



Commission of Architectural Review

8. COA-176751-2025	Final Review Meeting Date: 12/16/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	John Wilson
Project Description	Construct a new mixed-use building on vacant corner lot
Project Location	
Address: 2322 Venable Street	
Historic District: Union Hill	
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant proposes to construct a mixed-use building on a narrow, vacant corner lot.</p> <p>The original building located on the site was a two-story, masonry, Italianate style building with a bracketed cornice and first floor commercial space. The building sat on the lot line, and proud of the extant building located at 2320 Venable Street.</p> <p>The original building on the site was demolished between 2012-2014.</p> <p>The proposed mixed-use building will be comprised of a one-story commercial space fronting Venable Street, and a two-story residential section at the rear which will face Pink Street. The commercial space will be clad in brick, and the residential section will be clad in fiber cement siding and panels.</p>	
Staff Recommendation	
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, Alex.Dandridge@RVA.gov, (804)646-6569
Previous Reviews	<p>This application was conceptually reviewed by the commission at the November 2025 meeting. Specifically, the Commission found that the proposed storefront is compatible with the character of the district and the surrounding neighborhood. However, members noted that the residential portion of the design does not reflect traditional neighborhood patterns, particularly regarding window arrangements and the use of Hardie panel elements between windows. Commissioners emphasized the need for greater interaction on the public-facing residential elevation, while acknowledging the</p>

	<p>challenges posed by a zero-lot-line condition. The Commission advised incorporating more human-scale elements into the residential section and suggested that the base of the building could be made flush to better represent the typical treatment found within the district.</p> <p>The application was reviewed in December 2025 and deferred. The Commission stated that it was difficult to determine what changes had been made since the previous review and felt that revisions were not clearly communicated. While supporting contemporary commercial design, the Commission expressed concern that the lack of street-facing entrances did not create a sense of defensible space and requested increased transparency along the Pink Street residential elevation. The Commission noted the site's grade change and emphasized the need for some form of entrance on Pink Street, suggesting that privacy concerns be addressed through interior treatments rather than reducing exterior windows. Concerns were also raised about entry sequences and the effectiveness of transom windows, with a recommendation to remove that condition. Although the entrance location and recessed entry were viewed positively and considered typical for the city, the Commission agreed that the addition of a door on Pink Street was an improvement but reiterated the desire for clearer residential entrances or additional articulation along that elevation.</p>
Staff Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final colors, siding, brick, roof, materials submitted for staff review and approval. • Final exterior light fixture designs submitted for staff review and approval. • Final window materials and dimensions be submitted for staff review and approval.
Surrounding Context	
<p>The residential character of the north side of Venable Street is primarily 2-story three-bay brick Italianate structures set on raised foundations with full-façade front porches. The south side of Venable Street is developed with two large 2-story brick structures of attached single family dwellings. Each single family home has three bays, many with a 2-bay front porch, and seven of the homes have false mansard roofs. Directly across pink street from the subject site is a two story mixed-use building that faces Venable Street. There is a large four-five story converted, multifamily building at the southeast corner of Venable Street and Pink Street.</p>	

Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
<p>While the proposed building is mixed use, the massing, form, and materiality of the front commercial section and the rear residential component greatly differ, and the building reads as two attached buildings with different uses, rather than one cohesive design. For this reason, the analysis is broken into the review of the front commercial section using the new commercial construction guidelines, and then the rear residential section using the residential construction guidelines.</p>		
Commercial Section		
New Construction, Commercial, Sitting, pg. 52	<i>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</i>	The new commercial building will be proud of the adjacent historic building located at 2320 Venable Street, having no setback from the sidewalk. Staff finds this setback appropriate, as it is typical in the district for small commercial buildings to sit on the lot

	<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>line close to the sidewalk. Furthermore, the proposed setback will mirror that of the previous mixed use budling on the site.</p> <p>While typically it is suggested that new construction not be proud of adjacent historic buildings as to not obscure them, the proposed budling will be one-story, while the neighboring building is two stories. The height difference between the two budlings means that the historic budling located at 2320 Venable will only be partially obscured, and even less obscured than it was by the pervious historic building on the site, which was two-stories.</p>
<p>New Construction, Commercial, Form, pg. 52</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>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. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.</i> <i>2. New commercial construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic commercial buildings in the district.</i> <i>3. New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.</i> 	<p>The commercial building will be rectangular in form with a flat roof. It will not have any projections and will be quite narrow. Staff finds that that the simple and small scale of the building form is overall very compatible with the scale of historic buildings in Union Hill which largely consist of two-story buildings. This proposed one-story commercial building doesn't overwhelm its historic context.</p> <p>The commercial building will have large plate glass, storefront windows that wrap the corner of Venable Street and Pink Street. The transparency of the large storefront windows create a connection between the interior space of the budling and sidewalk, which in return enhances the pedestrian scale of the budling and the surrounding pedestrian realm.</p> <p>The entrance of the commercial space will face Venable Street, tucked away in an in set area between the subject proposed building and 2320 Venable Street. During the conceptual review, the comission and staff recommended that the in set entrance be better articulated using an additional architectural element such as a simple canopy, downlit light, or other pedestrian scale element. The applicant has revised the plans to include a simple downlight over the entrance on Venable Street.</p>
<p>New Construction, Commercial, Height, Width, Proportion & Massing, pg. 53</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.</i> <i>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</i> 	<p>The commercial building will be one-story which is compatible with the height of the surrounding buildings and does not overwhelm the surrounding historic context.</p>

	<p><i>building should read as a single piece of architecture.</i></p> <p><i>3. The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.</i></p>	
<p>New Construction Commercial, Materials & Colors, pg. 53</p>	<p><i>2. Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.</i></p> <p><i>3. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district (see Painting Section starting on page 60).</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>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</i></p>	<p>The commercial building will be clad in red brick, which is a compatible material within the district.</p> <p>Around the cornice, there will be a brick dental detailing, above the windows there will be double horizontal bands of soldier courses of brick, and the windows will be outlined by a single course of side facing bricks.</p> <p>Closer to the street level, there will be a horizontal band of cast concrete that will wrap the building beneath the windows.</p> <p>Staff finds that these subtle details will break up the materiality in a subtle way.</p>
<p>New Construction, Commercial, Corner Properties, pg. 54</p>	<p><i>1. Secondary elevations of corner properties should reference massing similar to other corner locations in the historic district.</i></p> <p><i>2. The material used in the primary elevation should be continued along the second, corner elevation.</i></p> <p><i>3. Particular attention should be paid to the height of foundations to create</i></p>	<p>The material of the commercial building's primary elevation will wrap the corner, including the storefront window.</p> <p>The height of the foundation will be appropriately scaled and enhance the pedestrian experience. It will be constructed of brick, which is a common building material found in the district.</p>

	<p><i>an appropriately scaled appearance that relates to neighboring structures and is consistent with neighboring properties. Heights should be kept to a level that will enhance, not detract from, the pedestrian experience. Foundation materials should be selected that are compatible with historic materials and consistent with properties within the district. If the foundations are parged, the parge coat must be opaque, and the coursing beneath must not telegraph through the parge coat.</i></p> <p><i>4. Windows and doors on the secondary, corner elevation should be organized following the principals of the primary elevation: windows should be proportioned appropriately, aligned vertically, and arranged as though designing a primary elevation.</i></p> <p><i>5. For commercial corner properties, we strongly encourage the use of architectural elements that are typical of commercial corner properties in Richmond's historic districts: storefronts that turn the corner, secondary entrances (including porticos and shed roofs, where appropriate), sign bands that turn the corner, lighting related to that on the primary elevation, and other similar treatments that treat the secondary corner elevation as an architecturally important elevation.</i></p>	<p>There will be an area beneath the cornice and above the storefront windows will be suitable for future commercial signage placement.</p> <p>During the conceptual review, it was noted that exterior lighting and fixtures were not submitted with the application, and Staff recommended that simple exterior light fixtures be installed strategically around the entire building that enhances the pedestrian realm and the character of the building. The applicant has responded by proposing simple exterior downlit lights around the perimeter of the building.</p>
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Residential Section

<p>Residential New Construction, Siting, pg. 46</p>	<p><i>2. New residential infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block. The minimum setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.</i></p> <p><i>3. New buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site.</i></p>	<p>The residential section will sit on the side yard lot line without a setback. This is not uncommon in the district and is like the setback of the previous building on the site.</p> <p>The residential section of the building will face Pink Street, which is a side street. While it isn't typical for residential buildings to face side streets, given the lot constraints and the design of the building in conjunction with the commercial section, this configuration is the most feasible.</p>
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<p>Residential New Construction, Form, pg. 46</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the historic district.</i> 2. <i>New residential construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic residential construction in the district.</i> 3. <i>New residential construction and additions should incorporate human-scale elements such as cornices, porches and front steps into their design.</i> 	<p>The residential section of the building will be rectangular in form with a gable roof. A majority of residential construction in the district includes a combination of flat roofs and shed roofs. Some one-story rear projections include low sloped gables. There are examples of nearby new construction on Pink Street and Carrington Street that have prominent gable roofs. Staff finds that a gable roof is compatible with other roof forms found in the district; however, a flat roof or shed roof could also be appropriate for the building.</p> <p>During the conceptual review, the Pink Street facing elevation didn't feature any steps or porches. The entrances to the units will be located on the west elevation out of view from the public right-of-way.</p> <p>There appears to be a horizontal element below the first-floor windows on the Pink Street elevation that helps visually break up that elevation at the pedestrian level.</p> <p>Staff finds that it is uncommon for residential buildings to not have entrance on street facing elevations; however, due to the grade of the lot and its narrowness, there isn't enough space on the Pink Street elevation to include a landing and stair into the units, making the western elevation the more feasible location.</p> <p>During the December review, the plans showed that the residential portion's Pink Street elevation featured small square windows. Staff and the Commission noted that these small windows were not in-keeping with fenestration patterns found in the district, and their size reduced the amount of transparency and interaction between the street and the building. It was recommended that these small square windows be increased in size to full-sized windows.</p> <p>The applicant revised the plans to show larger windows that match those on the second story. Staff supports this revision.</p> <p>For the last submission, the applicant revised the plans to include an inset covered porch and stairs on the Pink Street elevation between the commercial and residential sections of the building, in order to address the commission's concerns of the Pink Street elevation not having any entrances. Staff supported this revision, as the inclusion of an entrance on this elevation reflected the comments of the commission f adds pede from the conceptual review. In addition, staff noted that the addition of the entrance to this elevation enhanced its pedestrian in a simple way in the context of the specific site constraints.</p> <p>However, the commission expressed concern over the primary residential entrances being located on the west side of the building, rather than the Pink Street elevation. In the current submission, minimal changes have been made to address this concern. Relocating the residential entrances to the Pink Street elevation would result in substantial revisions to the overall design of the building.</p>
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		Staff appreciates the inclusion of the one covered entrance on the Pink Street elevation and finds that it addresses the Commission’s concerns, while also being understanding of the lot restrictions of grade and setback requirements.
Residential New Construction, Height, Width, Proportion, & Massing, pg. 47	<p><i>1. New residential construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.</i></p> <p><i>2. New residential construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in surrounding historic districts.</i></p> <p><i>3. The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.</i></p>	<p>The residential section of the building will be two stories in height which is compatible with surrounding residential buildings.</p> <p>The section of the building will respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in the surrounding historic district.</p> <p>The building does not have a traditional cornice, but the gable roof’s eave height from grade is compatible with that of other two story buildings in the surrounding historic district.</p>
Residential New Construction, Materials and Colors, pg. 47	<p><i>2. Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.</i></p> <p><i>3. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the district.</i></p>	<p>The residential section of the building will use horizontal HardiPlank siding, HardiPanel siding between the first and second story windows, and asphalt shingle roofing. The siding will be painted an “off-white” color. Staff finds that the siding materials and colors are appropriate for the district. While HardiPanel doesn’t have a similar shape and dimensions to traditional historic materials, the use of this material helps visually break up the expanse on the side elevations and creates a gentle contemporary design.</p> <p>During the conceptual review, it was recommended that the residential portion of the building use a standing seam metal roof in lieu of the proposed asphalt shingle roof. The commission and staff believed that standing seam metal is a more compatible material for roofs in the district. The applicant has responded by revision the plans to include a standing seam metal roof.</p>
Mechanical Equipment, pg. 68	<i>The visual impact of new mechanical equipment should be minimized to protect the historic character of the district.</i>	The trash enclosures will be located at the rear of the property, and the exterior HVAC equipment will be located on the roof.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, the application is 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



Figure 1. Looking north at subject site at the corner of Venable & Pink Street.



Figure 2. Looking Southwest towards subject site from Pink Street.



Figure 3. Looking east down Venable Street from subject site.



Figure 4. Looking south down Pink Street towards Venable Street from the rear of the subject site.



Figure 5. Looking East down Venable Street mid-block.



Figure 6. Original mixed-use building located on the Subject Site. Demolished.



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Figure 7. Venable Street, looking north. Block context



Figure 5. Venable Street looking north, block context