

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

9. **CAR No. 14-118** (A. Watkins)

**2109-2111 M Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Construct two new single-family residences**

Staff Contact: **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval to construct two new single-family residences on two vacant lots located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed buildings are two-story structures with shed roofs that replicate the Italianate building style found throughout the district.

Due to the shape and alignment of the parcels, the buildings will be slightly canted, which will match the alignment of the adjacent house at 2105 M Street. The buildings will be offset from one another, but will have the same setbacks relative to M Street.

The buildings would be situated between an existing house and an alley. The proposed buildings would be between 24' and 26' in height. The dwellings will have 3' side yard setbacks and 4' to 8' front yard setbacks (as measured from the front porch), due to their canted nature. The buildings will have a one-story front porch, and a two-story rear porch. The applicant proposes smooth cement board siding, masonry foundation, masonry or brick front porch foundation supports, rubber membrane main roof, architectural shingled porch roof, wooden front posts, painted Richmond rail, fiberglass or wood front door, composite windows, and vinyl corbels.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Commission staff reviewed the 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 the structure is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

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

The proposed 3' side yard setbacks will reflect the typical pattern along the block. The 4' to 8' front yard setbacks (as measured from the front porch) would be similar to the estimated 2' to 5' front yard setback of the adjacent building, and the estimated 3' setback of the adjacent building across the alley. Because structures along this block of M Street do not have a completely uniform setback, ensuring that the new structures align perfectly to the existing ones is not as critical, so long as the new construction results in a coherent and consistent street wall.

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

The proposed dwelling will face M Street, the most prominent street bordering the site.

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 form of the building is typical of two-story Italianate buildings located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District.

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 discouraged.*

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of the neighborhood.

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

The proposed design calls for a front porch that has a form which is comparable to other porches in the area.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION, & MASSING

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

The proposed structures will be between 24' and 26' tall at the ridge of the roof. The context rendering of the proposed and adjacent buildings provided by the applicant indicate that the proposed structures will be similar in height to adjacent building. The structures will mostly split the difference in height of the adjacent buildings, which are approximately 30' and 24' to the east and west, respectively.

2. *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 design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district.

3. *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 is generally simple and block-like.

MATERIALS, COLORS, & DETAILS

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

This standard is not applicable.

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 standard is not applicable.

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

The applicant proposes smooth cement board siding, masonry foundation, masonry or brick front porch foundation supports, rubber membrane main roof, architectural shingled porch roof, wooden front posts, painted Richmond rail, fiberglass or wood front door, composite windows, and vinyl corbels. Staff would recommend the use of a membrane or metal roof above the front porch in place of the proposed architectural shingles.

4. *Paint colors for new additions should complement 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.*

The applicant has not provided paint colors for the proposed structures, and is advised to either have paint colors chosen at the time of the meeting, or provide colors similar to the CAR paint color palette, which staff could administratively approve.

5. *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 smooth fiber cement siding for the dwelling. The siding should have a smooth finish (and not a faux grain), in accordance with the Commission's guidelines for synthetic materials.

6. *Vinyl windows are strongly discouraged and rarely permitted.*

The application specifies the installation of composite windows with a 2/2 grid pattern at the front, and 1/1 grid pattern at the sides and rear. The windows will have simulated-divided lites.

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 substitution of a membrane or metal roof above the front porch in place of the architectural shingles proposed. Also, staff recommends that the applicant add a decorative element to the front of the buildings, either to the cornice, porch frieze, or porch railings, in order to differentiate the structures from other Italianate new construction which is occurring throughout the district.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, 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.