



Commission of Architectural Review

3. COA-186141-2026	Final Review	Meeting Date: 6/23/2026
Applicant/Petitioner	Mark Hays	
Project Description	Construction of new brick front yard wall replacing previously removed unsafe stone wall	
Project Location		
Address: 303 W Clay Street		
Historic District: Jackson Ward		
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant proposes the construction of a new low brick wall along the front property line, replacing a stone wall that was recently removed under emergency authorization due to structural instability. The proposed wall would be approximately 14 inches in height and constructed of modular brick matching the existing house and neighboring historic walls along the block.</p> <p><i><u>The application originally also included the installation of PVC dentil molding on the reconstructed front porch cornice. However, at the applicant's request, review of the dentil molding will be reviewed in a future application so that the applicant may present that portion of the project in person. The current review is therefore limited to the proposed front yard brick wall.</u></i></p>		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Yara Iwaz, Yara.Iwaz@RVA.gov, (804)646-6031	
Previous Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	

Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff recommends approval of this application, with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff recommends approval of the construction of a new low brick wall in the front yard.• Staff supports the use of brick as an appropriate material for the replacement wall; final wall height and brick course width to be submitted for staff review and approval.• Staff recommends that the final gate design, material, and finish be submitted for administrative review and approval, if applicable.• Any approval of this application by the Commission does not authorize the installation of PVC dentil molding on the front porch.
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Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
<p>Note : <i>The portion of the application related to PVC dentil molding is not included in this review and will be evaluated under a future application.</i></p> <p><u>Any approval of this application by the Commission does not authorize the installation of PVC dentil molding on the front porch.</u></p>		
<p>New Construction, Residential Outbuildings, Fences & Walls, pg. 51</p>	<p><i>1. Fence, wall, and gate designs should reflect the scale of the historic structures they surround, as well as the character of nearby fences, walls, and gates.</i></p> <p><i>2. Fence, wall, or gate materials should relate to building materials commonly found in the neighborhood.</i></p>	<p>The property is located within the Jackson Ward City Old and Historic District on a block characterized by attached and semi-attached masonry dwellings with consistent front setbacks and modest front yard enclosures. Numerous properties on the block feature low masonry walls along the sidewalk edge, made of concrete or brick, including neighboring properties at 301, 305, 307, and 309 W. Clay Street.</p> <p>Historic documentation consistently depicts a front yard stone wall at the subject property. While staff was unable to conclusively determine whether the recently demolished stone wall was original to the site, photographic evidence submitted by the applicant suggests that the stone wall may have been a later alteration constructed atop an earlier brick base. The proposed replacement therefore introduces a material and wall type that is consistent with both district precedents and the architectural character of the property.</p> <p>The proposed wall is modest in height and scale and reflects the dimensions and proportions of neighboring low walls located along the same block. The proposed opening aligns with the existing front walk and maintains the traditional relationship public sidewalk and private property. Staff finds that the overall configuration is compatible with the surrounding historic context.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approval of the construction of a new low brick wall in the front yard.</u></p>
<p>Standards for Site Improvements, Fences & Walls, pg. 78</p>	<p><i>6. A new fence or wall should be constructed using materials and designs appropriate to the District. Height restrictions are governed by the Zoning Ordinance.</i></p>	<p>Although staff cannot definitively conclude that the demolished stone wall was non-historic, the proposed replacement draws from established examples on the block face and appears consistent with the historic development pattern of the district.</p> <p>Brick is one of the predominant building materials within Jackson Ward and is used extensively throughout the block in both primary buildings and site features. The proposed brick wall introduces a material that is more compatible with the masonry character of the district than the previously existing stone wall.</p>

		<p><u>Staff supports the use of brick as an appropriate material for the replacement wall; final wall height and brick course width to be submitted for staff review and approval.</u></p>
<p>Standards for Site Improvements, Fences & Walls, pg. 78</p>	<p><i>3. If not original to a site, new street-front fences, walls, and gates should be compatible with the historic structure in design, materials, and location, and should be based on physical or documentary evidence does not exist, the proposed fence, wall, or gate should be compatible in design, materials, and location, and should look to precedent on the block face or the block face opposite, or within the district, but not outside the district. By following this guidance, in some circumstances, permission for new fences, walls, or gates may be granted.</i></p> <p><i>5. When considering the design of new fences, remember that some districts, such as Church Hill North and Union Hill, historically featured modest wooden picket fences, while some districts, such as Monument Avenue and West Grace Street, more rarely had fences, and when they did occur, were rarely wooden picket fences. In the event of a conjectural fence, the design should seek simplicity, rather than elaboration.</i></p>	<p>The proposed design is simple and appropriately restrained. However, it is unclear if a gate will be installed in the location of the proposed opening. If a gate is indeed proposed within the central opening, staff recommends that the final gate design, material, and finish be submitted for administrative review and approval.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the final gate design, material, and finish be submitted for administrative review and approval, if applicable.</u></p>

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: 1950s Assessor card, showing a stone wall in the front yard



Figure 2: John Zehmer photo collection



Figure 3: Stone wall that was recently removed due to unsafe conditions as deemed by the Commissioner of Buildings



Staff Report
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Figure 4: Site condition photograph submitted by applicant, showing an underlying layer a brick that suggests the wall was a later addition



Figure 5: neighboring properties show similar wall forms



Figure 6: Current site conditions