



LEESBURG BOARD OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW STAFF REPORT

**PUBLIC HEARING: 19 DECEMBER 2011
AGENDA ITEM 6B**

**THLP-2011-0077
15 Liberty Street SW, H-1 Overlay District
Fabian E. Saidi, Applicant
Fabian E. Saidi, Owner
Building/Contractor: NA**

ISSUE

Brought before the BAR as a result of enforcement action, the project involves the installation of vinyl lattice on the front and sides of an open porch on the façade of the building at 15 Liberty Street SW. The lattice is approximately 36 inches high and mounted on a wood frame that was constructed between the historic turned porch posts that support the enclosed second story overhang. The lattice is white, and the trim is painted white to match the rest of the trim on the building. The lattice features a grained texture and is constructed all of a piece; in other words, it does not feature the traditional overlap that results from installing lattice strips diagonally over one another.

The architectural survey from 2000 documents the historic, contributing dwelling as constructed between 1890 and 1905. The open first story of the porch is supported by turned porch posts that appear, based on material, profile, and condition, to be original to the main body of the building. The same can be said for the scroll-sawn brackets at the top of the porch posts. It appears as though the concrete porch foundation is a later modification to the structure, although it doesn't appear as though the porch ever had a railing—due to the lack of mortise holes in the turned posts. The second story of the porch appears to have been enclosed at some point during the first or second quarter of the twentieth century.

Open porches such as the one at 15 Liberty Street SW are not uncommon in the Old and Historic District and are most common when the porch is low to the ground. In fact, they may be found on several historic dwellings that date from the late nineteenth century. A similar (though more ornate) example may be seen less than a block away at the Norris House Inn (108 Loudoun Street SW), where a Queen Anne-style porch was added in the 1880s or 1890s to an early-nineteenth-century Federal-style building (pictured right). Other examples may be seen at 206 Loudoun Street SW, 109 South King Street, and on North King Street. In Leesburg, they appear to be more prevalent when the building abuts the right-of-way or sidewalk.



In evaluating the project, staff used—and the BAR should refer to—the guidelines for porches on pages 61-62 of the Old and Historic District Design Guidelines. The guidelines state:

Entrances and porches are quite often the focus of historic buildings, particularly when they occur on primary elevations. Together with their functional and decorative features such as doors, steps, flooring, balustrades, pilasters, columns, posts and entablatures, they can be extremely important in defining the overall historic character and style of a building. Their retention, protection, and repair should always be carefully considered when planning rehabilitation work. For residential buildings, porches have traditionally been a social gathering place as well as a transitional area between the interior and exterior. Non-original porches reflecting later architectural styles are often important to the building's historic integrity. For example, an Italianate-style porch added to a Federal-style dwelling has achieved its own significance.

Porch Guidelines

1. **Retain** porches that are critical to defining a specific building's design and the integrity of the overall historic district.
2. **Repair** and **replace** damaged elements of porches by matching the materials, methods of construction, and details of the existing original fabric.
3. When replacing porch features, maintain the historic dimensions and profiles of such elements as column bases, shafts and capitals, balusters, and ornamental millwork.
4. Provide evidence that the desired alteration is appropriate to the historic and architectural character of the structure if the applicant seeks to remove, alter, or replace a porch.
 - Do not strip porches and steps of original materials and architectural features such as handrails, balusters, columns, brackets, and roof decorations of wood, iron, cast iron, tile and brick.
 - Do not enclose porches on primary elevations and avoid enclosing porches on secondary elevations in a manner that radically changes the historic appearance of the building.

Although the guidelines for porches are clearly applicable to this project, the guidelines for cornices and trim on existing buildings on pages 63 and 64 may also inform the BAR's review of the application:

The junction between the roof and the wall is sometimes decorated with brackets and moldings, depending on the architectural style. This junction is formed in many ways, sometimes with a cornice that may be simple or highly articulated. Cornices also appear below a porch or portico roof or above a storefront.

Other times, the wall extends above the roofline, forming a parapet wall that may be decorated to visually complete the design. Trim related to doors, windows, porches, or other elements is an important character-defining feature of a building. The design of any trim or decorative wall features responds both to the architectural style of the building and to the building materials.

Cornice and Trim Guidelines

1. **Retain** original or historic cornices and trim that define the architectural character of the building.
2. **Repair** rather than replace original or historic cornices and trim. Match original materials, decorative details and profiles.
3. **Replace** missing cornices or trim based on physical evidence, or barring that, on local historic architectural precedent. The design should be compatible with the architectural style of the building.
4. **Retain** existing trim that defines the architectural character of the historic building.
5. **Repair** rather than replace existing deteriorated trim. Match original materials, decorative details, and profiles.
6. **Replace** missing trim based on physical evidence or, if that is not possible, select trim that is compatible with the original building
 - Do not remove elements that are part of the original or historic composition without replacing them in-kind.
 - Do not replace an original or historic cornice with one that conveys a different period of construction or architectural style.
 - Do not replace original or historic trim with trim that conveys a different period, style, or theme.

STAFF ASSESSMENT

Staff believes that the porch railing, as constructed, is not appropriate and does not meet the standards set forth in the Old and Historic District Design Guidelines for several reasons.

First, the applicant has provided no physical or photographic evidence demonstrating the historic presence of a railing on this porch. Unfortunately, staff has not identified any photographs of this building that pre-date 1975, by which point any railing that may have been present had been removed. The immediately available photographic documentation of this property only goes back to the 1975 Architectural Survey, which has been included with this report.

Neither is the railing designed in a manner that is consistent with traditional porch railings in the Old and Historic District. Were the BAR to determine that the installation of a railing is appropriate in this case, the railing might be considered appropriate if it were: lower and rising only to a height consistent with the top of the square-edged base of the columns and incorporating a traditional hand rail, base rail, and turned or square balusters that butt into the hand and base rails rather than overlapping them as in modern deck construction. Furthermore, the use of lattice on a porch railing has no precedence in Leesburg's architectural history. As installed, the railing is modern and does not reflect the traditional design or construction techniques found on the rest of the building.

Finally, the material used for the railing is inappropriate because it does not convey the visual characteristics of traditional materials. Beyond the fact that lattice has no basis as a porch railing material in the Old and Historic District—which, in and of itself, makes it inappropriate in this application—the material is clearly a thin plastic lattice that does not feature the shadow lines that one expects with a traditionally installed lattice screening.

This is not to say that lattice is entirely inappropriate for other uses in porch construction. There are numerous examples of old and new lattice used as the screening material below the porch deck. Lattice was traditionally used in this way throughout the Old and Historic District. This is not, however, the foundation on which any decision should be made about the current application.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION/DRAFT MOTION

(Based on the BAR's discussion at the meeting, any changes to the language of either part of the motion should be incorporated as necessary.)

Based on the findings that:

- The circa 1890-1905 dwelling is an historic, contributing resource in the Old and Historic District; and
- Based on the information available, the open porch with no railing is historic and original to the construction of the main building; and
- There is no physical or documentary evidence indicating that a railing previously existed on the porch; and
- The design of the railing is not consistent with traditional porch railing design in that it features a lattice screen spanning a rough lumber frame with no handrail, base rail, or balusters, and is not consistent with the dimensions or proportions of the existing porch posts; and
- The material used for the porch railing is an insubstantial and inauthentic plastic lattice that does not convey the traditional characteristics of porch materials in the Old and Historic District.

I move to deny the request presented in TLHP-2011-0077. Furthermore, I move that the applicant be required to return the porch to its original character with the understanding that, should the applicant wish to install an alternate railing on the porch, the dimensions, design, and materials be based on traditional design and consistent with the guidelines for porches on page 61 of the Old and Historic Design Guidelines, and an application will be submitted to and approved by the Board of Architectural Review prior to installation.