



Commission of Architectural Review

4. COA-185223-2026	Final Review Meeting Date: 5/26/2026
Applicant/Petitioner	Marisa Perez
Project Description	Construct three new two-story attached buildings on vacant lots
Project Location	
Address: 1014-1016 Russell Street	
Historic District: Union Hill	
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant proposes the construction of three new single-family attached buildings on vacant parcels. The project represents new construction on an undeveloped portion of the block. The proposed buildings are two stories in height with a side gable form, and include front-facing façades with entrances and full-width porches on Russell Street. Site plans also indicate a trash enclosure near the front of the lots.</p>	
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Yara Iwaz, Yara.Iwaz@RVA.gov, (804)646-6031
Previous Reviews	<p>April 2026: Conceptual review of 1014-1016 Russell Street to construct three townhouses. The Commission was generally supportive of the project and aligned with staff recommendations, noting that the overall scale and design successfully reflect the character of the neighborhood, particularly in presenting the buildings as individual attached dwellings. The Commission expressed that the build-to-rent concept is appropriate and will likely appeal to residents by offering a more home-like environment than typical multifamily developments.</p> <p>However, several design refinements were recommended. The Commission emphasized the importance of selecting roof materials that are consistent with historic precedents, such as standing seam metal, and noted that the roof may be more visible than initially anticipated. Consideration should also be given to adjusting the roof pitch.</p>

	<p>To better relate the building to the street and mitigate its perceived height, the Commission suggested incorporating a more pronounced cornice line or other pedestrian-scale architectural elements, including deeper projections and returns typical of historic homes. Additional recommendations included exploring variations in rear door canopies to reflect common district patterns and evaluating window configurations on the front façade, while acknowledging potential constraints from the interior layout.</p>
<p>Staff Recommendations</p>	<p>Staff finds that the revised proposal addresses the comments provided during conceptual review and is compatible with the Guidelines. Staff recommends approval with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff finds the revised trash enclosure appropriate and recommends that the applicant coordinates with DPW to ensure that collection requirements are met. • Staff recommends revising the front cornice to better match the proportions and composition of historic cornice features found within the district. Revised elevation drawings to be submitted to staff for review and approval. • Main roof be a standing seam metal, and front porch roof be flat lock metal.

Staff Analysis

Surrounding Context

The subject properties are located on the west side of Russell Street, a block that is currently largely undeveloped. The east side of Russell Street contains a surface parking lot and the Shiloh Baptist Church, a one- to one-and-a-half-story structure. To the north, Carrington Street forms the boundary of the historic district and features a mix of historic and newer infill development. Notable examples include late 19th-century Italianate dwellings characterized by bracketed cornices, dentils, and full-width porches (2313 and 2315 Carrington), as well as more recent three-story semi-attached residences with dormers (2309 and 2311 Carrington). To the south, along Venable Street, the context includes earlier Italianate buildings, including attached residential buildings typically two stories in height, with raised brick foundations, bracketed cornices, and rhythmically spaced fenestration (2404-2406 Venable, and 2410 Venable).

Overall, the surrounding context is defined by a mix of historic and contemporary buildings, but with consistent characteristics including vertical window proportions, clearly articulated façades with base-middle-top composition, and relatively uniform building heights along established streets.

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards For New Construction: Doors and Windows, p.56	<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>Fenestration & Porch Rhythm</p> <p>The revised proposal substantially improves the fenestration pattern of the primary façades. The introduction of three evenly spaced windows on each building establishes a rhythm that is more consistent with historic residential patterns in the district and reinforces the vertical alignment typical of attached residential buildings.</p> <p>The revised porch design, including the use of three porch posts aligned with the window bays above, further strengthens the coherence and proportional organization of the façade.</p> <p>Furthermore, the windows are noted as being SDL aluminum-clad wood, which is appropriate.</p> <p><u>Staff finds these revisions to be appropriate and consistent with previous recommendations, and recommends approval of the fenestration.</u></p>
Standards for Site Improvements, p.76	<p><i>8. Landscape design should enhance the streetscape and contribute a strong aesthetic along street frontages. Appropriate landscaping should buffer the visual severity of surface parking lots from view. Vacant lots, large expanses of blank wall and other unattractive streetscape features (i.e. utilities, rear yard trash depots, etc.) can also be screened effectively with appropriate landscaping.</i></p>	<p>Trash Enclosure & Side Elevations</p> <p>The applicant has revised the site plan to relocate the trash enclosure toward the rear of the property and has adjusted the side elevations accordingly. These revisions improve the relationship between the building and the streetscape while avoiding conflicts between window openings and service areas.</p> <p><u>Staff finds the revised trash enclosure appropriate, and recommends that the applicant coordinates with DPW to ensure that collection requirements are met.</u></p>

<p>Standards for New Construction: Form, page 46</p>	<p><i>3. 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></p>	<p><i>Cornice & Pedestrian-scale elements</i></p> <p>In response to conceptual review comments, the applicant introduced a cornice element intended to better define the top of the front façade. Staff finds that this revision improves the building's overall base-middle-top composition and provides a clearer visual termination at the roofline.</p> <p>However, the proposed cornice appears somewhat minimal in depth and visual presence relative to historic district precedents. In many historic attached dwellings within the district, the cornice or entablature is more substantial and visually integrated with the fenestration below, often through the use of deeper frieze elements, larger corbels, or bracket-like trim that aligns with the window rhythm (figure below). These elements create a stronger relationship between the upper façade (middle of building) and roofline termination (top of building), allowing the cornice-window assembly to read as a unified architectural system rather than as separate horizontal and vertical elements. Given the evenly spaced window bays in the revised design, the proposal could successfully incorporate a more pronounced entablature or frieze treatment that aligns compositionally with the fenestration pattern below.</p> <p>Staff further notes that the addition of a matching cornice treatment at the rear elevation is not characteristic of district precedent, where rear elevations are typically simpler and less articulated than street-facing façades. Retaining the stronger cornice treatment solely at the primary façade would reinforce the hierarchy between front and rear elevations and better reflect traditional residential patterns in the district.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends revising the front cornice to better match the proportions and composition of historic cornice features found within the district. Revised elevation drawings to be submitted to staff for review and approval.</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><i>Roofing Materials</i></p> <p>The proposed asphalt shingle roofing material is found within the district; however, it is more commonly present as a replacement material rather than as a defining historic roofing type. To better reflect roofing materials historically associated with residential buildings in the district, staff recommends using metal roofing materials, particularly at visible roof areas. Flat-lock metal roofing would be especially</p>

		<p>appropriate and compatible with the architectural character of the district while providing a more refined and historically consistent appearance.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the roofing material be flat-lock metal.</u></p>
<p>Standards for New Construction: Form, page 46</p>	<p><i>3. 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></p>	<p><i>Base-middle-top composition</i></p> <p>The composition of the proposed buildings has been revised and significantly improved since conceptual review. The porches have been widened to extend across the full width of each dwelling, and while the porch roofs remain visually separated between units, they collectively read as a continuous presenting element along the street façade. The roof form has also been revised to eliminate the previously proposed variation in height between the attached dwellings, and now presents as a unified roof element spanning the three buildings. In addition, the overall height of the building has been reduced through a lowering of the roof slope while maintaining the first- and second-story heights. This revision removes the earlier impression of a third story and instead results in a moderate side-gable form more consistent with the district context.</p> <p>Together, these revisions improve the way the building presents along Russell Street by emphasizing horizontality and creating a more cohesive façade composition, and better define it as a multi-family project. This unified presentation is particularly appropriate for new construction on this largely undeveloped block, where the project will play a substantial role in defining the future streetscape character.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approval of the revised building composition.</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: Top: Main Elevation, Conceptual review/ Bottom: Main Elevation, Final review



Figure 2: Example of a Cornice treatment