

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
January 27, 2015 Meeting**

7. **CAR No. 15-006** (Urban Core Development) **320 North 32nd Street**
St. John's Church Old and Historic District

Project Description: **Construct new mixed-use development**

Staff Contact: **J. Hill**

The applicant requests approval to construct a two-story mixed-use building that houses two ground-floor commercial spaces with two residential apartments above and a third, townhouse-style two-story residential unit on the western end of the building. Parking is provided at the western end of the parcel adjacent to a city alley and screened from the street by a fenced trash enclosure.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. 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 on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

- 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.*

The structure built to house commercial activity is built to the property line, the traditional pattern for corner commercial properties in the City's historic neighborhoods and in this Old and Historic District in particular. The main body of the townhouse unit is setback from the property line with the porch built to the public right-of-way. The porch stairs are inset so as not to encroach on the sidewalk. Many houses in the district have minimal front yard setbacks and there are other instances of porches built to the front property line; a nearby example is 306 North 32nd Street.

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

The proposed development appears successfully to address both North 32nd and Marshall streets. The corner entrance to the commercial space in the earlier version has been replaced with entrances to two separate commercial spaces on Marshall Street. There is a 32nd Street entrance to one of the residential units and the band of storefront windows successfully communicate the interior commercial activity to both Marshall and 32nd streets.

- 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.*

The project is not of a scale that accommodates structured or interior parking. A small number of parking spaces are provided off of a city alley at the western end of the parcel. The parking area is proposed to be screened by a fenced trash enclosure.

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 design of the new buildings reference the traditional configuration of corner commercial development, storefronts, townhouses, porches, and roof forms. The form of the building appears successfully to communicate the different functions

of its component parts. The parapet in the earlier version generated much discussion but here is reduced in scale and simplified. Balconies and porches are sought-after urban-living amenities. It appears the balconies proposed will require an encroachment permit as they extend over the public right-of-way.

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

The proposed buildings maintain the existing human scale of the neighborhood.

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

The proposed designs include storefronts, porches, and human-scale entrances.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

The proposed development does not appear to exceed the height of the existing adjacent buildings. Drawings included with the submission note depict the height of the proposed building within the context of the cornice height and roof height of the adjacent structures.

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 design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district, and the submission communicates the additional detail for the elevations, particularly fenestration and the corner parapet that was requested at the time of conceptual review. There is one discrepancy among the elevations that involves a window on the west (alley) elevation. The window does not appear in the floor plans or the color-rendered elevations but does appear on Sheet A202. Staff recommends including the window.

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

The cornice height appears to be fully compatible.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This guideline is not applicable for new construction on this vacant parcel.

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

All of the materials included in the project overview and indicated on the drawings appear to be selected to be visually compatible with materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.

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

The applicant indicates that paint colors will be selected from the palette included in the Guidelines. As the specific colors have not yet been chosen, the applicant may subsequently submit them to CAR staff for review and administrative approval.

- 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.*

The cementitious siding should have a smooth untextured finish, as indicated in the project overview.

- 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.*

The applicant will need to provide information on the location and configuration of the mechanical units as this is not evident from the drawings provided. Additionally, the building owner or tenant will need to submit any commercial signage for CAR review and approval.

- 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.*

Staff recommend that the trash enclosure be reduced in size so that there is more separation between the enclosure and the front door of the townhouse unit. Otherwise, a person standing on the porch waiting to enter is looking down into the immediately adjacent trash enclosure. The parking should still be screened

with fencing or landscape plantings of sufficient heft to soften the presence of parked cars so close to the sidewalk.

Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions. The proposed infill project appears generally to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines*. Staff recommends that approval be conditioned on the provision of additional information on the location and configuration of mechanical units, the reduction in size of the trash enclosure to separate it from the townhouse porch entrance, and supplemental screening recommended under Item 6 on pages 4 and 5 of the staff report.

It is the assessment of staff that the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 114.930.7(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 code.