

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
May 27, 2014 Meeting**

16. **CAR No. 14-47** (HRR)

**307 N. 21<sup>st</sup> Street  
Church Hill North Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Demolish and rebuild single-family dwelling**

**Staff Contact:** **C. Easterling**

The applicant requests approval to demolish and rebuild a single-family dwelling at this lot located in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The existing residence at the site is in a significant state of deterioration. The previous owner was cited for multiple property maintenance violations and the building was condemned. After applying for several building permits for work to address stabilization issues, the previous owner sold the property without beginning the work outlined in the permits. The current owner purchased the property in June of 2013.

The City issued a notice of imminent danger to the property owner in September of 2013. When a building located in a City Old and Historic District is declared an imminent threat to public safety, Commission of Architectural Review approval of the demolition is no longer required, in accordance with Section 114-930.6 (j) of the City Code. After being informed of the need for the building to come down, the applicant began to prepare the structure for demolition, but the notice of imminent danger was rescinded on December 30, 2013. The applicant must now obtain approval from the Commission prior to demolishing the building. The building has been modified over the years, and most of the existing windows are not original to the property. When the Commission held a special meeting at the site earlier in 2014, several members had an opportunity to go inside the building to assess the deterioration.

The applicant proposes to demolish the building down to the foundation, repair the foundation, and construct a residential building within the footprint of the original building. The new structure will have smooth HardiPlank siding, one-over-one wood windows, a standing seam metal porch roof. The one significant change to the design of the original structure is the elimination of the side porch on the north elevation. The applicant hopes to salvage original decorative features from the existing building for reuse in the new structure.

**Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions.** The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* outlines the conditions under which the Commission may approve the demolition of a structure on pages 72 and 73. The *Guidelines* notes that the Commission shall approve requests for demolition when one of the following is determined:

1. There are no feasible alternatives to the proposed demolition.
2. A building or structure is deemed not to be a contributing part of the historic character of an Old and Historic District.
3. The Commission deems that a building or structure has deteriorated beyond the point of feasible rehabilitation.

The *Guidelines* states that the Commission may also consider the following additional factors when arriving at a decision consider the demolition of a building in an Old and Historic District:

1. The historic and architectural value of a building
2. The effect that demolition will have on the surrounding neighborhood
3. The type and quality of the project that will replace the demolished building
4. The historic preservation goals outlined in the Master Plan and Downtown Plan

To aid in the Commission's evaluation of the project, the applicant has provided a structural engineer's report and a write-up outlining the costs to rehabilitate the existing structure.

It is the assessment of staff that the building has deteriorated beyond the point of feasible repair. Staff supports the applicant's proposal to rebuild the structure and reuse salvaged decorative elements in the new construction. The existing historic building has been compromised not only by deferred maintenance, but by the removal or modification of many of its character-defining features. Staff's primary concern with the new infill is the elimination of the side porch in the design. If the applicant needs additional enclosed space, staff recommends that the applicant design the northeast corner of the building to look like an enclosed porch. Staff is also concerned with the proposed front porch roofing material. If the applicant intends to replicate the appearance of the original roof, the porch roof should be metal or membrane.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions noted above, the work outlined in the proposal complies with the Standards for Demolition outlined in Section 114-930.7(d) 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.