

Docket Item # 7
BAR CASE # 2007-0136

BAR Meeting
September 26, 2007

ISSUE: Addition and Alterations

APPLICANT: Saharat Prompol

LOCATION: 419 North West Street

ZONE: RB/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy to address issues of mass, scale and architectural compatibility. However, should the Board approve the addition and alterations, Staff recommends the following conditions:

1. That the following statement appear in the General Notes of all site plans so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703)-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds; and,

2. That Staff review and approve the proposed brick prior to construction.

****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: Docket item #6 must be approved before this docket item may be considered.

I. ISSUE:

The applicant is requesting approval of a certificate of appropriateness for a new three story rear addition and alterations to the existing two story house.

Alterations

The main block of the existing house will be altered in two respects. First, the applicant proposes to add a brick parapet along the edge of the roof at the front (west) and north and south sides. The new brick will match the existing brick. The existing house is approximately 22' high at the front. With the parapet, the height will be raised to 24'. The parapet is intended to hide the HVAC units to be placed on the roof and to reduce the difference in height between the main block at the front and the proposed new addition behind it. Secondly, the applicant proposes to add a one story front porch. The porch will be offset from the north corner by approximately 4' and will extend to the south corner, where it will turn the corner and continue along the south side above the first story windows as an unsupported overhang projecting 2' from the face of the building. The porch will have a brick foundation, metal roof and simple wood posts and railing. The porch posts will be square section as will the pickets of the railing.

Addition

The majority of the proposed new addition will be in the form of a rectangular block located directly behind the existing main block. This block will be 2' wider than the existing main block, projecting beyond it on the south side. A smaller rectangular block functioning as a stair tower will be located on the north side adjacent to both the existing main block and the new addition, projecting beyond their plane by 6'6" and extending to the north property line. The third story of the addition will have a smaller footprint than the lower two levels and will have an open deck on the south side and a covered deck on the east side. The addition has a varied roofline with the major portion sloping up toward the rear. It will be 30' at the highest point, at the rear, and approximately 27.5' at the lowest point, a section on the south side at the front. The stair tower on the north side will be a consistent 29' height. The addition will increase the net floor area of the house from 1031 square feet to 2958 square feet.

The addition will be clad in painted wood siding, wood panels and red brick. The roof will be metal. The windows and doors will be wood, manufactured by Marvin. The trim will be wood. The siding, panels, doors and windows and trim will be painted white.

Addition – west elevation

The addition will project above the existing house by a story and beyond the existing house on both the north and south sides by several feet. The third story will project approximately 3.5' above the main block of the house which will have added height with the new brick parapet. The west elevation of this portion of the third story addition will have no openings and will be clad in metal roofing. On the north will be the stair tower. The narrow end of this three story rectangular block faces the west. It will be clad in wood siding and will have a long narrow window divided into three sections separated by wood panels. On the south side, the addition

will appear as a two story brick block with no openings and surmounted by a wood railing which will surround a third story deck.

Addition – south elevation

The addition will be composed of three major blocks on the south side. In the forefront and toward the rear or east will be a two story brick block having a single, 6' by 6' square window in the first story at the east end. This brick block will support a deck at the third story level that will be surrounded by a wood railing. Set in behind the brick block will be the plane of the three story block. This section will have a sloping roof rising approximately 2.5' from front to back. This section will be clad in wood siding and will have vertical trim strips defining the bays and horizontal strips defining the stories. A new entrance to the house will be located on the south side, accessed by a new brick terrace with wood railing and trellis over the entrance area. The door will be a French door with glazing above and wood panels below. A full length window will be located to the right of the French doors, functioning as a sidelight. Paired long windows with wood panels below will be located in the second and third stories directly above the entrance. There will be two additional window groupings of this same design on the third story, overlooking the deck. The stair tower, located on the north side, will be visible above the existing main block and the new three story block. It will have a flat roof, no openings and will be clad in wood siding.

Addition – east elevation

The east (rear) elevation will also be composed of three major blocks. In the forefront will be the two story block and, set back 4' above this, the third story. The three story stair tower on the north side will be in the background, set back 21' from the face of the two story block. The two story block will have a brick pier at the left side where it wraps around from the south side. Beyond this, it will have a narrow strip of wood siding and then a large expanse of glazing. There will be French doors and a large full length window on the first story. The second story will have the same, only the positions of the door and window will be the reverse of those below. The second story door will have a wood railing at the base. The two story block will support a deck for the third story that will be surrounded by a wood railing. The third story east elevation will have a French door with large transom and sidelight on the left side. The right side will be clad in wood siding. The east elevation of the stair tower will match that of the west elevation with a long narrow window divided into three sections separated by wood panels within a wall clad in wood siding. There will be a brick planter at the base of the stair tower.

Addition – north elevation

Again, the north elevation is composed of three major blocks; the three story stair tower at the forefront along the north property line, the three story portion of the addition set back 6'6", and the narrow sliver of two story addition at the east end. The 17'7" wide north wall of the stair tower section will be without openings. It will be clad in wood siding with a narrow strip of wood panels at the west end. Horizontal wood trim strips will define the three stories. Beyond this will be the three story addition which is broken into two fields, one clad in brick and one in siding. There will be a window in each story. A rectangular window will be located in the first and the second story near the west end of this section. A long horizontally oriented window will be located in the third story, more or less centered in the section. On the same plane with the three story section is a narrow two story section that is almost entirely glazed, consisting of a full

length window in the first and second stories and supporting the third story deck with wood railing.

The addition will be readily visible from a number of vantage points along North West Street and is anticipated to be visible in through-block views from Oronoco Street to the north.

II. HISTORY:

As discussed in docket item #6, the free-standing, two story brick house at 419 North West Street appears to have been constructed circa 1938. The one story addition to the rear was added at a later date. There is no record of prior BAR reviews for this property.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed addition and alterations comply with the zoning ordinance requirements.

The property at 419 North West Street presents unusual opportunities and challenges. The large lot provides an opportunity for a substantially larger building than the existing, very modest house. Like most of the Parker Gray district, the property is zoned RB, which has a floor area ratio of .75 the lot area, allowing a house with a net floor area (FAR) of 2,962 square foot. The existing house has a net floor area of only 1,031 square feet. On the other hand, the *Design Guidelines* for residential additions caution that additions should not overwhelm the existing structure or neighboring buildings (Residential Additions – Page 6). Located as it is on a relatively loosely developed block and surrounded by properties with open side yards, the lot also provides many opportunities for views of a proposed rear addition. Unlike the more typical case in the historic districts where there are strings of attached rowhouses blocking views to the rear from the street and preventing additions from being seen in direct relation to the main block of the house at the front, here the addition will be seen in context with the existing house and with neighboring buildings. For the most part, the neighboring buildings on both sides of the 400 block of North West Street and on all sides of the square bounded by North West, Oronoco, North Payne, and Princess Streets are small in scale. The visibility of the addition means that not only is size and massing a factor, but also its architectural character. In its design, it must be compatible with the architectural character of not only the house to which it is attached, but to the surrounding neighborhood. These factors need not be constraints or impediments to the new addition, but they do require that the addition be handled with a great deal of skill and sensitivity. It should be possible to design a substantial addition in a modern vocabulary that will work in this context. However, it must be approached in a very thoughtful and respectful manner.

Size and Scale

In general, Staff and the Board are not comfortable with additions that approach the size of the existing house, even when the addition is less visible than that proposed for 419 North West Street. In keeping with long accepted historic preservation philosophy, the thought is that the historic portion of the building should remain the predominant element. While the zoning regulations provide the outer parameters for the largest possible structure allowed on any given lot, the historic district regulations give the Board the authority to determine what size addition is appropriate for that property, given the historic character of the surrounding district and the nature of the existing house. Few if any residential additions of this size have been constructed in Parker-Gray. The house at 429 North West Street does have an unusually large addition

which is sited to the side and at the back of the historic house. This addition was approved by the Board at its eighth meeting on June 11, 1986 (BAR Case #86-15PG). It should be noted that, as large as it is, the zoning ordinance would have allowed a substantially larger addition than that which was built because of the exceptionally large lot. It is unlikely that the same addition would be approved today. A large addition, designed by Mr. Demian, the architect for the present project, was approved by the Board two years ago and has been constructed at 421 North Fayette Street (BAR Case #2005-0055, 4/27/2005). This addition added living space in the attic above the existing two story house and added a three story rear addition which also wrapped around the south side. However, the addition was not proportionately as large in relation to the existing house as the one now proposed for 419 North West Street. The addition at 421 North Fayette Street added 1,375 net square feet to the existing 1,262 net square feet (108% increase). With the new addition, the house remained well below the allowable FAR. The current project at 419 North West Street seeks to add 1927 net square feet to the existing 1031 net square feet (a 191% increase) and falls only 4 square feet below the allowable FAR. Staff believes the size of the addition is out of scale with the existing house and with the modest houses that characterize the neighborhood. Staff recommends that the size of the addition be significantly reduced.

Architectural Character

The *Design Guidelines* make it clear that whether an addition uses an historical vocabulary or one which is more modern, it must be respectful of the building to which it is appended and compatible with the surrounding district.

The Boards generally prefer addition designs that are respectful of the existing structure and which seek to be background statements or which echo the design elements of the existing structure (Residential Additions - Page 5).

Another approach to a design for a residential addition is one which creates a distinct yet compatible contrast with the original building through the use of differing materials, colors and the abstraction of the principal design elements of the original building (Residential Additions - Page 5).

Staff feels the present design makes no effort to be compatible with the character of the existing house or the district. The 1938 house at 419 North West Street is very basic and does not offer much in the way of design elements to draw from. However, it does offer its own scale, massing, roofline, materials, rhythms and fenestration sizes and patterns as well a faint Colonial Revival flavor. The surrounding houses tend to be earlier, dating to the turn-of-the last century and reflecting the popular Queen Anne, 2nd Empire and Italianate styles of that period. The addition, as presently designed, does not reflect the character of the existing house or its neighbors in any way. Instead, it offers a sharp contrast. While it is a fine design in its own right, it appears as if it was accidentally attached to the existing house. It does not seem to be integrated in any substantial way. Staff does note that the architect made two adjustments in response to Staff comments to seek to tie the old to new and minimize the differences. First, the 2' parapet was added to the existing main block to reduce the impact of the three story block beyond and second, the portico was extended around to the new addition in the form of a front porch and side overhang. These modifications are not adequate to mitigate between the old and new designs. Staff believes the design must be restudied to be quieter and simpler at the very

least, if not to incorporate more elements drawn from the Colonial Revival period and the existing house.

Height, Massing, and Form

Again, the *Design Guidelines* offer recommendations with regard to these aspects of the design of an addition and, not surprisingly, they call for additions that respect the existing building and prevailing characteristics of the blockface (Residential Additions - Pages 6 & 7). This addition differs from the surrounding single family residences in several ways. With the exception perhaps of the house at 429 North West Street which is discussed above, this proposal is a story taller than the other houses in the neighborhood and it places the taller and larger mass in the rear where traditionally, the massing steps down. The form of the addition, with its varied rooflines and planes, is complex, in part from an effort to break down the mass and make it appear smaller. However, this complexity of forms, as well as complexity of surface materials, rooflines and window types, is contrary to the local historical building tradition in which additions tend to be simpler than the main block. The nontraditional massing, complex form and height will result in the addition having a much more prominent visual profile in the neighborhood than is desired for an addition in an historic district. Rather than serving as a background building, it will attract attention. The *Design Guidelines* call for additions to take care to “not overwhelm the existing structure or neighboring buildings (Residential Additions – Page 6).” In the opinion of Staff, the proposed addition will overwhelm the existing house and neighbors. Staff believes the addition can be made more compatible by reducing it to two stories above grade, simplifying the massing and rooflines and using an architectural vocabulary more closely related to the existing building and its neighbors.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends deferral of the application for restudy to address issues of mass, scale and architectural compatibility. However, should the Board approve the addition and alterations, Staff recommends the following conditions:

1. That the following statement appear in the General Notes of all site plans so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement:

Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703)-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds; and,

2. That Staff review and approve the proposed brick prior to construction.

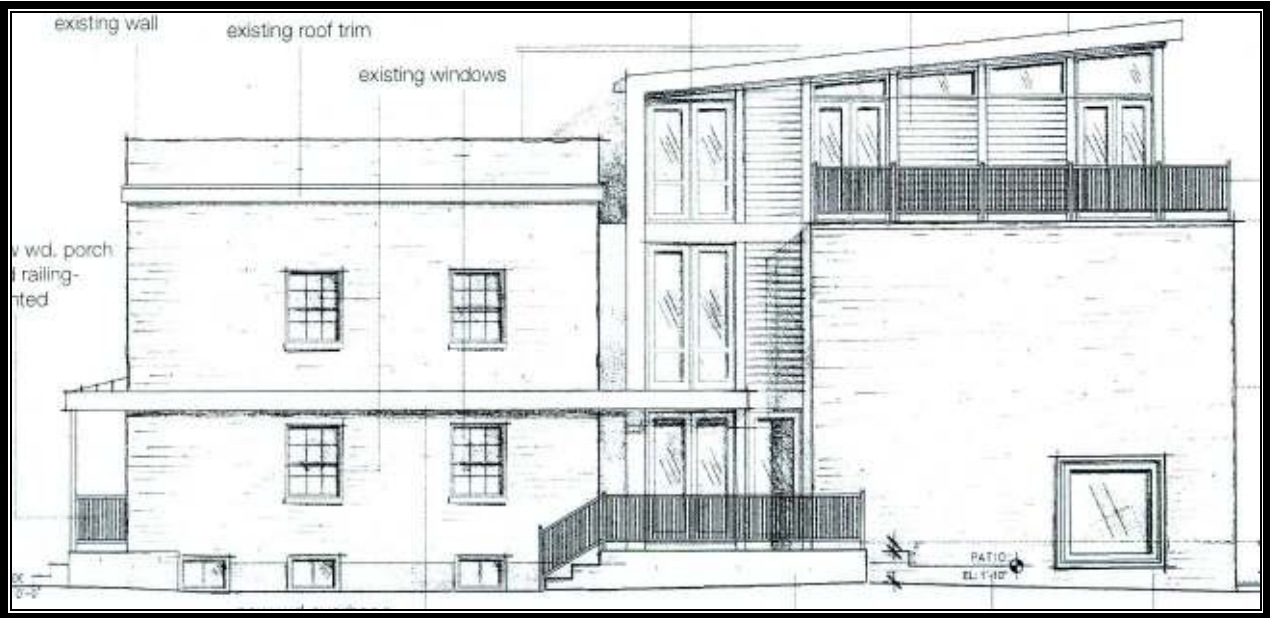


Figure 4 – Proposed south elevation



Figure 5 – Proposed east elevation

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 A soils report must be submitted with the building permit application.
- C-5 New construction must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-6 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-7 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-8 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.
- C-9 A wall location plat prepared by a land surveyor is required to be submitted to this office prior to requesting any framing inspection.

Historic Alexandria:

The window design and scale is out of place for the surrounding buildings. The design scheme needs to be reworked.

Alexandria Archaeology:

- F-1 The G.M. Hopkins insurance map shows that by 1877, at least one structure was present on the block bounded by West, Oronoco, Princess and Payne streets. The lot therefore has the potential to yield archaeological resources that could provide insight into domestic activities of African Americans in 19th-century Alexandria.
- R-1 Call Alexandria Archaeology immediately (703-838-4399) if any buried structural remains (wall foundations, wells, privies, cisterns, etc.) or concentrations of artifacts are discovered during development. Work must cease in the area of the discovery until a City archaeologist comes to the site and records the finds.
- R-2 The above statement must appear in the General Notes of the site plan so that on-site contractors are aware of the requirement.

Transportation and Environmental Services:

- R1. An approved Plot Plan must be attached to the building permit application. This requirement is based on the following items: a) the proposed improvements will result in an increase in the area of the building footprint of greater than 100%, b) the proposed improvements will affect existing drainage patterns. (T&ES)
- R2. The building permit plans shall comply with requirements of City Code Section 8-1-22 regarding the location of downspouts, foundation drains and sump pumps. Refer to Memorandum to Industry dated June 18, 2004. [Memorandum is available online at the City web site under Transportation\Engineering and Design\Memos to Industry.]. (T&ES)
- R3. Applicant shall be responsible for repairs to the adjacent city right-of-way if damaged during construction activity. (T&ES)
- R4. All improvements to the city right-of-way such as curbing, sidewalk, driveway aprons, etc. must be city standard design. (T&ES)
- R5. No permanent structure may be constructed over any existing private and/or public utility easements. It is the responsibility of the applicant to identify any and all existing easements on the plan. (T&ES)
- R6. An erosion and sediment control plan must be approved by T&ES prior to any land disturbing activity greater than 2,500 square feet. (T&ES)
- R7. Compliance with the provisions of Article XIII of the City's zoning ordinance for stormwater quality control is required for any land disturbing activity greater than 2,500 square feet. (T&ES)