

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
January 26, 2016 Meeting**

15. **CAR No. 16-014** (S. Krumbein)

**2308 Jefferson Avenue
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

Construct new mixed use building

Staff Contact:

K. Chen

The application was reviewed conceptually at the December 15, 2015 meeting. The Commission was generally favorable in its comments, but there was some discussion related to the verticality of the ground floor and the horizontal nature of the upper floors, the departure from the traditional three-bay pattern of the upper stories, and an understanding of the details especially at the corners.

The proposed building is of frame construction with a commercial space on the first story, and three, two-story residential units on the second and third stories. The first story is organized by five, operable storefront doors. A stylized cornice and signage band separates the first and second stories and a stylized cornice crowns the top of the building. The second and third stories of the building are organized into two bays of ranked, paired windows. The side elevations have a saw-toothed pattern to provide outdoor space for the units on the roof of the first story.

Details of the corner condition and the cornice have been provided as well as a context drawing from the east.

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 or 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 block where the new building will be constructed is bound by 23rd, 24th, M and Leigh streets and Jefferson Avenue that cuts across the block at an angle along the southeast corner. The proposed new construction will be located on a lot that is approximately 28' wide and 165' deep, at its longest point, with a diagonal front property line that follows the face of Jefferson Avenue. The southeast corner of the façade will be set at the property line; at the southwest corner, the face of the building will be set approximately 19' back creating an open triangular space at the front of the building facing Jefferson Avenue. A site plan was not provided that illustrates the side yard setbacks but no side yards are required under UB zoning. The adjacent commercial buildings are constructed lot line to lot line and set at the edge of the sidewalk facing Leigh Street.

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

The new building is sited mid-block and faces Jefferson Avenue, the most prominent street bordering the site.

- 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.*

This standard is not applicable.

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 traditional building form of commercial buildings, in the surrounding neighborhood, is a masonry, rectangular form that is generally two stories in height and three bays wide with symmetrically placed openings. The vertical form is broken by a cornice and the façade terminates in a cornice with a shed roof behind. The ground floor fenestration pattern is usually organized by vertical pilasters that engage the storefront cornice and sign band creating a symmetrical composition.

The proposed new building incorporates some of these characteristics. In traditional storefront design, there is a large, undivided expanse of glass over a low solid base with vertical door elements and a cornice and sign band that organize the lower story which creates a horizontal composition. The proposed lower story is organized by five, operable storefront doors topped with a sign band and cornice which creates a vertical composition. The use of paired windows on the second and third stories is also an unusual feature in the area and creates a horizontal composition as compared to the more vertical traditional three bay composition. The doors on the first story and windows on the upper stories are not symmetrically placed in façade.

The stepped, saw-toothed design of the side elevations, which will be visible from 24th Street, is also unusual but it is utilized in this instance to provide light and outdoor space for the residential units.

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

Traditional commercial buildings engage with the pedestrian through large storefront windows and cornices above that created a human scale for the building. The new building incorporates glass panels and doors, and a cornice above the storefront that maintain the existing human scale of the district.

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

The operable storefront doors at the pedestrian level and the cornice between the first and second story add human-scale elements to the façade of the building.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

The majority of the surrounding buildings in the area are two stories in height. The proposed new building is three stories tall. The overall height of the new building appears to be compatible with the adjacent buildings because the new building incorporates smaller floor to floor heights. This results in the windows and cornices not aligning with the adjacent buildings. The building height allowed by zoning is 28' which this building meets because the height is calculated based on the mid-point of the sloped roof on the rear which is 28'.

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 proposed new construction respects the typical pattern of commercial buildings in the area that are defined by strong horizontal divisions between the first and second stories and cornices that terminate the buildings at the roof line. However, the proposed building façade does not share the strong symmetry that is seen traditional commercial buildings. The ground floor also does not read as a unified composition that is framed by pilasters and a cornice.

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

The cornice above the doors and at the top of the proposed new building do not align with the cornices on the adjacent commercial building.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This standard is not applicable.

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

The commercial buildings in the surrounding neighborhood are predominately of masonry construction while residential buildings are of frame construction. The use of frame construction is compatible with the dominated material used for residential construction in the neighborhood.

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

Light Mist has been selected for the color of the Hardie lap siding and the Hardie panel on the sides. The smooth Hardie trim used for the cornices, corner boards, and window and door trim will be white. The guardrails on the east side of the building will have stainless steel cables and stations and wood cap will be painted white. The asphalt shingles on the rear roof slopes will be a medium grey color – Estate Grey. The sloped roofs will be minimally visible from 24th Street on the east. The colors selected are compatible with colors found on the Commission approved paint palette. A color was not specified for the windows or the storefront.

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 application calls for the use of smooth, untextured Hardie lap siding, panels, and trim. Asphalt shingles will be used on the rear roof slopes and the flat roofed areas, which are not visible from the public right-of-way, will be TPO membrane. The windows and storefront will be aluminum.

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 mechanical units will be located on the west side of the building on the roof over the second floor corridor. The mechanical units will be screened from view on Jefferson Avenue by the third story and the building to the west. They will be visible at a distance from 24th Street to the east.

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.*

The building does not have alley access from the rear so trash receptacles will need to be placed on Jefferson Avenue for collection. A room is designated for trash on the first floor plan and accessed by a door opening onto Jefferson Avenue.

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 with:

- The ground floor be symmetrically organized and unified by the use of vertical and horizontal framing elements.
- The second story windows be symmetrically placed in the façade.
- A survey be submitted that shows the placement of the building on the lot
- Colors for the doors and windows be submitted for staff approval if they are a color other than white.

It is the assessment of staff that with the acceptance of the stated conditions the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 30.930.7(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.