



Agenda Item #2

Application 2023-37-CA

DETAILS

Location:

280 Chatham Street

Summary of Request:

After-the-Fact Approval: omission of columns at screened porch; variation of the screening material and pattern from the approved; variation of door size on east elevation (façade); omission of limestone door and window headers

Applicant (as applicable):

Geri Moulton

Property Owner:

Same

Staff Reviewer:

C. Dawson

Historic District:

Oakleigh Garden

Classification:

Non-Contributing

Summary of Analysis:

- The application under review seeks after-the-fact approval for the omission of porch columns, a variation in porch screening material and pattern, installation of smaller than specified doors, and omission of limestone door and window headers, as approved by the ARB in 2017.
- The variations and omissions in question are not in contravention to the *Design Review Guidelines for Mobile's Historic Districts*.

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PROPERTY AND APPLICATION HISTORY

Oakleigh Garden Historic District was initially listed in the National Register in 1972 under Criteria A (historic significance) and C (architectural significance) for its local significance in the areas of architecture, landscape architecture, and planning and development. The district is significant for its high concentration of 19th- and 20th-century architectural types and styles and significant in the area of landscape architecture for its canopies of live oaks planted from 1850 to 1910. The district is significant in the area of planning and development as the location of Washington Square, one of only two antebellum public parks remaining in Mobile. The district was expanded in 1984, and an updated nomination was approved in 2016.

The subject property, 280 Chatham Street, was constructed in 2022. The block on which it sits originally was home to a single house, the one currently located to the immediate north of the subject house at 250 Chatham Street. That 1867 residence sat in the approximate center of the block until the early 20th century, when it was moved to its current location at the southwest corner of Chatham and Palmetto streets to allow for the development of the western edges of the block.

MHDC records show that this property has appeared twice previously before the ARB. The application proposing construction of the subject house initially appeared in July 2017 and was tabled for clarifications. Upon its second appearance in August 2017, the application was approved.

SCOPE OF WORK

1. Maintain the existing, as-built conditions.
 - a. omission of Tuscan columns at north and south ends of east-facing screened porch
 - b. horizontally oriented screening pattern at porch
 - c. shorter than specified doors on eastern elevation (façade)
 - d. omission of limestone lintels above windows and doors
 - e. dark-colored porch screening (rather than approved copper screening)
2. Paint door headers (the wall between the doors and flat panel areas) in the south-center bay and door headers (area between the doors and transoms) in the center bay the same color as the doors and their trim to emulate taller doors.

APPLICABLE STANDARDS (*Design Review Guidelines for Mobile's Historic Districts*)

1. New designs should relate to the fundamental characteristics of the historic houses on a block while also conveying the stylistic trends of today. (6.0)
2. ...contemporary design is encouraged, but not required, by the Architectural Review Board provided it is compatible with the historic district. The Architectural Review Board will pay particular attention to mass, scale, siting, and overall design, but all elements will be considered. (6.0)
3. New residential construction should be compatible with adjacent historic buildings in scale, massing, materials, color, and overall design. Elements of compatibility include siting, orientation, spacing, landscaping, and distance among adjacent buildings. A successful compatible design will also consider the distinctive architectural character of the street, the neighborhood, and the district. (6.0)
4. Design exterior building walls to reflect traditional development patterns of nearby historic buildings.
 - Use a ratio of solid to void that is similar in proportion to those of nearby historic buildings.
 - Reflect the rhythm of windows and doors in a similar fashion on all exterior building walls. The ARB will consider all building walls; however, building walls facing streets may face increased scrutiny. (6.38)
5. Design a door and doorway on new construction to be compatible with the historic district.

- Place and size a door to establish a solid-to-void ratio similar to that of nearby historic buildings.
 - Place and size a special feature, including a transom, sidelight, or decorative framing element, to complement those seen in nearby historic buildings. (6.41)
6. Design a porch to be compatible with the neighborhood.
- When designing a porch, consider porch location, proportion, rhythm, roof form, supports, steps, balustrades, and ornamentation relative to the main building and porches in the district.
 - Design the elements of a porch to be at a scale proportional to the main building. (6.42)
7. Locate and design windows to be compatible with those in the district.
- Use a traditional window casement and trim similar to those seen in nearby historic buildings. (6.45)

STAFF ANALYSIS

This application proposes maintaining the as-built conditions of the new-construction house at 250 Chatham Street. These conditions include the omission of columns at the outer edges of the screened porch, the horizontally oriented screening pattern of the porch, 8' tall doors in the south-central and central bays of the east elevation (façade), and the omission of limestone headers over the south-central doors on the east elevation and over windows on the north, south, and west elevations. These treatments vary from the design approved by the Architectural Review Board in August 2017.

The scope of work approved at that time for the façade stated, “Unarticulated ante and Tuscan columns will define the porch.” The *Guidelines* recommend that porches in new construction be compatible with the neighborhood and that ornamentation should be considered “relative to the main building and porches in the district.” (A.6) The columns described in the 2017 scope of work and shown on the approved plans were compatible with the main building, but they were not discussed in either of the ARB meetings at which the application was considered or entertained in the staff reports as an integral element of the proposed design. Therefore, the columns initially proposed for the screened porch are neither required by the *Guidelines*, nor have they been considered an element of the design required for the house to be compatible with the surrounding district. (A.2, 3)

The *Guidelines* do not offer guidance regarding the screening of porches in new construction. The written scope of work for this project states only, “Copper framed and colored porch screening will be situated within the porch bay,” though the approved elevation shows five vertical screening panels on the porch’s east elevation. Chapter 6 instructs that existing historic porches should not be screened in a way that does not damage any historic elements (“If a porch is to be screened, do so in a manner that preserves the existing porch elements and does not damage them.” 6.4), but there is no mention of designs or materials suitable for new construction. Furthermore, the screen design and material were not discussed in the staff report or meeting minutes where the new construction application was on the ARB’s agenda. Therefore, while the vertically oriented, copper-colored screening initially proposed by the applicant and approved by the ARB would subjectively be more aesthetically pleasing than the extant, horizontally oriented, dark-colored screening, the as-built screening is not incompatible with the *Guidelines*.

Neither the scope of work nor the submitted plans approved for this property in 2017 noted the height of the proposed doors at the south-central and central bays of the house. A comparison of the extant house and the approved drawings makes evident that the extant doors are shorter than those actually installed. Consultation with the owner and her contractor revealed that, while 10'-tall doors initially were intended for these openings, 8'-tall doors were installed. As a result, the wall areas above the doors in both portions of the façade were treated with blank panels. The design intent of graceful walls of light composed of tall glass doors and transoms was not achieved as proposed. The *Guidelines* state, “Use a ratio of solid to void that is similar in proportion to those of nearby historic buildings.” (A.4) The *Guidelines* further advise, “Place and size a door to establish a solid-to-void ratio similar to that of nearby historic buildings. Place and size a special feature, including a transom, sidelight, or

decorative framing element, to complement those seen in nearby historic buildings.” (A.5) The extant doors and windows have been placed as approved by the ARB, and the solid-to-void ratio of the subject building is compatible with surrounding historic structures. While the height of the doors in two areas of the façade is smaller than was approved due to supply chain issues during construction, the applicant has proposed to mitigate the issue by painting the wall between the doors and flat panel areas in the south-central bay and between the doors and transoms in the center bay the same color as the doors and their trim to emulate taller doors. Whether the mitigation is implemented or not, the existing condition is not in contravention to the *Guidelines*.

In regard to the seven sets of French doors on the east elevation, the scope of work approved in 2017 states, “Limestone lintels will surmount the two doorways on the southernmost end.” The approved scope of work further states that the bank of three six-light windows on the south elevation, two pairs of wight-light windows at the west end of the north elevation would have limestone lintels. No limestone lintels are extant. The *Guidelines* advise that window trim should be similar to that seen in nearby historic buildings. (A.7) There are no nearby buildings exhibiting limestone lintels. Furthermore, the height of the lintels on the approved plans far exceeds the height of lintels on nearby properties. Therefore, the height of the approved lintels reflects the style of the new-construction house, but they are not in keeping with nearby historic properties. However, the existing stuccoed window and door headers approximate the approved limestone lintels. Although the material is not what was approved, the design intent is demonstrated in a manner that is inoffensive to the surrounding district.

Site Location – 280 Chatham Street

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD VICINITY MAP	
	
APPLICATION NUMBER	2
DATE	8/2/2023
APPLICANT	Geri Moulton/ Joe Vinson
PROJECT	Omission of columns at screened porch, variation of screening pattern from the approved, variation of door size on east elevation
	

Site Photos – 280 Chatham Street



1. View west to east elevation of screened porch; note screening is not copper in color



2. View west to south end of east elevation of screened porch (location of formerly proposed Tuscan column)



3. View southwest to northeast corner of screened porch on east elevation (location of formerly proposed Tuscan column)



4. View west to central bay with 8'-tall French doors



5. view west to 8'-tall south-center doors without limestone lintels