

Docket Item # 10
BAR CASE # 2007-0186

BAR Meeting
September 26, 2007

ISSUE: Alterations
APPLICANT: Janice Horst
LOCATION: 231 N. West Street
ZONE: RB/Residential

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends deferral of the application to allow the applicant to reconsider the proposal.

****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 front door and to install windows where there are now air conditioning units protruding from the front wall. The existing door is a modern wood door with four panels and row of arched lights above. The proposed replacement door is also a wood door with four panels, but has two rectangular lights above. The door is to be varnished. The applicant intends to remove the through-the-wall air conditioners located above the door and on the first and second levels. These units are no longer functional. The applicant is seeking approval to replace the units with windows. No information was provided for the proposed windows.

II. HISTORY:

The two bay wide, two story frame house at 231 N. West Street was constructed between 1891 and 1896 as an interior unit in a row of five modest rowhouses. Over the years, the houses have been subjected to a number of exterior alterations and many have had two story additions added at the rear. The house at 231 N. West Street is clad in a non-historic siding, possibly masonite, and has had alterations to the windows and door at the front. Staff was unable to locate any record of BAR review for these alterations, but did find two building permits for general repairs, including window repair and replacement and new siding, in 1936 and 1970 (Permit #2068, 12/16/1936 and Permit #26953, 1/19/1970). On November 10, 2004, the Board approved demolition and plans for a two story addition at the rear of the house (BAR2004-0239 & 0240). Subsequent to that, on May 16, 2007, Staff administratively approved double hung wood replacement window sash in the existing openings. Prior to approving replacement in the existing openings, Staff encouraged the applicant to consider restoring the second story openings to their original appearance, based on the neighboring houses, but the applicant was opposed to further work or expense at that time.

III. ANALYSIS:

The proposed window and door alterations conform to the zoning ordinance regulations.

Staff understands from the applicant that the windows and door have already been purchased. Staff regrets that the applicant made these expenditures without first consulting Staff, as she had on two prior occasions. The house has been subject to unwise alterations over the years but could readily be returned to a much more attractive and historically appropriate appearance with just a few well-considered alterations. Unfortunately, the proposed alterations are not well-considered.

Door

The proposed four panel door with lights above is a modern door type. As discussed in the *Design Guidelines*, doors and their surrounds are as much a character defining feature of architectural styles as are windows (Exterior Doors – Page 1). Late 19th century houses of this type in Alexandria typically had solid four panel doors with no lights. Other door styles were available in this era, including the half glazed door with a large single window above wooden panels, however these other types were less common and are markedly different in appearance than the proposed door.

Windows

The proposal to insert windows in the air conditioning openings is unacceptable. Again, the *Design Guidelines* explain that “the size, location, type and trim of windows are a defining element of historic architectural styles” (Windows – Page 1). The current front façade of 231 N. West Street is marred by earlier alterations which reduced the number of windows on the second story from two to one, changed the remaining window to a square rather than rectangular shape and inserted two through-wall air conditioners. The removal of the air conditioners is essential to restoring the façade to a historically authentic appearance. However, placing windows in the same openings that held the units would further diminish the integrity of the façade. The location, size and proportions of the windows would be utterly out of character with the highly regular facades typical of this row and houses of this type. If the applicant is seeking more light, an appropriately proportioned and located window should be added to the second story where a window undoubtedly previously existed, based on the fenestration pattern of the other houses in the row. Rather than adding an entire window in the location of the air conditioning unit over the door, it might be possible to add a narrow transom window to the door surround, for a more historically appropriate appearance. Staff would be more than happy to work with the applicant on the design of any alterations which would help to restore the façade to a more historically appropriate appearance. If the applicant feels such work is too extensive to undertake at this time, it would be best to leave everything as it is until appropriate alterations can be made.

At the very least, if the non-functioning air conditioning units are removed, they should be replaced with siding to match the existing.

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends deferral of the application to allow the applicant to reconsider the proposal.

CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

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

Code Enforcement:

- C-1 A building permit is required for this project. Plans shall accompany the permit application that fully details the construction.
- C-2 Alterations to the existing structure must comply with the current edition of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC).
- C-3 All windows must comply with IRC section R613 (residential) or IBC section 1714.5 (commercial). Specifically they must be listed as per the requirements of AAMA/NWWDA 101/ I.S.2 and/ or AAMA/NWWDA 101/ I.S.2/ NAFS, respectively.

Historic Alexandria:

Historic Alexandria suggests a four panel wood door and removing the air conditioning units and residing (no glass).