

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
March 22, 2016 Meeting**

14. **CAR No. 16-044** (L. Salzman) **1121 W. Franklin Street
West Franklin Street Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Expand the education building for the
Congregation Beth Ahabah and connect
the building to the Temple on the east
and the Joel House on the west**

Staff Contact: **K. Chen**

The applicant requests approval to expand the education building for the Congregation Beth Ahabah and create connections of the building to the Temple on the east and the Joel House on the west. The Beth Ahabah campus consists of 5 buildings – 1109-1125 West Franklin Street – all of which are located in the West Franklin Street Old and Historic District. The Temple (1117), built in 1904, and the two, early-twentieth century row houses (1109 and 1111) contribute to the National Register listed West Franklin Street Historic District. The early-twentieth century, Joel House (1125) contributes to the National Register listed Fan Area Historic District and the Education Building (1121), built in 1957, is listed as noncontributing. The two row houses to the east of the Temple, 1109 and 1111, are not included in this project.

The purpose of the expansion and the new connections is to create one central entrance to the Congregation Beth Ahabah campus, improve the functionality of the Education building, plan for future vertical expansion, and to create accessible connections between the Temple, Education building, and the Joel House.

The applicant is seeking **Conceptual Review** for this project. Conceptual review is covered under Sec. 114-930.6(d) of the City Code: *The commission shall review and discuss the proposal with the applicant and make any necessary recommendations. Such Conceptual Review shall be advisory only.* Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the Standards for New Construction on pages 44 and 45 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* and the resulting comments follow.

Staff Findings based on Commission of Architectural Review Guidelines

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

New construction should be compatible with the historic features that characterize its setting and context. To protect the significance of the historic context, the new work should reference the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of its setting. However, new construction should be clearly discernible from the old to protect the authenticity of the historic district.

SITING

- 1. Additions should be subordinate in size to the main structure and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating them at the rear or least visible side of the structure is preferred.*

The proposed addition re-faces the Education building, a noncontributing building, creating a new entrance at the northeast corner and extending the building to the west across an existing drive way. The connectors between the expanded education building and the Temple to the east and the Joel House to the west are set back and transparent. The addition is subordinate to and differentiated from the Neo-classical Temple to the east which is the center piece of the Beth Ahabah campus.

- 2. New infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block. The minimal setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.*

The proposed addition reinforces and restores a portion of the traditional street wall that was lost through the earlier demolition of row houses and the installation of a curb cut and driveway. The curb cut and driveway will be removed as part of this project.

- 3. New structures should face the most prominent street bordering the site.*

The proposed addition faces Franklin Street and creates a new, prominent entrance fronting on the street. Currently, there are multiple entry points to buildings and no accessible connections that link the Temple, the education building, and the Joel House. The accessible entrances are currently at the rear of the property.

FORM

- 1. New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the immediate area. Building form refers to the specific combination of massing, size, symmetry, proportions, projections, and roof shapes that lend identity to a structure. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

The Education building is currently a two-story, modernist, red, brick box that breaks the horizontal continuity of the street face. The proposed addition will

increase the height of the addition to three stories, through a false façade, which will reinforce the street face and the horizontal organization of the rooflines of the row houses and the cornice line of the Temple portico. The façade of the addition will be organized into vertical elements that are reflective of the vertical column spacing of the Temple portico and the vertical three-bay rhythm of the row houses. The addition will be constructed of brick that matches the tone and material of the Temple, and it will incorporate metal accents in the entrance and windows and the connectors to the Temple and Joel House will be clear glass.

SCALE

1. *New construction should maintain the existing human scale of historic residential and commercial neighborhoods. The inappropriate use of monumentally-scaled buildings that overwhelm pedestrians at the street level is discouraged.*

The new addition maintains the existing human scale of the historic street by reinforcing the horizontal line of the tops of the row houses yet is subordinate to the Neo-Classical Temple with its monumental portico and dome.

2. *New additions and infill structures should incorporate human-scale elements such as storefronts and porches into their design.*

The proposed design calls for human scale elements in its use of materials and the creation of a gracious and accessible entrance from Franklin Street. The addition also closes an existing driveway from Franklin Street which will greatly improve the pedestrian experience of the street.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION, & MASSING

1. *New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures.*

The new addition will be the same height as the row houses on the block and subordinate to the monumental scale of the Temple.

2. *New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial and residential properties in historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing of more than 30 feet should be broken up by bays.*

While contemporary in form, the façade of the new addition will be organized by vertical elements that are reflective of the rhythm of the columns on the Temple portico and the three-bay facades of the row houses. The glazed entrance and fenestration pattern are derived from symbolism that is important to the Jewish faith.

3. *Typical massing patterns throughout city historic districts are simple and block-like; therefore, new structures should avoid the use of staggered setbacks, towers, or elaborate balconies.*

The massing of the addition is a block like form that is organized into vertical elements through the brick joinery and broken by a unique and symbolic fenestration pattern. The massing is a bridge between the adjacent, residential scale of the row houses and the monumental form of the Temple.

MATERIALS, COLORS, & DETAILS

1. *New construction should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.*

The new addition will cover over existing elements of the Education building which is a noncontributing building in the National Register listed historic district and the connections to the Temple and the Joel House will be transparent and will not destroy historic fabric. The east elevation of the Joel House was largely reconstructed in 2001.

2. *Missing building elements should be replaced with new elements compatible in size, scale, and material to the original elements without creating a false historical appearance.*

This guideline is not applicable.

3. *Materials used in new construction should be compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.*

The design calls for brick, glass, and metal elements, which are compatible with the building materials of the Temple and the building materials prevalent throughout the district.

4. *Paint colors for new additions should complement those of the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

The applicant has indicated final color selections for brick and metal elements and there do not appear to be any painted surfaces.

5. *Vinyl, asphalt, and aluminum siding are not permitted for use in City Old and Historic Districts. Other synthetic siding materials with a smooth, untextured finish may be allowed in limited cases, but approval by the Commission is always required.*

The application does not call for any of these synthetic products.

6. *Vinyl windows are strongly discouraged and rarely permitted.*

The application does not call for the use of vinyl products.