

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
May 26, 2015 Meeting**

12. **CAR No. 15-063** (D. Kleyman)

**2100-2102 M Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Construct new single-family house**

Staff Contact: **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval to construct a single-family house on two vacant lots in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed building is an Italianate-influenced structure with a front porch and rear inset porch.

The proposed building will be situated between the rear yard of a contemporary house that fronts N. 21st Street and an historic structure across the alley. The proposed building is sited across from a previously-approved new construction Italianate, double house at 2109-2111 M Street. The structure will be a total of 28'-4" in height. It will have side yard setbacks of 3' and 3'-2", and front yard setbacks of 6' and 16'-8".

The applicant is proposing to install a privacy fence along the alley side of the property which will be opaquely stained a color to be approved by CAR staff. One parking space will be provided in the rear yard with access from the alley.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the "Standards for New Construction: Residential" on pages 44 and 45 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 on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

2. *New residential infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback 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 proposed 3' and 3'-2" side yard setbacks reflect the typical pattern along the block. The proposed 6' and 16'-8" front yard setbacks reflect the canted orientation of the structure to the street. The building will be sited somewhat closer to the street than other structures located along M Street, but would be more consistent with the side yard setback of the adjacent structure located at 601 N. 21st Street.

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

The new house will face M Street, the most prominent street bordering the site. As previously mentioned, the building is canted approximately 30 degrees to M Street in order to maximize the buildable area of the lots which are relatively shallow. Houses along this block of M Street have a variety of orientations to M Street, including canting of similar angles, such as an historic house across the street at 2105 M Street.

FORM

1. *New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the historic district. 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 form of the proposed building is typical of two-story Italianate buildings located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed structure will have a front porch and a rear inset porch located in the northwest corner of the structure which will not be visible from the public right-of-way.

2. *New residential construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic residential construction in the district.*

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

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.*

The proposed buildings design calls for a front porch which lends human-scale elements to the building's design.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

1. *New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.*

The proposed building will be a total of 28'-4" in height which would be slightly taller than the contemporary house to the west, and slightly lower than the historic house to the east which is 32' in total height. Houses along this block of M Street have a variety of building heights due to a variety of building styles and vintages, as well as the presence of English basements or front yard retainage. The proposed building height would be consistent with the overall building heights found along this block.

2. *New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in surrounding historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. For example, full-block-long row house compositions are rare in Richmond. New residential buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.*

The proposed building design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district.

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

The cornice height of the proposed structure will be slightly lower than that of the adjacent, historic structure at 2110 M Street.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This standard is not applicable.

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

The applicant proposes smooth fiber cement siding with a 7” reveal, parged CMU foundation, brick porch piers with wood lattice panels, tongue-and-groove porch flooring, painted Richmond rail, fiber cement fascia boards with Fypon corbels, black EPDM porch roof, membrane main roof, round front porch columns with “Tuscan” base and cap, 4-panel fiberglass front door with a 4-light transom above, rear fiberglass patio doors, and 2-over-2 MW Jefferson 300-series double-hung windows with simulated-divided lites. Staff recommends that the proposed cornice brackets be spaced to frame each window, not spaced equidistantly across the cornice as is currently proposed. Staff also recommends that the 4-panel front door with 4-lite transom above be substituted with a solid panel front door as the proposed 2-lite transom makes the door lites redundant.

Paint colors for new additions should complement the historically appropriate colors used on the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the district.

The applicant has proposed Hardieplank finished in “Countrylane Red,” which is similar to “Roycroft Copper Red” found on the CAR paint color palette. The applicant is proposing white for all trim.

- 3. 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 proposed building design calls for smooth fiber cement siding.

- 4. 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.*

This standard is not applicable.

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*. While the form of the proposed structure is similar to that of historic Italianate houses found in the district, the front porch design could be improved as it currently appears somewhat cluttered. Staff takes issue with the proposed transom windows located on the sides of the structure which are not an historic design. Staff feels that the lack of full windows on the side elevations represents a missed opportunity and is an unusual feature compared to similar historic houses.

Staff recommends that approval of the project be conditioned on the following:

- That the cornice brackets be aligned to frame each window, not spaced equidistantly as currently proposed,
- That the 4-panel 4-lite front door be substituted with a paneled door with no lites,
- That the transom windows on the sides of the structure be omitted from the final design, and
- That the applicant seek administrative review and approval of the proposed privacy fence and opaque stain color.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the conditions above, is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 114.930.7(c) of the City Code, and 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.