

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
October 28, 2014 Meeting**

7. **CAR No. 14-110** (M. Lavery)

**2303 Venable Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Install HVAC unit in front yard**

Staff Contact: **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval to install a screened HVAC unit in the front yard of this property located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The unit has already been installed, and this application is the result of enforcement activity. The unit is located at the front right of the structure, in an alcove between the front porch and a short brick wall. This location is also used for utility meters and may have originally been designed to accommodate such utilities. The unit is currently screened with a small wooden fence. The applicant states that the unit is currently less visible than if it were located at the rear of the property, which would leave it exposed from the rear alley and from Tulip Street. The applicant also states that the unit generates less noise in this location because of the natural baffling provided by its location in this alcove.

Staff recommends denial of the project. The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* states that, "New [HVAC] units should be placed in side or rear yards so as to minimize their visual impact. Side yard units should be located as far away from the front of the building as possible," as well as, "HVAC equipment on the ground should be appropriately screened with fencing or vegetation" (pg. 58 #1 & #3). While the installed screening does mostly obscure the HVAC unit from view, it is still readably visible as the front yards of houses on this block are very close to the sidewalk. It is also increases visual clutter at the front of the property, and the *Guidelines* do not allow for such units to be placed in front yard, but provide for ways to minimize their appearance in side or rear yards. A similar screening of the unit in the rear yard would be considered a more appropriate alternative.

It is the assessment of staff that the application is not consistent with the Standards for Site Improvements outlined in Section 114-930.7(e) of the City Code, nor with the *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*, specifically the page cited above, adopted by the Commission for review of Certificates of Appropriateness under the same section of the code.