




Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Commission of Architectural Review

3.COA-158358-2024	Final Review	Meeting Date: 1/28/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	David Franks	
Project Description	Reconstruct a covered front porch.	
Project Location		
Address: 1809 West Grace Street		
Historic District: West Grace Street		
High-Level Details: The applicant requests approval to reconstruct a front porch which was removed in 2024 without review and approval by the CAR. The building is a masonry, three-story, colonial revival building circa 1908. There have been three documented front porch designs on the building. The porch that was removed was not the original. A notice of violation was issued to the property in April 2024. A code case (036818-2020) was issued to the property for deteriorating front porch columns in 2020.		
Staff Recommendation	Denial	
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, alex.dandridge@rva.gov, (804) 646-6569	
Previous Reviews	The Commission continued this item at the December 2024 meeting, as the applicant was not present to speak on their application.	
Staff Recommendations	Staff recommends denial of the use of metal posts and railings on the new porch and recommends that the porch feature elements and materials that either reference the historic 1950s photograph of the building's original porch, neighboring front porches, or the most recent porch that was removed which featured wooden elements compatible with the district. Metal porches in the West Grace Street City Old and Historic Districts are anomalies and incompatible, pre-district alterations.	

Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
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<p>Building Elements, Porches, Entrances & Doors, pg. 71</p>	<p><i>4. Do not remove or radically change entrances and porches important in defining the building's overall historic character. Front and side porches are architecturally more ornate than utilitarian back porches.</i></p> <p><i>5. The entire porch should only be replaced if it is too deteriorated to repair or is completely missing; replacements should match the original as much as possible.</i></p> <p><i>6. When restoring a railing or balustrade there may be difficulty in maintaining the original height while meeting current building code. Always consult with the building department.</i></p> <p><i>7. When replacing a railing on a historic building which has lost its railing, the first step is to look for documentary evidence which records the appearance of that railing. If no documentary evidence survives, look for physical evidence (this may benefit from the help of a design professional)</i></p>	<p>The entire front porch was removed in early 2024. This front porch was not original to the building. The roof may have been original as seen by ghosting on the face of the building.</p> <p>Based on photographic documentation, there are three porch designs that have been present on the building overtime.</p> <p>The original porch featured a flat roof with a balustrade that featured tuned balusters and square newel posts with recessed panels. The porch was supported by Scamozzi columns sitting on tall square bases. The railing around the porch featured turned balusters and newel posts with recessed panels. The porch appears to have been nearly identical to the one at 1811 West Grace Street.</p> <p>The original porch was altered/removed at some point, likely around mid-century, and the Scamozzi columns and turned balusters were removed and replaced with decorative, flat, metal posts and railings, a common mid-century alteration to porches. The balustrade above the front porch was removed as well.</p> <p>Most recently, the porch featured square columns and newel posts on either side of the front porch stairs and simple rectangular pickets and banisters.</p> <p>This porch was removed in early 2024.</p> <p>The applicant is proposing to build a new front porch that features a hipped, standing seam metal roof which is supported by metal posts. There will be decorative metal detailing added between the tops of the posts and between the porch railings.</p> <p>It appears that the applicant is basing the new porch on the mid-century alteration of the front porch which featured decorative metal. Staff was able to locate a 1977 photograph that showed this version of the porch.</p> <p>The porch at this time did not have metal posts, but rather, decorative, flat metal supports. The roof of the porch appeared to be the original with a classical entablature, the profile of which can be seen though ghosting on the face of the building.</p> <p>The West Grace Street City Old and Historic District was designated in 1996. The version of the porch that is being referenced in the proposed design was an alteration that impacted the overall character of the building, as West Grace Street is significant for its cohesive architectural character, which are mostly Queen Anne Style with combinations of Italianate and Colonial Revival Detailing. Metal work on front porches is not common and not in keeping with the overall architectural character of the district or 1809 West Grace Street. <u>Staff finds that constructing a new front porch that references a past, incompatible alteration that changes the design and roof form of the porch is inappropriate and does not meet the guidelines, especially in cases when documentation of original features exists.</u></p>
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Standards for Rehabilitation, Residential Construction, pg. 59	<p><i>6. Retain original entrances and porches including doors, frames, fanlights, sidelights, steps, balustrades, pilasters, entablatures, columns and decorative features.</i></p> <p><i>7. Repair damaged elements instead of replacing them. Use materials that match the original in type or use physically and chemically compatible substitute materials that convey the same appearance as the surviving elements or sections. Use available documentation when reconstructing missing elements. Pictorial, historical, or physical documentation can be helpful.</i></p>	<p>All original architectural features of the front porch have been removed.</p> <p>The porch was not repaired but demolished completely.</p> <p>Historic documentation from the 1950s exists that shows that the original porch was colonial revival in-style with columns atop square bases, an upper balustrade, and turned balusters with a classical entablature. Staff notes that the historic photograph obtained during this review is limited to the far west side of the porch and is quite blurry; however, the overall elements and proportions of the original porch at 1809 west Grace Street appear to be quite similar to the neighboring property at 1811 West Grace Street.</p>
Standards for New Construction, 46	<p><i>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. To avoid creating a false sense of history, new construction should also be discernible from the old.</i></p>	<p>The proposed porch will feature metal posts and decorative metal work. Historically, West Grace Street did not feature porches with ornate, metal elements, but rather wooden elements like columns and balustrades. While there is documentation of metal ornamentation on the front porch at 1809 West Grace Street, Staff finds it inappropriate to construct a new porch that references incompatible alterations to a building and finds ornate metal work incompatible with the surrounding context of the district. Staff recommends denial of the use of metal posts and railings on the new porch and recommends <u>that the porch feature elements and materials that either reference the historic 1950s photograph of the building's original porch, neighboring front porches, or the most recent porch that was removed which featured wooden elements compatible with the district. Metal porches in the West Grace Street City Old and Historic Districts are anomalies and incompatible, pre-district alterations.</u></p>

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, the application is not consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation and New Construction outlined in Section 30-930.7 (b) and (c) 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.

Figures (next page)

Figure 1. 1809 West Grace Street, 1950s. Original front porch with Scamozzi Columns atop square bases. Ornate entablature and balustrade with turned posts above the front porch. Similar to neighboring properties.



Figure 2. 1809 West Grace Street, 1977, HRF Survey. Original front porch has been removed and replaced with mid-century, decorative metal posts and railings. Original entablature appears to be in place. Building has been painted.



Figure 3. 1809 West Grace Street, 2023. Front porch with square posts, simple square newel posts, and a flat roof. This porch has since been removed.



Figure 5. 1809 West Grace Street. Most recent front porch that was removed in 2024 with square columns and simple rectangular handrails.

Figure 4. 1809 West Grace Street, existing conditions 2024.



Figure 6. 1809 West Grace Street, existing conditions.