

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
April 28, 2015 Meeting**

16. CAR No. 15-055 (L. South)

**2515 E. Broad Street #3
St. John's Church Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Replace one first level window**

Staff Contact: **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval for the replacement of a window at this property in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District. The property is the Belfry Condos, located in the former St. John's Lutheran Church. The window in question is located on the east elevation on the sub-grade level. The work has already been completed and this application is a result of enforcement activity. The new window is a grid-between-the-glass, white vinyl window without exterior muntins. The applicant explains that this portion of the structure was once an open porch, which over the years was transformed into living area. In the fall of 2013, the applicant sought to have a storm window installed at this location, but instead the existing window was completely replaced with a new window. The existing window was a black, aluminum window with heavy plastic instead of glass. The applicant has proposed several options for remediating the violation.

Staff recommends approval of the project with a condition. The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* states that "Windows should only be replaced when they are missing or beyond repair. Any reconstruction should be based on physical evidence or photo documentation," and that, "Because the material cannot be manufactured to model effectively the appearance of historic windows, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic buildings in historic districts" (p. 65 #7 & 11). While the applicant has proposed several different window options, including the adherence of wood trim to the exterior of the new window, restoring the original aluminum window with heavy plastic, and the installation of a solid piece of glass, the most appropriate action, according to the *Guidelines*, is the applicant's proposal to install an aluminum-clad double-hung window with interior and exterior muntins.

However, the Commission may wish to consider a number of mitigating circumstances regarding allowing the applicant to retain the new vinyl window or to apply the proposed exterior muntins to the existing window. These circumstances include the fact that the window removed was not original nor historic and therefore no loss of historic fabric occurred, that the new window is obscured slightly by black metal bars, and that the new window is on the sub-grade level, mostly screened from view by the grade change and a hedgerow.

Because visibility of the window is partially obscured, and the proposal only relates to one window on a large, institutional structure, the Commission may consider whether the application of exterior muntins on the existing window

would convincingly achieve an appropriate simulated-divided lite window. Understanding how the proposed trim would fit together and interact with the edges of the window would help to dissuade any concerns that the new muntins would look out of place or “tacked on.”

Should the Commission not approve the installation of the exterior muntins on the existing window, and because the *Guidelines* caution against the installation of vinyl windows, staff recommends that the project be approved with the condition that the existing, vinyl window be replaced with a wood or aluminum-clad 12-over-12 wood window with true or simulated-divided lites (with spacer bars) to be finished or painted white to match the existing windows on the structure.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the condition above, is consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation in Section 114-930.7(b) of the City Code, as well as with the *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*, specifically the pages cited above, adopted by the Commission for review of Certificates of Appropriateness under the same section of the code.