

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
April 28, 2015 Meeting**

**15. CAR No. 15-039** (Valley West LLC) **1914 East Franklin Street  
Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Construct new multi-family development**

**Staff Contact:** **K. Chen**

**Background:** Plans for the new development at 1914 East Franklin Street were reviewed conceptually by the Commission of Architectural Review at their meetings on November 25, 2014 and January 27, 2015. The Commission made recommendations to the applicant in an advisory capacity at these meetings. The general consensus of the Commission members present was that the proposed building needed to be more compatible with the historic industrial architecture in the district. A number of Commission members expressed concern with the “busy elevations”, noting that the historic warehouses within the district had more consistent patterning. A number of Commission members also expressed concern with the pedestrian experience at the base of the building.

The applicant requests final review for the construction of a new, six-story multi-family apartment building that incorporates two levels of structured podium parking in the Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District. The T-plan building will extend the full length of the 100 block of North 20<sup>th</sup> Street with narrower faces on East Franklin, East Grace, and North 19<sup>th</sup> streets. The application includes a site plan, elevations, and a building summary describing general design and materials. The development pattern in the area is one of four and five story tobacco warehouses, one and two story commercial buildings, and a new four story apartment building on the northwest corner of Grace and 20<sup>th</sup> streets. The Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District is unique because it contains residential, commercial, and industrial scale buildings. The revised application is responsive to the Commission’s comments regarding the simplification of the design to be more compatible with the industrial character of the district and begins to respond to the concerns expressed regarding the building’s interaction with the street by adding units at the ground level along 20<sup>th</sup> Street. However, these units are accessed from the parking deck and not from the street. The parking access has also been removed from 20<sup>th</sup> Street.

## **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 guideline does not apply. The existing structure on the property is not historic and would be demolished to make way for the new structure. The new construction is intended to remediate the current siting with new construction that is more appropriate with the large-scale development found in this City Old and Historic District.

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.*

The new building is built to the property line at the intersections, establishing a traditional street wall and respecting the prevailing setback patterns of the historic streetscape within the district.

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

The new building will have an elevation on all four street faces of the block with its largest elevation on North 20<sup>th</sup> Street. On East Franklin, East Grace and North 19<sup>th</sup> Street the building will fill gaps in the existing built fabric.

4. *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.*

The building includes two levels of interior podium parking with access points on North 19<sup>th</sup>, East Franklin and East Grace streets. Moving the vehicle entry point off of 20<sup>th</sup> Street helps to reinforce this as the primary elevation and support pedestrian traffic on the street.

### **FORM**

1. *New commercial construction should use a building form compatible with 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. Form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

The overall size and form of the building do a lot in the way of remedial work for the district. This block of the district has been underutilized with surface parking for at least a generation. The nearby industrial buildings have flat, unadorned or articulated wall surfaces with regularly placed window openings. The verticality of some of the buildings is reinforced with applied pilasters or an expressed concrete structural grid. The revised elevations have been greatly simplified and the use of a unified color palette is compatible with the single material massing of the surrounding industrial buildings. The surrounding industrial buildings also have a rhythmic fenestration pattern of uniformly spaced and sized openings which the revised elevations have incorporated with minor variations at the balconies.

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

The current design contains human scale elements in the window proportions and the use of awnings at the entrances.

3. *New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.*

The design incorporates awnings at three points on the 20<sup>th</sup> Street elevation which correlate to pedestrian entrances. These awnings wrap the corners at Grace and Franklin streets and are located over the driveway entrances on Franklin Street. The pedestrian entry points on 19<sup>th</sup> and Franklin streets are into stairwells. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Street elevation, one entrance near the Franklin Street corner is into a lobby and the other accesses a stairwell; the central entrance accesses a stairwell; and northern entrance near Grace Street accesses a stair and elevator lobby. The introduction of vehicle entrances on three of the four elevations creates conflict points with pedestrian activity on these elevations.

## **HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION& MASSING**

1. *New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.*

The existing building heights in the surrounding blocks vary greatly from one-story to five-stories. The proposed building shares the block with a four-story building that wraps the northwest corner of Franklin and 19<sup>th</sup> streets and one-story buildings that front on 19<sup>th</sup> and Grace streets. At its highest point the proposed building has two levels of above ground parking and four residential floors.

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 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.*

The verticality of the surrounding buildings is emphasized in the vertical ranking of the window openings. The vertical movement is stopped by a strong horizontal line created by a roof edge or parapet with minimal or no decoration. The proposed new building incorporates vertically ranked window openings and corbelled brick cornices at the corners and central element on 20<sup>th</sup> Street.

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

The cornice height of the proposed in-fill building is higher than the adjacent buildings.

## **MATERIALS & COLORS**

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

This guideline does not apply in this instance of new construction as no historic architecture is present on the site. The proposed new construction does not engage the single historic building on Grace Street.

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

The applicant proposes to use "Georgetown" brick cladding with Rookwood Medium Brown cementitious panels on the upper floors, and metal awnings in studio Blue Green. The dominate pattern in the area is for a single construction material. A unified color palette has been submitted which minimizes the use of two building materials. The proposed windows are paired, Anderson Silver Line Series 2200, single-hung, 1/1, heavy duty vinyl windows in a dark bronze color.

3. *Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

The applicant provided color renderings and specified material choices and colors on the drawings. The colors indicated are compatible with those found on page 60 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*.

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 proposed windows are paired, Anderson Silver Line Series 2200, single-hung, 1/1, heavy duty vinyl windows in a dark bronze color.

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.*

Rooftop mechanical equipment will be located above residential levels 3 and 4 behind a parapet.

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.*

A trash room with an overhead door will be located on the Grace Street side of the building.

Additional applicable references from the *Guidelines* include:

Page 50: 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.

Page 53: With larger buildings, applicants are encouraged to develop multiple entry points (doors), in keeping with historic precedent for the building type in question. Single entry points – such as a single garage entrance accompanied by single pedestrian entrances are not in keeping with historic precedent, which demonstrates that most large buildings had multiple entry points.

The applicant has been working with the Zoning Administrator to determine which elevation is the primary elevation and to resolve other zoning related issues. The project is also subject to Plan of Development (POD) review.

Zoning and Land Use Administration have enumerated a number of concerns that will result in modifications to the design. These concerns include: a reduction in the number of vehicle entry points, the creation of a sense of arrival, and the interaction of ground floor units with the street.

Staff is also concerned that windows on the east and west elevations on the 4<sup>th</sup> residential level open into corridors and not into units. While the building does have more than a single entry point, there is generally more emphasis on arrival by vehicle and entry from the garage interior. Except for the provision of awnings, there is not much emphasis on pedestrian entry from the sidewalk. Sidewalk entry is through single-door entrances that open either into a stairwell or a lobby oriented to doors to the parking garage. Additional or reconfigured pedestrian entrances that convey a sense of arrival would help to enliven the interaction between the building and the sidewalk that connects the residents to their community.

It is the assessment of staff that the application is consistent only in part with Section 114-930.7 of the City Code, as well as with the *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*, adopted by the Commission for review of Certificates of Appropriateness under the same section of Code. *While the upper floors appear to successfully meet the guidelines the configuration of the parking and the manner in which the building addresses the street are less successful.* Staff recommends against approval of the application at this time and requests that the applicant return to the Commission with revised plans that better address pedestrian entry/arrival at the street level. The applicant should also continue to meet with City zoning and land use staff and include changes that may be required by zoning and POD review involving parking/vehicle entry at the street level and interaction of units with the street. [Should the Commission approve the application, that approval does not waive additional zoning or POD requirements. If the approved design has to be revised to meet zoning and POD requirements, the applicant should work with CAR staff to determine if the changes require additional review by the CAR.]