



Staff Report  
City of Richmond, Virginia



Commission of Architectural Review

4. COA-134295-2023	Final Review	Meeting Date: 10/24/2023
Applicant/Petitioner	Daniel Leonard	
Project Description	Construct a pergola in a rear yard.	
Project Location		
Address: 2519 East Grace Street		
Historic District: St. John's Church		
<p><b>High-Level Details:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The applicant requests approval to construct a pergola in the rear yard of a brick, Greek Revival dwelling circa 1862, otherwise known as the George A. Ainslie House.</li> <li>The pergola will be constructed of metal with a black finish and will be 15'x10'x10'. It will have a flat roof form with parallel, flush metal slats. The roof will be supported by simple square posts.</li> <li>The pergola will be visible from the public right-of-way, projecting above the rear brick wall. The applicant plans on planting evergreen shrubs to screen the pergola.</li> <li>In addition to the pergola, two new gates will be installed on the rear brick wall, one facing North 26<sup>th</sup> Street and one facing the rear alley. The gates will have a curved top and turned spindles on the upper half.</li> <li>The pergola and gates have already been installed without Commission approval.</li> </ul>		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, <a href="mailto:alex.dandridge@rva.gov">alex.dandridge@rva.gov</a> , (804) 646-6569	
Previous Reviews	<p>The Commission reviewed this application at the August 2023 meeting. The Commission deferred the application to allow the applicant time to receive feedback from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources regarding the impact the rear yard site improvements and the impact they may have on the possibility of receiving tax credits, which were being perused. The Commission also asked to see additional information on the proposed lighting, landscaping, and gate design. The applicant has since</p>	

	<p>withdrawn their tax credit application with the Department of Historic Resources.</p> <p>The Commission reviewed and approved exterior alterations at this property in June 2022. Exterior alterations included the enclosure of a two-story rear porch, alterations to an existing brick wall, and the installation of a new side and rear gate.</p> <p>Staff administratively approved revisions to the June 2022 approval in August 2023 based on revisions requested by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, which required that the exterior appearance of the new rear porch enclosure be further simplified to better differentiate it from the original portion of the house.</p> <p>In addition, Staff also administratively approved screening for an exterior HVAC mini-split that was installed on the roof of the rear projection without the proper approvals.</p>
<p><b>Staff Recommendations</b></p>	<p>Staff Recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that the ceiling of the pergola be finished or painted with a matte color/material; final solution to be submitted to staff for administrative review and approval.</li> <li>• that the trellis be painted a color that compliments the pergola and primary building; final color selection and trellis design submitted to staff for administrative review and approval.</li> <li>• that any future lighting associated with the pergola be compatible with the scale and size of the structure and be down lit and shielded from the adjacent right-of-way and properties.</li> <li>• final design of any future lighting be submitted to Staff for administrative review and approval.</li> </ul>

## Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
<p><b>Standards for New Construction, Residential New Construction, Outbuildings, pg. 51, #1-3</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Outbuildings should be compatible with the design of the primary building on the site.</i></li> <li>2. <i>Newly constructed outbuildings should respect the siting, massing, roof profiles, materials and colors of existing outbuildings in the neighborhood.</i></li> <li>3. <i>New outbuildings should be smaller than the main residence and be located to the rear and/or side of the property.</i></li> <li>4. <i>Prefabricated yard structures are discouraged. Screening will be considered as a mitigating</i></li> </ol>	<p>The pergola is part of a larger site improvement plan for the rear yard, which also includes an in-ground pool and hardscaping. Most of the site improvements are not visible from the public right-of-way.</p> <p>The <i>Guidelines</i> offer little guidance about small, auxiliary structures such as arbors and pergolas. It does, however, note that outbuildings should be compatible with the design of the major buildings on the site, and respect the materials and colors of the main structure. The <i>Guidelines</i> also suggests that new auxiliary structures should be located to the rear or side of the property to emphasize that they are secondary to the main residence.</p> <p>The pergola has a minimalist design that does not compete with, or detract from, the primary</p>

	<p><i>factor for the installation of these structures. However, prefabricated structures will still be reviewed for compatibility using the criteria developed in this section.</i></p>	<p>building on-site. It is subordinate in size and located in the rear yard.</p> <p>Staff finds that the narrow, dark frame of the pergola does not clash with other materials on site.</p> <p>At the August 2023 Commission meeting, the Staff Report stated that the metal underside of the pergola roof was highly reflective. Reflective finishes are not common in City Old and Historic Districts. <u>Staff recommends that the ceiling of the pergola be finished or painted with a matte color/material; final solution to be submitted to staff for administrative review and approval.</u></p> <p>The applicant proposes to plant potted evergreen shrubs adjacent to the pergola as a means of screening. The landscape plan indicates that there will be significant plantings of large and small evergreen shrubs on the slope behind the pergola and in pots along the east wall.</p> <p>Evergreen shrubs will include fourteen dense Emerald Green Arborvitae trees along the east side wall spaced at approximately 3.5 ft. The shrubs will have a mature height of 12-14 feet. The applicant indicates that these shrubs have already been purchased and have a height of 6-9 feet. They will be planted in the coming weeks before winter.</p> <p>Since the August 2023 review, the applicant now proposes to construct a wooden trellis screening around the pergola, specifically adjacent to the south elevation and the N. 26<sup>th</sup> Street elevation. The trellis will be planted with ivy. <u>Staff recommends that the trellis be painted a color that compliments the pergola and primary building; final color selection and trellis design submitted to staff for administrative review and approval.</u></p>
<p>City of Richmond Commission of Architectural Review Guidelines for Administrative Approval of Light Fixtures</p>	<p><i>A. Items delegated for staff review</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. The installation of conduit, motion detection fixtures, security lights, sconces, free-standing lights minimally visible from the public right-of-way.</i></li> <li><i>2. Light fixtures that are discreetly installed in porch ceilings, thresholds, or along walkways.</i></li> <li><i>3. Wall sconces and porch ceiling lanterns on the street façade(s) of a building that are compatible with the scale and style of a historic building.</i></li> </ol>	<p>At the August meeting, the lighting inside the pergola was discussed. The applicant explained that there is an embedded light-strip within the pergola. The applicant states in the application that they will “decommission” this lighting component. Staff finds that strip lighting is not common in City Old and Historic Districts and supports the applicant’s decision to decommission this element. However, if the applicant wishes to install a new lighting feature at a later date, <u>Staff recommends that any future lighting associated with the pergola be compatible with the scale and size of the structure, and be down lit and shielded from the adjacent right-of-way and properties. Staff recommends final design of any future lighting be submitted to Staff for administrative review and approval.</u></p>

<p>Site Improvements, Fences &amp; Walls, pg. 51</p>	<p>1. Fence, wall, and gate designs should reflect the scale of the historic structures they surround, as well as the character of nearby fences, walls, and gates.</p>	<p>Two gates have been installed on the rear and side of the extant brick wall. The gates are traditional in design with curved tops. The lower halves of the gates are opaque, while the upper halves have small turned spindles. Staff finds that the gate design is in-keeping with the character of nearby gates.</p> <p>At the August meeting, the Commission recommended that the gates be taller or more opaque in order to further screen the rear yard site improvements. In the revised application, the applicant states that gates will not be redesigned, as the trellis proposal should increase the screening of the rear yard as seen from the alley.</p>
<p>Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation</p>	<p><i>2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.</i></p> <p><i>5. Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.</i></p> <p><i>9. New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.</i></p>	<p>The 1990 National Register of Historic Places Amendment for St. John's Church lists the district as being significant under Criterion C. Architecture, specifically Greek Revival, Italianate, and Victorian.</p> <p>2519 East Grace Street is historically significant for its architectural style, which is Greek Revival with Italianate influences. When reviewing the impacts of the construction of the pergola against the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, Staff finds the pergola will not destroy historic materials that characterize the building. Staff also finds that the pergola will be adequately differentiated from the old materials and will have a rectangular form as seen in other auxiliary structures in the district.</p> <p>It is common in the St. John's Church City Old and Historic District for properties to have rear gardens enclosed by a brick wall. Some rear yards in the district do feature carriage houses or other auxiliary structures that are subordinate to the primary building on site. While most original auxiliary structures have the same materiality and design elements of the primary building, the new pergola's minimalist design does not match the traditional design of 2519 East Grace Street and this design choice will serve as a means of differentiation.</p> <p>Sanborn Maps from 1905 indicate that the subject site did historically feature rear auxiliary structures including a masonry 2-story structure and a few smaller frame structures. These structures were demolished long ago, but this information does confirm that other smaller structures have existed on the site in the past. (See figure 6)</p> <p><u>Staff finds that the installation of the proposed pergola does not negatively impact the integrity of the site's historic significance.</u></p>



## Figures

Figure 1. 2519 East Grace approximately 1955.



Figure 2. View of pergola and rear yard looking north from rear alley. Newly installed gates partially obscure the rear yard.



Figure 3. View of pergola looking northeast from the rear alley. There is a steep grade change in this location. This image was taken standing quite low down a steep hill from the subject site. Reflectivity of the ceiling is apparent.



Figure 4. View of pergola from across 27<sup>th</sup> Street looking west. Pergola is situated quite far to the rear of the primary building.



Figure 5. View of pergola from adjacent sidewalk.



Figure 6. 1905 Sanborn Map demonstrates that the subject site featured several rear auxiliary structures, including a 2-story masonry structure and small frame structures.



