

November 1, 2020

To the Board of Architectural Review:

As the owner of 1311 Prince Street, I strongly oppose the proposal for a third floor addition to 1309 Prince Street that is on the docket for the Nov. 4, 2020, BAR hearing, of which notification of this major project was sent to me—an adjoining/attached neighbor—only this past week, barely meeting the minimum requirement set by the City.

I ask that the BAR deny the proposal for this third floor addition, commonly known as a popup, to 1309 Prince Street. Other neighbors on Prince Street also oppose this project. This third floor popup proposal harms the historic character not only of the individual home, but harms the historic character of the trio of sister buildings it is part of, as well as to the entire northern side of Prince Street.

Please note that I have thoroughly read the City of Alexandria's Design Guidelines, and this project fundamentally fails in meeting those guidelines. I have included pertinent sections from the Design Guidelines throughout this letter in bold so you can easily scan for the references.

1309, 1311 and 1313 make up a unique trio in Old Town Alexandria. These properties face both Prince Street and Commerce Street, and by a miracle, until now these triplets have survived nearly intact for more than 135 years. In fact, the staff report published on October 30, 2020, notes that no prior BAR approvals for 1309 could be found.

While the city tax records date 1311 Prince to 1890, this trio of properties exist on an 1885 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* and would have been built some years before that. The City should do due diligence to see who built and owned these homes from their beginning and really delve into the history of these triplets before allowing a permanent, fundamental change. With so many beautiful buildings long since demolished, the fact that these buildings have survived so long without alteration should matter to this historic city, which should want to take great care of the remaining 100-plus year old buildings that still exist.

We do know there is notable history on this block: Across the street from 1309 is a historical marker in front of 1302 Prince Street noting the location of the Toussaint L'Ouverture Civil War Hospital for African American troops. The location is listed on the City of Alexandria's website at www.alexandriava.gov/historic/civilwar/default.aspx?id=73499#HistoryofLOuvertureHospital. (Also note: Around the corner is the Freedom House Museum at 1315 Duke Street, which the City purchased in March 2020 to save this National Historic Landmark.)

This historical 1300 block of Prince Street is a busy one, and maintaining its historical character is advantageous to the City, to home owners and to business owners. Down the block at 1319 Prince Street is a triangular building that appears on historical maps and now houses a booming local business where Prince, West and Commerce Streets come together. Also on historical

maps is the Ice House on Commerce Street, which is being restored to house another local business that already does brisk business when its truck is here. Neither of these buildings have been altered with additions for extra floors, and their historic character and that of our street and block as a whole appeals to residents, customers and tourists alike.

There are many homes in Old Town's 22314 zip code that exceed the current square footage of 1309 Prince, with about 90 of them on the market right now, according to Redfin.com; but there are few homes that have survived intact since the late 1800s as these homes at 1313, 1311 and 1309 have. These homes should be celebrated for their similar styles, not altered.

The repetition created by the 1300 triplets reminds one of the repetition created by the architectural gems of the Seven Sisters in San Francisco, also built in the 1890s—it's not just each individual home that has beauty, but the intact repetition of the homes that also makes them special in their entirety.

I ask the BAR to act in favor of preserving this trio of architectural, historical gems on Prince Street, and to act as a steward of architectural history and the history of this city. The decision the BAR makes on this proposal matters—and will seal its reputation as a defender of Old Town's historical charm and soul, or just a hoop to jump through to get one's way.

As an adjoining property owner, I have many significant concerns about this proposed popup on 1309 Prince. In addition to the above, my top concerns are:

1) INAPPROPRIATE ARCHITECTURAL STYLE ADDED TO THE STREETScape

A careful evaluation of the architecture on the 1300 block of Prince Street illustrates what a mismatch this popup proposal is. While the staff report published online on October 30 cites a nearby similar mansard roof to the 1309 proposal, that two-story house with the mansard roof sits blocks away, far from the view of the 1300 block, and it is an aberration on its own block. Nor does that mansard roof sit on top of the height of a full third floor.

All single family homes on the northern side of Prince Street are two stories and each have the same beautiful stacked cornice feature on front—that includes a couple of newer buildings on the block built in the 1980s whose designs were clearly kept in line by previous City staff and BARs to maintain the symmetry on the northern side of Prince Street. Not a single one has a mansard roof, which is an inappropriate alteration to a home on this side of the block.

The mansard roof is Second Empire style and none of the homes on Prince Street are Second Empire style—it is clearly inappropriate. Note, too, that the 1970s houses built on the southern side of Prince Street have their dormers on the back, not on the front; having dormers on the front does not match other single family homes on this block. **In Chapter 2, Building Alterations, on Page 3 of Roofing Materials, the Design Guidelines say: "New elements such as dormers and skylights should not be added to a historic roof in a**

manner which visually alters the original design of the roof or destroys architectural fabric.”

2) HARM TO HISTORICAL CHARACTER ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BLOCK:

This third floor proposal is inappropriate for these 100-plus year old buildings, both in front and in back—both sides of which are visible to the street. It is not just the harm to the historical front of the homes facing Prince Street that is at stake, but to the historical character of the back of the homes that face Commerce Street as well. Adding a third floor significantly and negatively changes the character of the back of these three 1300 sister homes, which all match not only at the front but the back, too.

In Chapter 5, Additions-Residential, on Page 6 under Height, the Design Guidelines say: Additions of an extra floor to single family homes should be added “only if the significant architectural character of the house and blockface are preserved.” Adding a third floor fundamentally changes the architectural character of the back of 1309 and 1311, and the proposal should be denied.

3) A DISASTROUS PRECEDENT:

Allowing this proposal to proceed would set a precedent that would encourage and allow more popups on Prince Street and other streets in the historic district.

The additional height created by this project is a negative for all surrounding homes. It’s a negative for the homes in front of, to the sides of and behind 1309 Prince. If this project encourages more popups on Prince with extra additional height lining the street, the character of the street itself will change radically.

In Chapter 5, Additions-Residential, on Page 2, the Design Guidelines say: “Additions must be designed so that they are compatible with both the architectural character of the existing house and the immediate neighborhood.” A third floor addition is not compatible with the immediate neighborhood.

4) HARM TO HISTORICAL STRUCTURE:

There is great potential for structural harm to my adjoining building, and other historic buildings on this block, during an extended, unnecessary construction project. I have been told of two buildings that collapsed in recent years in Old Town Alexandria during construction, and I see no public structural engineering report for this project. I demand such a report be released publicly to neighbors on Prince Street before this project moves forward.

In fact, in Chapter 4, Demolition of Existing Structures, on Page 4, the Design Guidelines say: **“In some instances, the Boards may require a structural analysis of the building by a licensed professional engineer in order to make an informed decision regarding the structural integrity of a building before making a decision on the application for a Permit to Demolish.”** This is such an instance, and I demand that the City follow this section of its own Design Guidelines.

5) NO PROOF OF SHARED WALL/WALKWAY’S ABILITY TO HANDLE LOAD:

There is a shared wall and shared tunnel/walkway between 1309 and 1311, and again there is no structural engineering report that indicates these shared areas are actually able to handle the load of a third floor. That shared tunnel/walkway means that there is a void on the first floor, which further puts into question the ability of the shared structure to handle a third floor load.

I demand a structural engineering report be done and sent to neighbors before approving this project. After all, if these structures can’t support this proposed project, 1309 and 1311 could both be lost. Requiring a structural engineering report to be done before this project is approved is in line with the Design Guidelines.

6) SEVERE IMPACT ON THE 1311 PROPERTY AS A WHOLE:

While I’ve been told the BAR may not care about this negative impact, any homeowner at 1311 certainly would. And in fact, the Design Guidelines call for the impact to neighboring properties to be considered. **In Chapter 5, Additions-Residential, on Page 6 under Height, the Design Guidelines say: “Additions which increase the height of such structures should not adversely impact the light and air of nearby residential properties.”** While that quote is in reference to multi family structures, the proposed plan at 1309 is to raise the height of its building to match the height of the multi family structure of its adjoining neighbor at 1307—hence this guideline applies by direct association.

My property at 1311 would suffer permanent reduction of sunlight and privacy due to the height added by a third floor to 1309, and that will result in a decrease in quality of life. Currently, looking out the kitchen door, you get a good view of the sky and clouds rolling by; if this popup is approved, the view will be of a brand new brick wall.

In Chapter 5, Additions-Residential, on Page 6 under Form, the Design Guidelines say: “Generally, additions to residential structures should not overwhelm the existing structure or neighboring buildings.” This third floor addition indeed overwhelms 1311 Prince and should be denied.

Not only does the addition of a third floor permanently ruin the historic character of the back of these triplets, so does the fill in of the kitchen door, which every floor plan in this trio of sister buildings has in that spot.

Additionally, that fill-in creates a direct violation of right to privacy. I request that either the fill-in of the kitchen door be denied or that 1309 be required to construct additional height to the shared privacy fence at 1309's expense.

Our homes are merely feet apart—these houses are not on large tracts of land where a neighbor's decision may have no to minimal impact on the next door neighbor's property. The impact to immediate neighbors should be considered, and that consideration is indeed called for in the Design Guidelines.

Please note that in **Chapter 4, Demolition of Existing Structures, on Page 4 under Application Requirements, the Design Guidelines say: "Reason for Demolition: The application must clearly spell out the reason for the demolition and describe alternatives to demolition and why such alternatives are not considered feasible."** I don't see alternatives listed, and they should be added to this application before it moves forward through the BAR process.

Buying a historic home is a choice, and with that choice, comes responsibility. Owning a historic home, particularly an old row home, means eschewing the need to squeeze in a McMansion where it does not belong.

The Historic Alexandria Foundation well describes a historic homeowner's responsibility at www.historicalexandriafoundation.org/ownership.html. To quote:

"Ownership in Old Town

... As you admire Old Town houses, know that there are special responsibilities involved in maintaining the delicate balance between the realities of modern life and the perishable beauty of our architectural heritage. Each owner becomes an important link between yesterday and tomorrow, and has the privilege and obligation of preserving this heritage. ...

... In the years since establishment of the Historic District and the architectural review process, many valuable structures have been saved from demolition and inappropriate alteration.

The unique pleasures of living in an older building extend beyond the facade. Interior change, while incorporating modern conveniences, should preserve the original fabric and character of the building."

My choice as a historic homeowner is to protect historic character—both to honor past generations and for future generations to enjoy—and thus I oppose this popup proposal.

I'd also like to point out that the Design Guidelines are dated May 1993. In Chapter 4, Demolition of Existing Structures, on Page 4 under Determination of Significance, the Design Guidelines say: "All buildings and structures constructed prior to 1860 are significant." At the 1993 publication date, a building from 1860 would have been 133 years old. These Prince Street triplets are currently at least 135 years old and counting—and they have significance, too.

In Chapter 4, Demolition of Existing Structures, on Page 2, the Design Guidelines say: "Generally speaking, there must be a compelling reason for the demolition, either in whole or in part, of a significant structure in the historic districts. The Boards actively seeks (sic) to retain the existing historic fabric of the historic districts and strongly discourage the demolition of any portion of an 18th or early 19th century structure." I strongly argue that in 2020, the Design Guidelines should be updated to protect any structure from the mid to late 19th century that still survives intact, and that includes these 1300 triplets.

I love living in Old Town Alexandria and have for many years, and its historical charm is a big reason why. But maintaining that history requires stewardship and facing difficult choices of how to preserve that historical character in a modern world. I hope that the BAR is up to the task and protects the historic charm of Old Town Alexandria and Prince Street—charm that is a true, intangible asset to this city and to all who live and work here.

I hope that the Board of Architectural Review maintains the high standards that it claims to impose and denies this proposal. I have long heard how onerous the BAR can be and its reputation for maintaining strict standards for our historic district. I hope the BAR upholds that reputation and doesn't allow an unnecessary expansion to compromise our historic buildings and the soul of our lovely City of Alexandria.

Best regards,
R.L. Sheedy
1311 Prince Street
NoPopupsOnPrince@gmail.com

Footnote:

*The 1885 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map with the 1300 triplets is found here:
https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3884am.g3884am_g089681885/?sp=11&r=-0.243,0.224,1.863,1.32,0 ... and note even the larger multiunit building at 1307 looks to be on this map.

Goodies Frozen Custard & Treats

Monday, November 2, 2020 6:01:15 PM

Subject: [EXTERNAL]1309 Prince Street Renovation

Hi Lia -

I am the owner of the property at 200 Commerce Street, also known as the Ice House, located right behind this property and next to their parking lot. We've spoken in the past and I hope you recall.

I am writing you in support of the proposed renovation project for 1309 Prince Street. I am delighted that the new owners have decided to improve on the property and make it large enough for a family. They will not only be improving on the property but adding to the historic character by restoring the transom. They are also preserving the roofline and cornice and as staff noted the changes to the front elevation will return the building back to what it should look like. They are in no way destroying the historic fabric of this property or our unique block. I do hope that you will support this project from our new neighbor. Feel free to buzz me anytime if there is a need.

Brandon Byrd, Proprietor
Goodies Frozen Custard & Treats
Tel: (202) 630-6455

www.mmmgoodies.com

#GODisCEO

From: [Danielle Romanetti](#)
To: [Lia Niebauer](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL]BAR #2020-00500 & 2020-00502
Date: Monday, November 2, 2020 5:28:56 PM

Dear members of the BAR,

My name is Danielle Romanetti. I am a resident of the city of Alexandria and the owner of the commercial property and the business fibre space that is located at 1319 Prince Street. We are a local boutique that provides supplies to hand knitters, crocheters and weavers. I am located on the same block as the project at 1309 Prince Street and also hold a perpetual easement over the parking lot located behind their property. As such, the previous and now current owners of the property and I have maintained a relationship since we essentially share property. I am very excited for their addition and the careful work they have done on this project with their architect and BAR staff as well as with neighbors. The property owners are proposing modifications that will make this property more livable for a growing family, as the townhouse is incredibly narrow at the moment, which has limited its space. I wanted to highlight that BAR staff felt the existing roof was not a defining feature of the home and that the changes to the front elevation of the building would actually help return the building to the look of its original design. In addition, it is worth noting the nature of the properties on this block which are a mix of both historic townhouses, commercial properties and townhomes built in the 70s or later and (see the South side of the block), apparently, historic townhouses that have had massive rear additions put on before BAR creation and are divided into apartment units. My neighbors are a mix of business owners, home owners and renters at many income levels. Some are residents of our shelters and other community housing like Guest House. The 1300 block of Prince is, in fact, an incredibly unique block for Old Town and not one that is entirely historic or even entirely residential. And yet, this couple has done careful planning to propose a historically appropriate renovation to their new home while also making it more appropriate for a family residence. They wanted to own a historic property in Old Town and felt that they could bring much needed updates and improvements to this one. I do hope that you will consider approving their project so that this family can move into this property sooner and be able to enjoy the unique character of our block.

Regards,

Danielle Romanetti
Owner
fibre space

Danielle Romanetti
Owner
fibre space | fibrespace.com
1319 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
phone 703-664-0344 | Instagram [fibrespace](https://www.instagram.com/fibrespace)
Find us on Ravelry: Fans of fibre space

DISCLAIMER: This message was sent from outside the City of Alexandria email system.
DO NOT CLICK any links or download attachments unless the contents are from a trusted
source.

From: [Zach Price](#)
To: [Lia Niebauer](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Comments: BAR #2020-00502 OHAD, Request for addition and alterations at 1309 Prince Street
Date: Tuesday, November 3, 2020 10:21:57 AM

To whom it may concern,

I am the owner of 218 S West St, around the corner from 1309 Prince St. After reading in full the applicant's proposal and BAR staff analysis, I write in support of the requested addition. The proposal is thoughtful and does not detract from the historic appeal of the Prince St face of the building, as the cornice is preserved and the addition is set back from the original facade.

We must always be careful to balance historic preservation with the needs of our neighbors; given the age of the building, its immediate surroundings, and the care the owner's application takes to preserve the property's appearance on Prince St, I see no reason why we should override the BAR staff's recommendation in this case.

Respectfully,
Zach Price

DISCLAIMER: This message was sent from outside the City of Alexandria email system. DO NOT CLICK any links or download attachments unless the contents are from a trusted source.

As the owners of 1304 Prince Street, we strongly oppose the proposal for a third-floor addition to 1309 Prince Street--directly across the street from our townhome.

Adding an entire third floor to a house that now only has two floors can certainly be considered a major change to a façade. As noted in the Staff Report, 1309 Prince Street is part of a historic triplet of houses that was built “between 1877 and 1855,” which means that this triplet has survived, nearly unscathed, for the last 143 to 165 years. We were therefore very surprised to hear that the city is now considering allowing a major change to be made to part of this historic structure, instead of wanting to preserve its original architectural integrity for future generations—particularly on such a historic, well-traveled street of the city.

According to the City of Alexandria’s Design Guidelines, an extra floor can be added to a single-family house “only if the significant architectural character of the house and block face are preserved.” (Chap. 5, Additions-Residential, p. 6). Like other residents of our block and the surrounding neighborhood, we believe that the **proposed addition would significantly and negatively alter the architectural character** of this historic triplet of houses, and of the northern side of Prince Street.

Adding an entirely new third floor to #1309 would add a large mass onto the right side of the triplet, which would ruin the visual harmony of the three houses (these houses are nearly identical and also share a common cornice). Because of its size and location and because it is in a different style than the rest of the façade, the new addition would inevitably draw attention to itself and, most importantly, **break the harmonious and balanced repetition of architectural elements that characterizes the triplet.** We also feel that a style typically as ornate as Second Empire would clash with the elegant simplicity of the existing façade.

Due to its central location on the northern side of Prince St., **the triplet is the main contributor to our block’s historic character** (#1315 and #1317 Prince were built in the 1980s and most houses on the southern side of Prince were built in the 1970s). Such a major change would therefore significantly affect the entire “look and feel” of our block.

This significant change matters a great deal to us and other residents of Prince Street, of course, but it should also be noted that our block draws **a frequent stream of visitors and tourists—many on foot**. Some of them are drawn to the former location of the important **Civil War Toussaint L'Ouverture Hospital**, which is marked by a historic city marker in front of 1302 Prince Street and is listed on the city's Web site. The triplet of houses offers them all an unadulterated view of Alexandria's rich and well-preserved (at least to this date) architectural past.

Furthermore, **all buildings on the northern side of the block are two-story buildings of approximately the same height** except for #1307 (which is the only multi-family structure of the block). When #1315 and #1317 were built in the 1980s, great care was taken to make them look like the triplet houses. At the present time, there are no dormer windows on the block (our own and our neighbors' dormer windows face the other way).

According to the **City's Design Guidelines**, **"Additions must be designed so that they are compatible with both the architectural character of the existing house and the immediate neighborhood"** (Chap. 5, Building Alterations p. 2). For all the previously stated reasons, the proposed third-floor addition does not meet these criteria. In addition, the Guidelines also say: "If an unacceptable loss of existing historic fabric will result because of the installation of dormers, such installation is generally not appropriate" (Chap. 5, p. 1).

The architects who built the most recent houses (from the 1970s and 1980s) on the block, including ours, obviously took great care in maintaining the consistency and visual harmony of the block's architecture and making sure that no new building would dominate existing ones. **Why break with this careful, long-standing approach** by adding a new floor, much higher than most other surrounding houses, to part of a historic structure?

We understand and respect the fact that the owners of #1309 want more space. However, Old Town does offer a wide variety of houses of different sizes. Historic houses equivalent in size to what #1309 would be after the addition regularly come up for sale in the surrounding streets, as well as on Prince street itself. So, **given that houses of that size can be bought in the historic district, what could justify making such a radical and permanent change to a 19th-century historic structure?**

Is personal convenience becoming more important than the preservation of past architecture for future generations?

Also, more practically, **the third-floor addition would have a direct negative impact on the amount of light the front part of our house receives.** We expect to get less light in our kitchen in the morning. It does matter because one of us can be negatively affected by even small variations of ambient light and has worked from home permanently in the room facing #1309 for the last 13 years.

The view from our second-floor home office would also be **partly obstructed, and we would lose some privacy** as the two added 3rd-floor dormer windows would offer the owners of #1309 a direct view from above into our 2nd-floor home office.

In 2007, we bought #1304 because, among other reasons, we loved the views onto Prince Street, in particular our unobstructed view from the 2nd floor, and the amount of light that enters this space, and because we trusted that the city and the BAR would maintain the high historic preservation standards they were known for, and not allow unnecessary changes and additions to such beautiful historic structures.

If those high standards were to no longer apply, we think that all current residents and potential buyers should be made aware of it, to avoid the kind of unpleasant changes the #1309 proposed addition would bring. Another major concern to some of us is that this proposal, if approved, would create **a dangerous precedent** that could eventually adversely affect not just our block, but the whole historic district, with third floors and other major extensions popping up here and there just because people want more space and argue that it has been done at #1309.

For all the above reasons, we hope that the Board of Architectural Review will maintain its high standards and preserve the architectural integrity and visual harmony of this triplet of houses and the historic character of our block that sits on a main, historic street of the city.

From: [Julie Catherine Detomo](#)
To: [Lia Niebauer](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL]BAR #2020-00500 & 2020-00502
Date: Tuesday, November 3, 2020 1:16:19 PM

To whom it may concern at the Board of Architectural Review-

I am a 16 year resident on the 1200 block of Prince Street and I understand there is a project proposed for 1309 Prince Street. I want to be clear that I find nothing wrong with the proposed changes. I welcome them, in fact. The proposed work looks to be reasonable, beautiful, and will add to the blossoming nature of this street (which is increasingly composed of children and families). Preserving homes in a way that can also accommodate family living is a most positive step to continuing our delightful community. Please consider approving the plans for 1309 Prince Street.

Sincerely,
Julie Detomo
1218 Prince Street

DISCLAIMER: This message was sent from outside the City of Alexandria email system.
DO NOT CLICK any links or download attachments unless the contents are from a trusted source.

From: [Kari Galloway](#)
To: [Lia Niebauer](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Comments in favor of 1309 Prince St renovation
Date: Wednesday, November 4, 2020 11:01:24 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)

After reviewing the BAR staff notes and application for renovation of the property at 1309 Prince St I am writing in favor of the recommendation by BAR staff to allow the property owners to move forward with the renovation requested. Careful work by the architect to maintain the character of the home and to match that of the neighborhood is apparent. Allowing the homeowners an opportunity to make their home more usable and updated while maintaining its historical presence seems like a win for the all of us in the surrounding community.

As a rental property occupant with a long-term lease around the corner at 120 S Payne, I know the neighbors to be fair and sensible when considering a careful renovation. This plan respects the neighbors and allows for a new and more beautiful life of an older property.

Respectfully, Kari

Kari Galloway
Executive Director
Friends of Guest House
1 East Luray Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22301
703-549-8072 o
703-473-5474 c
www.friendsofguesthouse.org

"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality."

- Martin Luther King Jr.



Please be advised that Friends of Guest House cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent via email. The information contained in this transmission may contain privileged and confidential information, including individually identifiable information protected by federal and state privacy laws. It is intended only for the use of the person(s) named above. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that taking any action in reliance upon, or any review, dissemination, distribution, or duplication of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender by reply email and destroy all copies of the original message.

DISCLAIMER: This message was sent from outside the City of Alexandria email system. DO NOT CLICK any links or download attachments unless the contents are from a trusted source.