

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
November 25, 2014 Meeting**

16. **CAR No. 14-139** (Mid-Atlantic Comm. Properties) **535 West Broad Street
Broad Street Old and Historic District**

Project Description: Construct new commercial building and parking area

Staff Contact: **K. Chen**

The applicant requests final review on revised documentation for the construction of a new 13,000 square foot commercial building with parking area and drive-thru pharmacy pick-up at the intersection of Broad and Belvedere streets in the Broad Street Old and Historic District. The application includes a building summary describing general design and materials. The intersection is recognized as an important "Richmond Gateway." A canopied filling station/convenience store currently occupies the site. Construction has just begun on the VCU Institute for Contemporary Arts on the property across Belvidere to the west.

Commission staff reviewed the revised project through the lens of the Standards for New Construction on pages 44 and 45 and the Standards for Site Improvements on pages 66 and 67 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

New construction should be compatible with the historic features that characterize its setting and context. To protect the significance of the historic context, the new work should reference the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of its setting. However, new construction should be clearly discernible from the old to protect the authenticity of the historic district.

SITING

1. *Additions should be subordinate in size to the main structure and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating them at the rear or least visible side of a structure is preferred.*

- This guideline does not apply. The existing structure on the property is not historic and would be demolished to make way for the new structure. The new construction is intended to remediate the current siting with new construction that is more appropriate for a City Old and Historic District.

2. *New infill construction should respect the prevailing setback patterns of the surrounding block faces. The minimal setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.*

- The new building is built to the property line at the intersection, establishing a traditional street wall and respecting the prevailing setback patterns of the historic streetscape within the district. The design does not establish the street wall along the entire street frontage, however. The pharmacy pick-up lane is adjacent to the existing alley off of Belvidere, and the parking area and entrances are located along the Broad and Belvidere block-faces.

3. *New structures should face the most prominent street bordering the site.*

- The new construction is designed to appear as though storefronts line Belvidere and Broad, both extremely important Richmond streets. The applicant responded to the Conceptual Review comments from the Commission by placing entrances at the northwest corner of the building from both Broad and Belvidere streets, which further reinforces the importance of both of these streets.

4. *New infill structures should be spaced within 20% of the average distance between existing houses on the block.*

- This guideline is more applicable within a district with an established and intact residential character. The commercial buildings in the majority of the area of the district model a continuous commercial block-face of compatible yet diverse buildings. The building currently adjacent to this site on Broad, a former McDonald's, does nothing to help establish appropriate spacing.

5. *If setback waivers are needed, the Commission can be requested to support a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) waiver.*

- The applicant has applied for a Special Use Permit to address issues raised by the Zoning Administrator and other city departments.

FORM

1. *New 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 structure. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

- The overall size and form of the building accomplish much in the way of remedial work for the district. This corner of the district has been underutilized with a historically incompatible structure for at least a generation. During Conceptual Review, the Commission expressed concern that the cornice and heavy frieze gave the building a horizontal appearance. The applicant has responded to this concern and increased the verticality of the building by removing the frieze and extending the brick to the underside of the cornice. The applicant has also increased the height of the portion of the building at the corner of Belvidere and Broad to further emphasize the importance of this intersection. The Commission also expressed a desire for a truly mixed-use design with additional stories. While the applicant appreciated and acknowledged the desire to create a mixed-use project at this location the revised drawings do not include this feature.

2. New construction should be contemporary in style yet compatible with surrounding historic structures. New construction should not mimic previous architectural styles in such a way that creates a false historical appearance.

- The new construction takes its cues from traditional storefront architecture but does not attempt to mimic previous architectural styles and would not be mistaken for a historic structure. The compatibility of the form is discussed above.

SCALE

1. New construction should maintain the existing human scale of historic residential and commercial neighborhoods. The inappropriate use of monumentally-scaled buildings that overwhelm pedestrians at the street level is strongly discouraged.

- The current design respects the human scale.

2. New additions and infill structures should incorporate human-scale elements such as storefronts and porches into their design.

- The storefronts appear successfully to communicate the human scale of the new construction. Based on Conceptual Review comments, the applicant increased the amount of clear glass and created additional entrances from Broad and Belvidere streets which further respond to the human scale and high volume of pedestrian traffic in the district.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

1. New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures.

- There is very little left of historic precedent to establish typical height in the immediate area. The closest historic buildings are a historic three-story building with apartments over a store at 518 West Grace Street and a row of two-story commercial buildings on the north side of West Broad Street (504, 506 and 508). Without an established pattern immediately adjacent to the site, staff does not find the height of the proposed new construction inappropriate for establishing a strong edge to the district, although the dense urban character of the larger district would seem to support a taller building. The revised elevations indicate that the height of the building was increased at the corner of Broad and Belvidere streets.

2. New structures should have the same number of stories as the majority of structures on the block.

- This guideline is addressed in the comment immediately above.

3. New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial and residential properties in historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing of more than 30 feet should be broken up by bays.

- The applicant has increased the verticality of the building by increasing the height of the block at the corner of Broad and Belvidere streets, and removing the frieze and extending the brick to the underside of the cornice. These modifications give the building a more vertical massing.

4. Typical massing patterns throughout City historic districts are simple and block-like; therefore, new structures should avoid the use of staggered setbacks, towers or elaborate balconies.

- The proposed massing features simple and block-like forms arranged with stepped setbacks.

MATERIALS, COLORS & DETAILS

1. *New construction should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.*

- This guideline does not apply in this instance of new construction as no historic architecture is present on the site.

2. *Missing building elements should be replaced with new elements compatible in size, scale and material to the original elements without creating a false historical appearance.*

- This guideline is not applicable as the project does not involve any historic structures.

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

- The materials proposed, brick cladding with EIFS trim on the cornice, colored metal storefront elements, upper story windows with the appearance of wood windows, and standing seam metal awnings appear to be appropriate and compatible with the materials used in the greater surrounding district and are similar to materials that have been approved for new construction in commercial areas of Old and Historic Districts in Richmond's downtown. Actual appropriateness is verified when more specific details are provided for final review. For instance, windows will be required to have true or simulated divided lites as shown on pages 59-60 of the *Guidelines*. Windows in Old and Historic Districts are generally required to have wood sash or aluminum-clad wood sash. Storefront façade guidelines are covered on Page 46. Awnings are discussed on page 62 and seem intended to guide placement of awnings on existing historic buildings.

4. *Paint colors for new additions should compliment those of the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district (see *Painting Section starting on page 54*).*

- The colors used in the illustrations may be taken as a general indication of what the applicant intends and seem appropriate. Specific colors for exterior elements can be submitted for review and approval by Commission staff.

5. *Generally, synthetic siding materials are strongly discouraged for use in City Old & Historic Districts. If used on a new rear addition, and not visible from a prominent public right-of-way, these materials may be allowed in limited cases but approval by the Commission is always required.*

- This guideline does not apply to the proposed design.

PARKING AND SIGNAGE

Guidance for the design of parking areas is covered under the *Standards for Site Improvements* on page 67. The parking area is on the interior of the block with landscape buffers generally indicated. A monument sign (page 65) is also indicated at the Broad Street entrance.

Staff recommends approval of the project. The proposed infill project appears to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines*. 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.