

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
February 24, 2015 Meeting**

19. **CAR No. 15-022** (W. R. Jones)

**425 North 25th Street
Church Hill North Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Construct new mixed use building**

Staff Contact: **K. Chen**

The applicant requests conceptual review and Commission comments for the construction of a new mixed-use building on a vacant lot in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The proposal is for the construction of a three-story building with commercial on the first and residential on the second and third floors. The third floor is set back from the façade (west elevation) and rear (east elevation). The application includes 3-D elevation drawings, but does not include a site plan, dimensions or materials.

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: Commercial” on pages 50 and 51 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

All new residential and commercial construction, whether in the form of additions or entire buildings, should be compatible with the historic features that characterize their setting and context. To protect the context of the surrounding historic district, new construction should reference the materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of the existing historic building or buildings in its setting. However, compatibility does not mean duplicating the existing buildings or environment. In order to avoid creating a false sense of history, new construction should also be discernible from the old. Perhaps the best way to think about a compatible new building (or addition) is that it should be a good neighbor; one that enhances the character of the existing district and respects its historic context, rather than being an exact (and misleading) reproduction of another building.

SITING

1. *Additions should be subordinate in size to their main buildings and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating additions at the rear of or on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This guideline does not apply.

2. *New commercial infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard development patterns of the surrounding block. The minimum setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall. In cases where the adjoining buildings have different setbacks, the setback for the new building should be based on the historical pattern for the block.*

A dimensioned site plan was not included. It could not be determined if the infill construction respects the prevailing front and side yard development patterns of the surrounding block.

3. *New commercial buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site.*

The proposed in-fill is located on a corner and is oriented with the primary elevation facing 25th Street and a corner entrance that storefront glazing that is oriented towards Clay Street.

4. *For large-scale commercial parking, parking within the building is strongly encouraged. If a building includes parking within it, vehicle entry doors should be located on non-primary elevations.*

This guideline does not apply.

FORM

1. *New commercial 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 building. Form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

The proposed building form is compatible with the massing, size, symmetry, proportions, and projections of other corner commercial buildings found in the area. The set-back and reduced form of the third story is not typically found in the area.

2. *New commercial construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic commercial buildings in the district.*

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of nearby historic commercial buildings by incorporating large areas of storefront glazing and an intermediate cornice on the 25th and Clay street elevations.

3. *New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.*

The proposed building incorporates human scale elements at the pedestrian level by incorporating large areas of storefront glazing on the 25th and Clay street elevations.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

1. *New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.*

The proposed building is located in an area with both residential and commercial and some larger institutional buildings, the majority of which are two-stories in height. Context drawings with dimensions were not included therefore this guideline cannot be fully evaluated.

2. *New commercial construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial buildings in Richmond's historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. When designing new commercial buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face, the design should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.*

The proposed building respects the vertical orientation typically found in corner commercial buildings. The first story has a horizontal orientation organized by the use of storefront and intermediate cornice. The second story is organized into a typical three bay arrangement found in the area.

3. *The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.*

Context drawings with dimensions were not included therefore this guideline cannot be fully evaluated.

MATERIALS & COLORS

1. *Additions should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.*

This guideline does not apply.

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

Information on proposed materials was not provided.

- 3. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

Information on proposed paint colors was not provided.

- 4. 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.*

Information on proposed materials was not provided.

- 5. Rooftop mechanical equipment should be located as discretely as possible to limit visibility. In addition, appropriate screening should be provided to conceal equipment from view. When rooftop railings are required for seating areas or for safe access to mechanical equipment, the railings should be as unobtrusive as possible, in order to minimize their appearance and visual impact on the surrounding district.*

Information on the proposed location of mechanical equipment was not provided.

- 6. For larger-scale projects that involve communal garbage collection (such as dumpsters or other large collection device), these garbage receptacles should be located away from the primary elevation or elevations of the building (preferably to the rear) and screened from view.*

Information on the proposed location of dumpsters or other garbage collection devices was not provided.