



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia

RICHMOND PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

PDR

Commission of Architectural Review

4. COA-162877-2025	Final Review	Meeting Date: 4/22/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Matt Morgan, project:HOMES	
Project Description	Construct a new three-story multi-family building.	
Project Location		
Address: 815-821 Mosby St.		
Historic District: Union Hill		
High-Level Details:	<p>The applicant requests approval to construct a new, three-story multi-family building on a vacant lot. The new building will have three projecting bays on the façade with recessed, covered balconies. There will be a prominent cornice on the third-story, and the building will be clad in materials that resemble those traditionally found in Union Hill.</p> <p>In August 2020, the Building Commissioner authorized the demolition of a vacant two-story building located on the site.</p>	
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, alex.dandridge@rva.gov , 804-646-6569	
Previous Reviews	<p>This application was scheduled for review at the March 2025 CAR meeting but was withdrawn by the applicant.</p> <p>The Commission conceptually reviewed this application at the February 2025 meeting. The Commission expressed appreciation for the proposed exterior material palette which referenced historic materials commonly found on the block. The Commission suggested that the head height of the third-story windows be dropped so that the window hoods were not touching the base of the cornice; an arrangement which is more in-keeping with the district. There were several recommendations from the Commissioners that suggested adding entrances to the first-floor units that face Mosby Street in order enhance the pedestrian scale of the building and to enhance its interaction with the street. It was stated that it "felt like the building was turning its back to the street". Overall, the Commission felt the height of the building was acceptable; however, one Commissioner suggested that the site could be regraded so that the building could be constructed at a lower grade to reduce its overall height.</p> <p>The Commission approved plans for this site in May 2022; however, that project was never completed.</p> <p>In August 2020, in accordance with Section 30-930.6(j) of the city code,</p>	

	<p>the Building Commissioner authorized the demolition of a vacant 2-story frame building. The building was deemed a public hazard, due to significant water intrusion which deteriorated load bearing structural members.</p> <p>In 2019, the Commission approved the demolition of a concrete retaining wall at this site.</p>
Staff Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant submit a site regrading plan with the final plan set to confirm proposed grade conditions and ensure the height of the building will be true to the plans. • Any new retaining wall should be constructed of materials common in the district such as brick, concrete, or parged block. • The the parking area behind the building be adequately screened from the public right way with vegetation that reaches an adequate mature height to serve as screening. • Final window, door, railing, and cladding material selections be submitted to staff for approval.

Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Siting, pg. 46, #2-3	<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p>The proposed building will have an approximate setback of 12 feet. While the irregularly shaped commercial building to the north doesn't have a deep setback and will sit proud of the proposed building, the proposed building appears to have a similar setback to the existing buildings to the south along Mosby Street.</p>
Form, pg. 46, #1-3	<p><i>1. New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the historic district.</i></p> <p><i>2. New residential construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic residential construction in the district</i></p> <p><i>3. New residential construction and additions should incorporate human-scale elements such as cornices, porches and front steps into their design.</i></p>	<p>The proposed building will overall be rectangular in form, with projecting bays across the front. While the building itself has a larger mass than what is typical of the district, the front projecting bays help break the building up into three main sections that are two bays wide.</p> <p>The site sits higher than the sidewalk.</p> <p>During the conceptual review, to enhance the pedestrian scale of the proposed building, the Commission recommended that the applicant revise the plans to include front yard sidewalks and stair access that would connect the first floor, street-facing units to the public sidewalk along Mosby Street, which is typical of the district.</p> <p>The applicant has revised the plans to include entrances on the façade of the building at the first-floor units. While the entrances will not be directly connected to the public sidewalk, they will be connected to a sidewalk on-site that will run parallel</p>

		<p>to the public sidewalk. Staff finds that this revision is appropriate.</p>
Height, Width, Proportion, & Massing, pg. 47, #1-3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>New residential construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.</i> <i>New residential construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in the surrounding historic districts.</i> <i>The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.</i> 	<p>The proposed building will be three-stories in height, which is taller than most residential buildings in Union Hill; however, the applicant has implemented a few design solutions that make the building more compatible with its surroundings. Existing three-story buildings in Union Hill are typically on raised foundations. 809 Mosby Street is a nearby historic building that sits on a raised foundation and is three-stories in height. The proposed building's design has taken material cues from 809 Mosby Street, having a brick first floor to resemble a raised foundation, and then lap siding on the upper two-stories.</p> <p>During the conceptual review, the Commission recommended that the applicant submit the heights of the surrounding buildings with the final application. The applicant has provided these heights. To address the Commission and Staff's concerns regarding the height of the building, the application has been revised to show that the site will be regraded, and the building will sit about ten feet lower than previously. The rooftop of the building is now approximately the same height as the tallest historic building on the block 809 Mosby Street. Staff finds that the reduction in height and the regrading of the site is appropriate. <u>Staff recommends that the applicant submit a site regrading plan with the final plan set to confirm proposed grade conditions and ensure the height of the building will be true to the plans.</u></p>
New Construction, Doors and Windows, pg.49 #3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The size, proportion, and spacing patterns of doors and window openings on free standing, new construction should be compatible with patterns established in the district.</i> 	<p>Windows and doors will be vertically aligned and appear to be similar in size to historic window and door dimensions.</p> <p>During the conceptual review, the Commission recommended that the third story windows be lowered so that the window hoods were not touching the base of the cornice. The applicant has revised the plans so that there is a four-inch gap between the third-story window hoods and the base of the cornice.</p> <p>Even if the building is reduced in height, it will project above the neighboring corner commercial store at 823 Mosby Street making the north elevation highly visible from Mosby Street, O Street, and the MLK Memorial Bridge. While not a corner property, the height difference between the</p>

		<p>proposed building and the existing one-story corner commercial building will make the north elevation a prominent one. As proposed, there are not any significant architectural features on the north elevation.</p> <p>Since the conceptual review, the applicant has revised the plans to include vertically aligned windows on the building's visible north elevation.</p>
New Construction, Materials & Colors, pg. 53	<p>2. <i>Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.</i></p> <p>5. <i>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 proposed building will have a brick base on the facade and fiber cement lap siding on the upper two-stories. Trim will be a composite material. The cornice will be contemporary in design with a fiber cement board and batten, fiber cement fascia board, and a prefinished metal coping.</p> <p>Board and batten siding will be used within the recessed areas of the façade, and on the north elevation. While the Commission has not typically supported the use of board and batten siding, painted a dark color, it could be visually recessed against the lighter colored, more traditional materials being used. If the Commission doesn't support board and batten siding in this location, then a hardi panel could also be appropriate.</p> <p>During the Conceptual Review, the Commission and Staff recommended that the exterior brick cladding on the first floor be extended further across the south elevation, terminating at a logical point that is less visible than what was proposed.</p> <p>The applicant has responded by extending the exterior brick cladding and cornice detailing farther across the south elevation, terminating at the second window back. Staff finds that this revision further obscures the transition from brick to siding from the public right-of-way and extends to an architectural element that visually serves as a point of termination.</p> <p>Exterior doors will be Fiberglass, and the exterior windows will be Anderson 100 series, which are made of a composite material consisting of reclaimed wood and PVC polymer fibers.</p>
Mechanical Equipment, pg. 68	<p><i>The visual impact of new mechanical equipment should be minimized to protect the historic character of the district.</i></p>	<p>On a site plan submitted by the applicant, the location of exterior mechanical equipment is shown as being on the ground at the rear of the building, or on the roof.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the exterior mechanical equipment be located on the ground at the rear and screened from the public right of way. It is unclear if the roof's parapet is tall enough to screen rooftop mechanical equipment, therefore staff is recommending against the installation of rooftop</u></p>

		<u>mechanical equipment.</u>
Site Improvements, Sidewalks & Curbs, pg. 76	7. <i>Sidewalks and curbs should be built of common building materials found throughout the District. Generally, simple paving designs are more compatible with the diverse building styles and better unify the various elements found on streets</i>	There is a steep grade between the public sidewalk and the face of the building. As proposed, the application suggests that there will not be a retaining wall constructed across the front of the property, but rather landscaping. In case of design changes to the site, <u>Staff recommends new retaining wall should be constructed of materials common in the district such as brick, concrete, or parged block.</u>
Site Improvements, Parking Lots, pg. 77	1. <i>Parking lots should be broken up as much as possible with interior landscaped islands and should be well screened from the public right-of-way and adjacent properties.</i>	There are a few parking spots proposed at the rear of the building. The applicant has provided a site plan that shows the location of vegetated screening on the north and south sides of the rear parking spaces. <u>Staff recommends that the parking area behind the building be adequately screened from the public right way with vegetation that reaches an adequate mature height to serve as screening.</u>

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. View of subject lots from Mosby Street.



Figure 2. View of subject lots from the rear alley.



Figure 3. View of subject lot from Mosby Street. Existing concrete stairs in foreground.



Figure 4. Existing historic buildings at 805-807 Mosby Street.



Figure 5. 809 Mosby Street.



Figure 6. View of subject lot from the rear alley.



Figure 7. View of subject block from the west side of Mosby Street looking east.



Figure 8. View of 823 Mosby Street looking north.

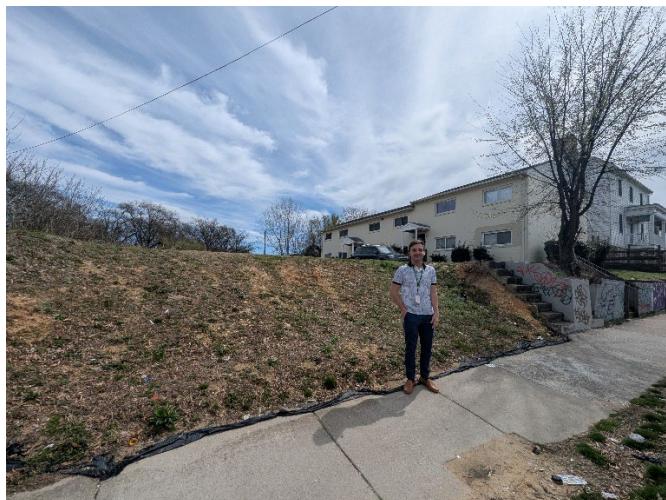


Figure 9. Subject lots steep grade with person comparison.



Figure 10. View of Mosby Street looking north. Front retaining walls and stairs are common streetscape features.