

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
August 25, 2015 Meeting**

11. **CAR No. 15-102** (A. Ogburn)

**613 North 28th Street
Church Hill North Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

**Demolish a non-historic
Concrete block quadraplex and
Construct new duplex**

Staff Contact:

K. Chen

The applicant requests approval to demolish a non-historic concrete block quadraplex and construct a new duplex. Demolition review is covered under Sec. 114-930.7(d) of the City Code and Sec. 114-930.9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. *Standards for Demolition* are contained on pages 78-79 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*.

In general, demolition is considered an option of last resort for contributing historic properties, and is only permitted under extreme circumstances. The commission shall approve requests for demolition when a building or structure is deemed not to be a contributing part of the historic character of an Old and Historic District. The subject property is a concrete block quadraplex built ca. 1961. In addition to being located in a City Old and Historic District it is located in the Church Hill North Historic District (127-0820) listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 and expanded in 2000. The inventory for the district lists 613 N. 28th Street as a non-contributing resource. At the time the nominations were written the building was not yet 50 years old, a bench mark used the National Park Service to define "historic," but it is outside of the Period of Significance for the districts (1812 to 1940) and would still be considered non-contributing.

The Commission has the authority to consider four other factors in arriving at decisions involving proposed demolitions – the historic and architectural value of the building; the effect that demolition will have on the surrounding neighborhood; the type and quality of the project that will replace the demolished building; and the historic preservation goals outlined in the Master Plan and the Downtown Plan. The building does not possess significant architectural detailing nor is it associated with a building style, prominent architect or historical event sufficient to suggest the demolition would have an adverse effect on the historic character of the historic district. The removal of the non-contributing concrete block quadraplex will have a beneficial effect on a block that is composed of new and historic attached dwellings.

Staff recommends approval of the demolition of the non-historic quadraplex. It is the assessment of staff that the application is consistent with Sec. 114-930.7(d) of the City Code, Sec. 114-930.9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and the *Standards for Demolition* contained on pages 78-79 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*, adopted by the Commission for review of Certificates of Appropriateness under the same section of the code.

The applicant requests conceptual review for the construction of a two attached single family dwellings. The new, two-story dwellings will be of frame construction with smooth Hardie Plank siding. Each dwelling will have a three-bay composition with a full façade hipped-roof porch with fiberglass columns. There will be a mansard roof at the front and a shed roof to the rear.

Conceptual review is covered under Sec. 114-930.6(d) of the City Code: *The commission shall review and discuss the proposal with the applicant and make any necessary recommendations. Such Conceptual Review shall be advisory only.* 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 or on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This standard does not apply.

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.*

A site plan showing front and side yard setbacks for the proposed new construction or the prevailing setback pattern on the block was not provided.

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

The new building is oriented towards 28th Street, the prominent street bordering the site.

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 proposed mansard roof form is one that has been approved for new construction numerous times in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The prevailing form in the block, for both new and historic buildings, is two-story, three-bay attached dwellings with full façade porches. The dominant roof form is a shed roof with a decorative cornice. The porches and cornices display a variety of decorative elements reflective of Italianate and Late Victorian-style dwellings.

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

The proposed new construction retains the human scale of nearby residential construction.

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 new construction incorporates human scale elements such as porches and front steps, a ranked fenestration pattern, and a mansard roof line.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

A context drawing for the proposed new construction is included but it is not dimensioned. The proposed mansard roof is higher than the adjacent new houses (left) and the historic houses (right) which all have shed roofs with decorative cornices.

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 new construction respects the vertical orientation typical of surrounding residential properties by incorporating a ranked fenestration pattern and a full façade porch.

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

The leading edge of the mansard roof is higher than the lower edge of the cornices on the new construction to the left and the top of the roof on the historic buildings to the right. However, no dimensions were included.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This standard does not apply.

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

The use of smooth Hardie Plank siding is compatible with the frame and lap siding construction that dominates the block. The use of synthetic slate on the mansard roof is not a material found on the block.

3. *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.*

No colors were specified.

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.*

The application specifies Hardie Plank smooth siding, fiberglass columns, synthetic slate, and vinyl porch ceiling. Legacy, double-hung 1/1 windows are indicated but it is not indicated if these are vinyl, clad or wood windows.

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.*

No information was provided on the location of the mechanical equipment or other site improvements including parking or fences.