff finds any of the proposed fences acceptable, but wonders if some of the sense of visual accessibility and uniqueness could be preserved without sacrificing the residents’ privacy. The top third of the fence as shown in the first and preferred design could be rectangular pattern lattice or could use spindles or cutouts. A treatment of this sort would both open up or lighten the fence and give it a more unique and attractive appearance. As the submitted materials do not clearly give the fence height or material, these should be part of the condition.

Staff notes that the proposed alterations will require approval of a minor amendment to the SUP.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the application with the following conditions:

1. That the fiber cement be smooth and that the nails not show in the installation; and,
2. That the fence be wood, no higher than 6’ and incorporate a more open top section with the final design to be approved by Staff.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 All exterior walls within 5 feet from an interior property line shall have a fire resistance rating of 1 hour, from both sides of the wall. As alternative, a 2 hour fire wall may be provided. This condition is also applicable to skylights within setback distance. Openings in exterior walls between 3 and 5 feet shall not exceed 25% of the area of the entire wall surface (This shall include bay windows). Openings shall not be permitted in exterior walls within 3 feet of an interior lot line.
- C-2 Prior to the issuance of a demolition permit or land disturbance permit, a rodent abatement plan shall be submitted to Code Enforcement that will outline the steps that will taken to prevent the spread of rodents from the construction site to the surrounding community and sewers.
- C-3 Roof drainage systems must be installed so as neither to impact upon, nor cause erosion/damage to adjacent property.
- C-4 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-5 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-6 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.
- C-7 Permission from adjacent property owners is required if access to the adjacent properties is required to complete the proposed construction. Otherwise, a plan shall be submitted to demonstrate the construction techniques utilized to keep construction solely on the referenced property.

Historic Alexandria:

The proposed redesign and infill of the porch appears to alter the appearance of the façade too drastically.