



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Commission of Architectural Review

10. COA-164394-2025	Conceptual Review	Meeting Date: 4/22/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Lisa Clark	
Project Description	Construct a new three-story, 22-unit multifamily building with ground floor commercial space	
Project Location		
Address: 715 Mosby St, Richmond, VA 23223		
Historic District: Union Hill		
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant proposes the construction of a three-story, 22-unit multifamily mixed-use building on a site previously occupied by a one-story structure, which was previously approved for demolition. The site is located within the Union Hill Old and Historic District and has previously been subject to other approved applications, including smaller-scale residential and mixed-use developments. The proposed residential building includes approximately 1,100 square feet of ground floor commercial space. The design features fiber cement cladding and recessed balconies.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Conceptual Review	
Staff Contact	Yara Iwaz, Yara.Iwaz@RVA.gov, (804)646-6031	
Previous Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Commission previously approved the demolition of a one-story structure on this site, followed by the conceptual approval of a mixed-use development. Additional applications for the site have included residential-only proposals featuring a smaller number of dwelling units than the current submission. 	
Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff finds that the proposed development presents significant challenges in meeting the intent the District Guidelines. While some aspects are in alignment with historic district characteristics, others lack essential contextual sensitivity. Staff recommends the following revisions and supplemental materials be addressed in future submissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce variation in material, color and/or form across the façade to reflect the building’s visual modulation. Revise window sizes for consistency and compatibility with Union Hill’s traditional fenestration patterns. Add human-scale architectural details, such as cornices or base articulation, and consider ground-level porch elements. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the architectural treatment of the commercial storefront to reflect the precedent in the district • Additional visual documentation will be critical to inform a future review. <p>Staff acknowledges that the project is in early conceptual review but notes that the current design lacks strong architectural relationships to the Union Hill Historic District. Without deeper articulation, material changes, or human-scale elements, the building does not yet adequately reflect the district's historic character or rhythm. Staff therefore recommends significant revisions to massing, detailing, and façade treatment.</p>
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Staff Analysis

Surrounding Context		
<p>The subject property is located on the west side of Mosby Street between Carrington and Venable Streets, within the Union Hill Historic District. The block is characterized primarily by one- to two-story residential structures, with three-story dwellings found further north along Mosby Street, where the streetscape includes a mix of two- to two-and-one-half-story frame and brick dwellings in Greek Revival, Italianate, and Late Victorian styles, most with front porches and elevated foundations.</p> <p>The surrounding context reflects the district's topographic variation, and the site itself features a notable level change typical of Union Hill. To the east and south of the property lies a rear alley, with the site constrained on the east side by a retaining wall. Immediately south of the parcel is a one-story masonry commercial building. The block retains a residential character overall, with intermittent commercial and institutional uses at key intersections.</p>		
Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards for New Construction: Siting, p. 46	<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>The structure is oriented to Mosby Street with front-facing stair entries, aligning with the neighborhood pattern and helping maintain the street edge.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends maintaining the stair-entry connection to the main street.</u></p>
Standards for New Construction: Height, Width, Proportion & Massing, page 47	<i>2. New residential construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in surrounding historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. For example, full-block-long row house compositions are rare in Richmond. New residential buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.</i>	<p>The building presents as a wide, uniform mass. Recessed balconies and lobbies provide some modulation, but without material differentiation and massing breaks, the façade lacks depth and/or vertical orientation.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends introducing stronger massing breaks and deeper recesses to reflect the scale and rhythm of historic rowhouses.</u></p>

<p>Standards for New Construction: Height, Width, Proportion & Massing, page 47</p>	<p><i>1. New residential construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.</i></p>	<p>While the proposed three-story height is consistent with some structures further north along Mosby Street, including two-and-a-half and three-story buildings on the rising slope, the rear elevation facing the alley presents a significant height disparity. As shown in Figure 7, the building appears substantially taller than the adjacent one-story commercial structure at 701 Mosby Street, resulting in a visual imbalance and potential disruption to the block's scale at its southern edge.</p> <p><u>Staff therefore recommends that the massing be stepped down towards the alley, and reducing the number of floors that face the one-story structure at 701 Mosby.</u></p> <p><u>Staff also recommends submitting further contextual drawings to evaluate height in relation to neighboring structures.</u></p>
<p>Standards for New Construction: Height, Width, Proportion & Massing, page 47</p>	<p><i>2. New residential construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in surrounding historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. For example, full-block-long row house compositions are rare in Richmond. New residential buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.</i></p>	<p>The building presents as a wide, uniform mass. Recessed balconies and lobbies provide some modulation, but without material differentiation and massing breaks, the façade lacks depth and/or vertical orientation.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends introducing stronger massing breaks and deeper recesses to reflect the scale and rhythm of historic rowhouses.</u></p>
<p>Standards for New Construction: Materials & Colors, page 47</p>	<p><i>2. Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.</i></p>	<p>The use of fiber cement lap siding is appropriate, but the building features a single uniform color. No change in material or finish accompanies the façade articulation.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends incorporating visual variety or secondary materials (e.g., at entries or balconies) to break up the mass and enhance depth, in keeping with the identifiable character of the district.</u></p>
<p>Standards For New Construction: Doors and Windows, p.56</p>	<p><i>2. The size, proportion and spacing patterns of door and window openings on free-standing new construction should be compatible with patterns established in the district</i></p>	<p>While windows are vertically aligned, their sizes are inconsistent across the elevation, which deviates from the typical window expressions seen in the district.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends revising window design to feature consistent sizing and regular spacing, referencing traditional fenestration patterns.</u></p>

Standards For New Construction: Storefront Facades, p.49	1. <i>Historically, storefronts were defined by simple piers, large storefront windows, a cornice, a signboard and/or attached signage, and awnings. The new storefront should be compatible with other historic storefronts within the district.</i>	While the commercial space is not on a corner location (but rather at the intersection of the main street and side alleyway), it appears to lack a distinct storefront design that references the full-width historic precedents as seen in the district. <u>Staff recommends referencing larger historic storefronts, and including typical elements such as signage, awnings, or cornices.</u>
Standards for New Construction: Form, page 46	3. <i>New residential construction and additions should incorporate human-scale elements such as cornices, porches and front steps into their design. In Richmond, porches were historically an integral part of residential design and provide much of the street-level architectural character of Richmond's historic districts.</i>	While the proposed structure is a multifamily building, the overall massing, fenestration, and minimal articulation create a visual language that lacks the character of traditional residential architecture in Union Hill. The wide façade and elevated bulk do not clearly communicate its use as a residential structure, and the main elevation reads as flat and oversized at street level. The design may read more as an institutional or commercial building, rather than housing. Though there are few direct precedents for multifamily buildings of this scale within Union Hill, the district is rich with design elements that clearly identify buildings as residential; this includes material transitions at the base, recessed entries, porches, cornices, individual unit articulation, and traditional façade variation. <u>Staff recommends introducing identifiable human-scale elements and other pedestrian-scale features that reference the historic district.</u>
Mechanical Equipment, p. 68	<i>The visual impact of new mechanical equipment should be minimized to protect the historic character of the district.</i>	Rooftop equipment is appropriately screened by a parapet, and trash/service areas are placed at the rear. <u>Staff recommends maintaining this approach.</u>

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

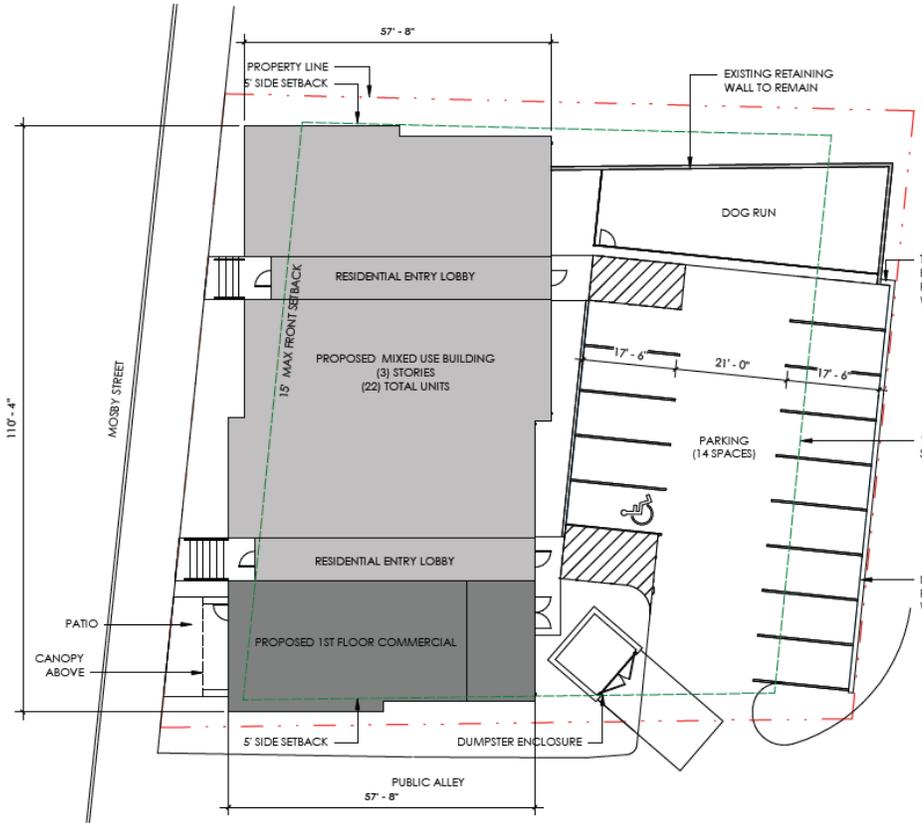
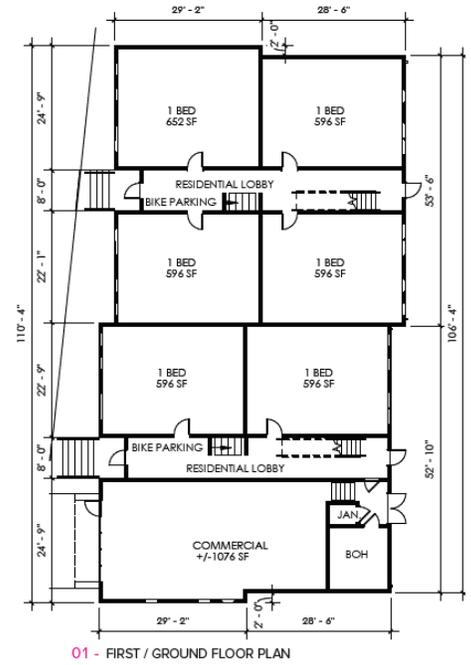
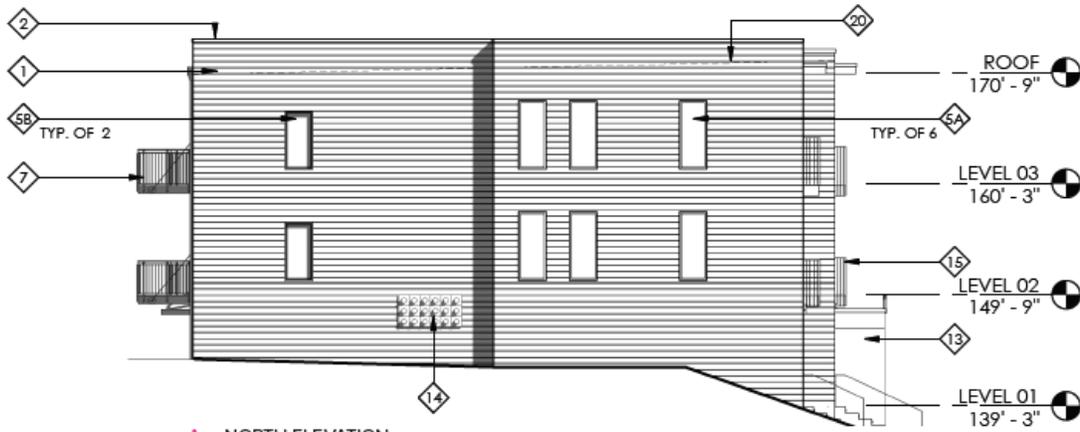


Figure 1: proposed site plan



01 - FIRST / GROUND FLOOR PLAN
Figure 2



A - NORTH ELEVATION

Figure 3: proposed north elevation



B - EAST / MOSBY ELEVATION

Figure 4: proposed east elevation



B - WEST / REAR ELEVATION

Figure 5: proposed west elevation

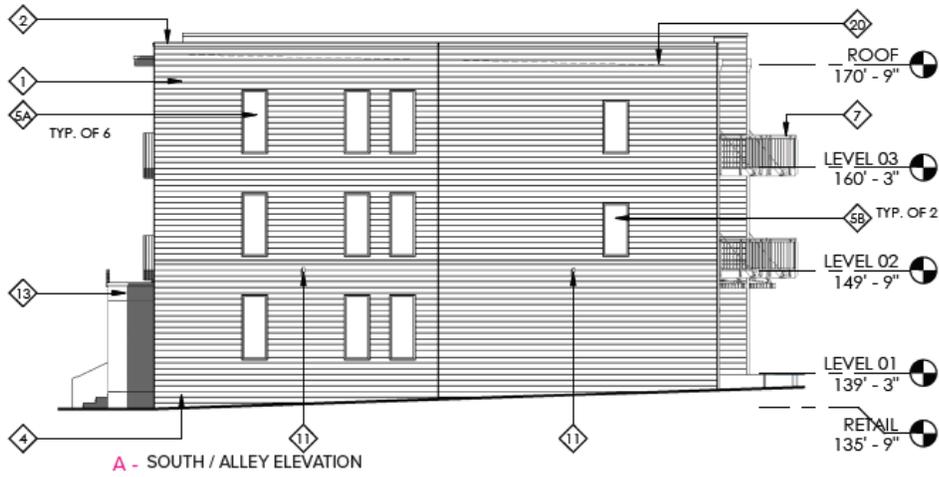


Figure 6: proposed south elevation



Figure 7: context elevation, showing the relationship with neighboring structures



Figure 8



Figure 9