



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Commission of Architectural Review

3. COA-135629-2023	Final Review Meeting Date: 9/26/2023
Applicant/Petitioner	Rick Fischl, SMBW, PLLC
Project Description	Construct a new, five-story commercial building.
Project Location	
Address: 13 E. Broad Street	
Historic District: Broad Street	
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The Applicant proposes to construct a 5-story commercial building on a vacant lot. The building will serve as the Headquarters for the VPM Media Corporation and will be programmed with commercial space, offices, media production space, and community space. The basement story will have some finished space and off-street parking.</p> <p>The original building on this lot was demolished in the 1980's after being damaged by a fire. The vacant lot is currently used as surface parking.</p> <p>The new construction will have a zero-set back from the buildings to the east and west. The new building will have a concrete podium and floors 2-5 will be clad with engineered stone and feature some metal accent panels.</p> <p>The portion of the development that fronts East Grace Street will not be reviewed by the Commission, as it is outside of the Broad Street Historic District. The southern boundary of the Broad Street Historic District is the alleyway between East Broad and East Grace Streets.</p>	
Staff Recommendation	Approval
Previous Reviews	The Commission conceptually reviewed this application at the July 2023 meeting. The Commission recommended that elevation drawings of the rear of 13 East Broad Street visible from East Grace Street be submitted with the final review. It was suggested that differing the materials on the upper two floors could help recess them.

	<p>The Commission asked that the applicant consider creating a more substantial cornice element between the 3rd & 4th floors. They also asked the applicant to consider further visually dividing the right (west) two bays on the front façade.</p> <p>The pedestrian-scale elements of the building were discussed, the Commission asking that a more “friendly” material for the ground-floor be used, as well as increasing its transparency.</p> <p>There was some discussion concerning the 5th floor roof overhang. Some Commissioners found it to be an aggressive element, but there was not a clear consensus if this was problematic.</p> <p>Regarding fenestration, some Commissioners wondered if adding more division in the windows (muntins) would be beneficial, while others expressed wanting to see more glass and transparency.</p>
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, alex.dandridge@rva.gov , (804) 646-6569
Staff Recommendations	None.

Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
New Construction: Commercial, Siting, page 52	<p><i>2. New commercial infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard development 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.</i></p> <p><i>3. New commercial buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site.</i></p> <p><i>4. If setback waivers, or any other waivers are needed, the Commission can be petitioned to support a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) waiver.</i></p> <p><i>5. For large-scale commercial parking, parking within the building is strongly encouraged. If a building includes parking within it, vehicle entry doors should be located on non-primary elevations.</i></p>	<p>The new construction will be a zero-setback development. This development pattern is in-keeping with the district. The zero front setback is compatible with the existing neighboring buildings and reinforces the street wall. The building will be directly attached to the neighboring buildings. This is compatible with the district and historic configuration of the previous building on the lot.</p> <p>The building will face the most prominent street, East Broad Street.</p> <p>Based on the application narrative, no waivers or variances will be needed from the Board of Zoning Appeals, as this is a by-right development.</p> <p>Structured off-street parking will be provided on-site, being located below-grade and in the interior of the site between the 13 East Broad building, and the other proposed building to the rear. The second proposed building will front East Grace Street. Parking will be obscured by the two new buildings.</p>
New Construction:	<i>1. New commercial construction should use a building form compatible with</i>	The new construction has been designed to take cues from and compliment the prevailing cornice

<p>Commercial, Form, page 52</p>	<p><i>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 building. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.</i></p> <p><i>2. New commercial construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic commercial buildings in the district.</i></p> <p><i>3. New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.</i></p>	<p>heights, rhythm, fenestrations, and heights found within the district and on the subject block.</p> <p>Most existing buildings on the subject block are three-stories in height. The new building has been designed so that the first three floors will align with the existing buildings and the upper two floors will be set back so that the additional height of the new construction does not overwhelm the neighboring historic buildings.</p> <p>The new construction has been designed so that it is broken into four bays that are compatible with the width of the other building facades on the subject block. This configuration reinforces the rhythm of the block. The applicant has provided a historic image of the original building on the site prior to front façade alterations that demonstrates that the original building was also similarly divided into 4 bays on the front façade, breaking up the large mass of the building.</p> <p>Several recessed areas have been punched into the front façade to give the building a contemporary design while still referencing the rhythm and proportions on the block. There is a large, recessed area on the ground floor that creates a pedestrian scale element reinforcing the human scale of the building.</p> <p>To better reference other historic storefronts in the district, the applicant has added vertical muntins in the store front windows along East Broad Street and raised the sills.</p> <p>The Commission had concerns regarding the opaqueness of the western ground-floor wall that recesses in towards the main entrance. The applicant has not adjusted the transparency of this element, but has adjusted the joints between the metal panels to better resemble the alignment of historic storefront windows. Furthermore, the applicant states in the application that there will be signage and plantings in this location to break apart the expanse of metal paneling.</p>
<p>New Construction: Commercial, Height, Width, Proportions & Massing, pg. 53, #'s 1-3</p>	<p><i>1. New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.</i></p> <p><i>2. New commercial construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial buildings in Richmond's historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. When designing new commercial buildings that occupy</i></p>	<p>Most buildings on the subject block are three-stories in height; however, the new construction will be five-stories. While not common on the subject block, there is historic precedent within the Broad Street City Old and Historic District for buildings that are greater than three-stories. Furthermore, the upper two-stories of the proposed building will be setback from the front façade of the building to emphasize the lower three floors and to subordinate the upper two floors. Staff finds the additional height to be</p>

	<p><i>more than one third of a block face, the design should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.</i></p> <p><i>3. The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.</i></p>	<p>acceptable in the locations for the above-mentioned reasons.</p> <p>While the building will be wider than most existing buildings, the front façade will be divided into bays that are similar in width to those buildings which sufficiently breaks-up the massing of the front façade.</p> <p>During the conceptual review, the Commission asked that the space between the 3rd & 4th floors read more as a cornice element. The applicant has responded to this recommendation by increasing the width of this space to create a more distinct visual break. The same design change was made to the 5th floor for consistency.</p> <p>The Commission asked that the massing of the building be more distinctly broken-up, however the applicant has not revised the plans to reflect this comment, as the building is a more contemporary design that uses other nuanced design choices to break-up its massing.</p>
<p>New Construction: Commercial, Materials & Colors, page 53.</p>	<p><i>1. Additions should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.</i></p> <p><i>2. Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.</i></p> <p><i>3. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district (see Painting Section starting on page 60).</i></p> <p><i>4. 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.</i></p> <p><i>5. 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.</i></p>	<p>The new building will be attached to the existing buildings to the east and west. No character defining architectural features will be obscured from view by the new construction. The building to the east does feature a mural that will likely be obscured, and the building to the west has several windows; however these windows are not original. Staff was unable to locate any approvals for the installation of these windows.</p> <p>The Broad Street City Old and Historic District features a variety of cladding materials, mostly brick, but a few examples of wood and stucco. The new building will predominantly be clad in engineered stone with metal accent panels. Staff finds this material to be visually non-obtrusive and compatible with the contemporary design of the building.</p> <p>During the conceptual review, the Commission asked that the applicant explore using a different exterior material on the 4th & 5th floors to further recess them. The applicant states in the application that this option was explored; however, the adjustment to the cornice element seems to adequately separate the upper two floors from the lower three floors.</p> <p>The applicant has indicated that rooftop mechanical equipment will not be visible from the public right of way, being screened from view on the roof.</p> <p>Trash collection will be located in an area that is accessed from other points other than Broad Street. It will be minimally visible.</p>

	<p>6. For larger-scale projects that involve communal garbage collection (such as dumpsters or other large collection device), these garbage receptacles should be located away from the primary elevation or elevations of the building (preferably to the rear) and screened from view.</p>	
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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. Original building.



Figure 2. Original building after front façade alterations. Demolished 1989



Figure 3. Subject block looking west.



Figure 4. View from subject block looking northeast



Figure 5. View of existing lot from north side of Broad Street.



Figure 6. Side of existing building to the east of site.



Figure 7. Side of existing building to the west of site.



Figure 8. Rear of site looking north toward Broad Street.

