COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
June 23, 2015 Meeting

16. CAR No. 15-050 (R. Cross) **1902-1908 Princess Anne Ave**
Union Hill Old and Historic District

Project Description: **Construct four, attached Single-family houses**

Staff Contact: **K. Chen**

Background: Plans for the new development at 1902-1908 Princess Anne Avenue were reviewed conceptually by the Commission of Architectural Review at their meeting in February 2015, and was deferred for final approval at the April 2015 meeting. Meeting minutes from those meetings are attached for reference. The Commission made recommendations to the applicant at these meetings and there were comments from neighbors and residents of Union Hill. The general consensus of the Commission members present was that the proposed building needed to do more to address Princess Anne Avenue and Jefferson Park.

The applicant requests final review for the construction of four, new, attached single-family houses in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed new construction is located at the end of Princess Anne Avenue; a dead end street lined with an eclectic mix of late-nineteen and early-twentieth century single-family dwellings and duplexes. Jefferson Park is to the south, a steep embankment to the west, the newly constructed Shockoe Valley View Apartments to the north, and historic houses to the east. The four attached dwellings will be oriented east to west to maximize the use of the lot that is limited by the extreme topography to the west. Roof top decks will be added to take advantage of the panoramic views of downtown to the west. The new dwellings will front onto a mews, to the east, that provides a buffer to the adjacent historic houses. The application includes a site plan, elevations and a detailed list of exterior materials.

The applicant has responded to Commission and public comments by orienting the first (south) dwelling towards the park. A porch and primary entrance to this unit will be accessed from the public sidewalk and face Jefferson Park, continuing the line of porches and entrances found to the east. The owner has also opened the mews (removed the gate) to the south so that it does not have a “gated community” feeling. The owner also responded to security concerns by adding a 6’ privacy fence across the north end of the mews to prevent through foot traffic.

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 garage on the property is not historic and would be demolished to make way for the new houses. The parcel once contained two pairs of attached dwellings and completed the streetscape from Mosby Street to the edge of the hill. The houses were demolished in the 1970s because they were structurally unsound.

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.*

The south face of the new houses is set approximately 8-feet from the south property line with the porch constructed within the set back. The historic houses to the east are set 15-feet from the edge of the sidewalk with the porches and steps constructed within this set back.

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

The proposed building site is bound on the south by Princess Anne Avenue, a public alley to the north, houses to the east, and a steep slope to the west. Because of the steep topography to the west, Princess Anne Avenue and the public sidewalk do not extend the full length of the south side of the parcel; leaving about 2/3 of the lot without street or sidewalk frontage. The primary entrance to the dwelling with street frontage is oriented towards the street. The

other units are accessed from a mews on the east side of the property. The mews forms an approximately 14' wide landscaped buffer to the adjacent house and extends the public sidewalk to the north to provide access to the three other dwellings. The mews is open to the street and public sidewalk to the south and there is a 6' privacy fence at the north end that closes to mews to through foot traffic with secured access for the residents of the new houses.

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 building offers a contemporary but compatible interpretation of forms found throughout the neighborhood. The historic houses to the east offer a variety of heights and massing. Mansard roofs with a variety of dormers and gables is the dominate roof form. The proposed new construction follows the general form of three-bays and 2-stories in height with a mansard roof. The south elevation is organized into two, three-bay masses separated by a recessed wall plane. The two masses are topped with a mansard roof. There is a one-story, two-bay porch on the façade of the east bay. The three-bay massing, mansard roof and porch are reflective of the houses to the east.

The east (mews) elevation has a similar three-bay massing with a false mansard roof. The elevation is broken by a projecting bay on the first story and covered entrances and stoops.

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

The proposed new construction maintains the human scale of the nearby historic residences in the fenestration patterns and the entry porch on the south elevation. The heights of the porches vary across the block but there is a continuous line of steps and porches across the block. The deck of the new porch is set approximately 3' above grade. The porch deck of the house immediately to the east is set at approximately 3'-6".

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 south elevation facing the street and park incorporates fenestration patterns and porches found on the adjacent houses that reflect the human scale of the historic architecture. One-over-one windows will be used on all elevations of the

new buildings and maintain the human scale fenestration pattern found on the adjacent historic houses. A Doric order porch with Richmond rail on the south elevation continues the human scale pattern found on the street face.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

The buildings on the block, facing the park, vary in height from 2 to 2 ½ stories with mansard roofs. The heights vary from approximately 23'-6" at 1910 Princess Anne to approximately 29'-3" at 1914 Princess Anne. The houses at the east end of the block are also perceived as taller because of the slope of the hill. The proposed new houses are two-stories in height with mansard roofs and approximately 29'-9" tall. There are one-story pent houses that provide access to the roof decks located near the center of each building. The size of the pent house over the south unit has been reduced to minimize its visibility from the street.

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 south elevation is fully visible from public right-of-ways and the park. The north elevation is also fully visible but faces an area outside of the historic district. The project presents a long elevation (south) facing the street that is broken into two, three-bay brick sections with a recessed darker brick bay between. The Mews (east) elevation consists of four, three-bay brick sections. The north (alley) elevation is organized into two three bay masses. The taller mass is clad with brick and the lower mass, to the west is clad with smooth cementitious siding. The west elevation is not visible from the district, and minimally visible from any other vantage point. It is broken into three brick masses separated by recessed two bay masses. The sides of the brick masses and the recessed bays are clad with smooth cementitious siding. The general massing of the south and east elevations compatible with the variety of façade widths found on the block.

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

The cornice heights like the overall heights of the adjacent historic buildings varies. The cornice heights of the new buildings are set at approximately 25'-9" above grade.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This guideline does not apply.

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

Brick, much of which is painted, is the primary building material on the block with a variety of stone and cast decorations and lintels. All of the historic houses have mansard roofs the majority of which are covered with slate shingles.

The applicant proposes to use brick and cementitious siding as the primary building materials with powder-coated metal railings and a synthetic slate roofing on the mansards on the south and east elevations. There are cast stone lintels over the windows on the south and east elevations. The proposed use of brick, cast stone, and slate are compatible with the historic materials. Samples of two proposed brick colors have been provided. The use of the darker brick color is limited to the section of brick between the two blocks on the south elevation. Slate samples have also been provided.

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.*

Roycroft Vellum, #43 on the color palette, has been selected for the cementitious siding.

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.*

Smooth, untextured cementitious lap siding will be used on portions of the north and west elevations. The porch on the south elevation will have “HB&G Perma Cast” cellular PVC round Doric columns and wooden Richmond rail. The windows are Anderson series 400 double-hung one-over-one aluminum clad wood windows on the south and east elevations and casements with the appearance of one-over-one windows on the north and west elevations. A synthetic slate made of recycled materials will be used. The entry doors on the east elevation are 6-panel steel doors and the patio doors on the west elevation are aluminum clad Anderson 400 series doors.

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.

The houses will have ground source heat pumps so there will be no need for external mechanical equipment. The rear roof decks, visible from the alley and a small portion from the park will be enclosed with painted or powder-coated metal railing. Photovoltaic solar panels, if included in the project, will be concealed behind the mansard roofs on the east elevation.

Parking and trash: Four diagonal, off-street parking spaces will be provided on the north side of the property and accessed through the alley. These spaces will be dedicated to the new owners. Trash receptacles (super cans) will be enclosed by a screening fence on the northeast corner of the property. There will be a 6' privacy fence at the north end of the mews that will be keyed for the property owners and will prevent cut through foot traffic. The fences and trash enclosure should be painted or opaquely stained.

Staff recommends approval of the project. It is the assessment of staff that the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 114.930.7(c) of the City Code, and 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.