



# Commission of Architectural Review

4. COA-138396-2023	Conceptual Review	Meeting Date: 11/28/2023
Applicant/Petitioner	Walter Parks Architects	
Project Description	Construct 20 new single family attached townhomes in groupings of 2 and 3, on Venable Street and Burton Street.	
Project Location		
Address: 2111-2119 Venable Street		
Historic District: Union Hill		
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The applicant proposes to construct 20 townhomes in groupings of two and three. The new construction will be located between Venable Street and Burton Street with units fronting both streets. Four units will be located to the south at the corner of Burton Street and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street.</li> <li>The townhomes will be three stories tall, some featuring rear third floor patios.</li> <li>The new construction will be frame with horizontal siding, fiberglass doors &amp; windows, metal railings, Fiber cement trim, and aluminum awnings.</li> <li>The land is currently vacant.</li> <li>The current parcels will need to be subdivided.</li> </ul>		
Staff Recommendation	Conceptual Review	
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, <a href="mailto:alex.dandridge@rva.gov">alex.dandridge@rva.gov</a> , (804) 646-6569	
Previous Reviews	None.	
Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>that the new construction incorporate some traditional architectural elements commonly found in the district on residential construction including: a cornice feature, front porches, greater articulation of and around windows (trim pieces and divided lights are common in Union Hill).</li> <li>that elevations for each proposed unit be submitted for review.</li> <li>that the setbacks of the townhomes be similar to that of the existing precedent on the subject block/s to reinforce/re-establish the street wall. Staff recommends that specific setback measurements be submitted for each unit.</li> <li>that the units feature full-width, covered front porches with a</li> </ul>	

	<p>roof form that resembles adjacent dwellings (visible/pitched roof form).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that larger windows be used on the first floor of the units.</li> <li>• that the applicant reduce the height of the units by one story in order to better reference the typical height of residential buildings on the subject block.</li> <li>• that a context drawing or rendering be submitted that clearly labels the height of the new construction and the adjacent existing buildings.</li> <li>• that a narrower vertical trim piece be used to break up the units, if the visual separation of the units is necessary to break up the massing.</li> <li>• that a fenestration pattern more in-keeping with the district be used, such as singular, vertically aligned windows.</li> <li>• that the applicant consider using a sash window, and consider using divided lights to create more architectural interest.</li> <li>• that information on hardscaping for sidewalks, alleys, and any parking pads, including materiality and dimension, be submitted for Administrative Review and Approval.</li> <li>• that details on any proposed walls or fences be submitted for Administrative Review.</li> </ul>
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## Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
<p><b>Standards For New Construction, page 46</b></p>	<p><i>All new residential and commercial construction, whether in the form of additions or entire buildings should be compatible with the historic features that characterize the 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 buildings in its setting.</i></p>	<p>The new construction will be located directly to the east of a larger masonry building which features a tall square corner steeple and a steeply pitched cross-gable roof. To the north, the site is border by a grouping of in-tact frame, modest, Italianate dwellings that are two stories in height, three bays wide, and feature decorative cornices with cornice vents, brackets, and full-width, one story, covered front porches. To the east and south of the site, there is vacant land, a parking lot, and newer construction of differing architectural styles.</p> <p>The new construction will not have any architectural features that reference the neighboring buildings. <u>Staff recommends that the new construction incorporate some traditional architectural elements commonly found in the district on residential construction including: a cornice feature, front porches, greater articulation of and around windows (trim pieces and divided lights are common in Union Hill).</u></p> <p>Very little information was given on the design of the dwellings. <u>Staff recommends that elevations for each proposed unit be submitted for review.</u></p>
<p><b>Standards For New Construction: Siting, page 46</b></p>	<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>Specific setbacks of the units were not submitted with the application. <u>Staff recommends that the setbacks of the townhomes be similar to that of the existing precedent on the subject block/s to reinforce/re-establish the street wall.</u> <u>Staff recommends that specific setback measurements be submitted for each unit.</u></p>

<p><b>Standards For New Construction: Form, page 46</b></p>	<p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><i>Massing:</i> The massing of the units appear to be narrower and taller than what is typically seen on the subject block. While not many details were given in the application, based on the site plan, it appears that the units are between 15-17 feet wide.</p> <p><i>Symmetry:</i> The new construction is generally symmetrical.</p> <p><i>Proportions:</i> The individual units appear to be taller and narrower than existing historic residential buildings in Union Hill.</p> <p><i>Projections:</i> Some units will feature third floor decks, creating a third story projection.</p> <p><i>Roof shapes:</i> The roof shapes of the new construction appear to be shallow pitched shed roofs (flat) which is in-keeping with roof shapes and forms found in the Union Hill City Old and Historic District.</p>
<p><b>Standards For New Construction: Form, page 46</b></p>	<p><i>2. New residential construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic, residential construction in the district.</i></p>	<p>As proposed, the new construction will not feature any human scale elements. Common human scale features in the Union Hill City Old and Historic District include front porches, large windows, and low front yard picket fences.</p> <p>Each unit will have a simple entrance with a few steps and a small aluminum canopy element. <u>Staff recommends that the units feature full-width, covered front porches with a roof form that resembles adjacent dwellings (visible/pitched roof form).</u></p> <p>It is common for historic dwellings in Union Hill to feature larger first floor windows that face the street. This window type enhances the pedestrian scale of historic dwellings and their connection to the street. <u>Staff recommends that larger windows be used on the first floor of the units.</u></p>
<p><b>Standards for New Construction: Height, Width, Proportion &amp; Massing, page 47</b></p>	<p><i>1. New residential construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.</i></p> <p><i>2. New residential 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.</i></p> <p><i>3. The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.</i></p>	<p>While there are a couple larger, taller masonry buildings in the immediate area, they are institutional/religious buildings, most residential buildings in the immediate area are two stories. <u>Staff recommends that the applicant reduce the height of the units by one story in order to better reference the typical height of residential buildings on the subject block.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that a context drawing or rendering be submitted that clearly labels the height of the new construction and the adjacent existing buildings.</u></p>

<p><b>Standards for New Construction: Materials &amp; Colors, page 47</b></p>	<p><i>2. Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.</i></p>	<p>The new construction will be clad in horizontal siding, which generally resembles other types of horizontal siding found within the district.</p> <p>A color palate has been submitted for dark, earth-toned colors.</p> <p>It appears that the groupings of two and three units will be visually separated by a vertical trim piece. <u>If the visual separation of the units is necessary to break up the massing, staff recommends that this be done by alternating the color of the units, or using a narrower vertical trim piece.</u> Most historic examples of semi-attached and attached houses within Union Hill do not feature this elements as a means of separation.</p>
<p><b>Standards For New Construction: Doors and Windows, page 56</b></p>	<p><i>2. The size, proportion and spacing patterns of door and window openings on free-standing new construction should be compatible with patterns established in the district.</i></p>	<p>Each unit will have groupings of two-three windows. Staff finds that groupings of windows of three and more are not common within the district. The use of groupings of three or more windows may be best suited for elevations that are minimally visible from the public right-of-way. <u>Staff recommends that a fenestration pattern more in-keeping with the district be used, such as singular, vertically aligned windows.</u></p> <p><u>The application states that windows will be fiberglass casement windows. Given the very minimal design of the building, Staff recommends that the applicant consider using a sash window, and consider using divided lights to create more architectural interest.</u></p>
<p><b>Site improvements and hardscaping</b></p>		<p>Based on the site plan submitted in the application, the units that front the north side of Burton Street and the south side of Venable Street will have an open area between them. From the plans, it is unclear what the treatment of this area will be. <u>Staff recommends that information on hardscaping for sidewalks, alleys, and any parking pads, including materiality and dimension be submitted for Administrative Review.</u> Appropriate paving for the Union Hill includes brick pavers, granite pavers, and gravel.</p>
<p><b>Standards for New Construction, Residential, Fences &amp; Walls, pg. 51</b></p>	<p><i>1. Fence, wall, and gate designs should reflect the scale of the historic structures they surround, as well as the character of nearby fences, walls, and gates.</i></p> <p><i>2. Fence, wall, or gate materials should relate to building materials commonly found in the neighborhood.</i></p> <p><i>3. Privacy fences along the side and rear of a property should be constructed of wood of an appropriate design. Privacy fences are not appropriate in front of a historic building.</i></p>	<p>No information was given on any walls or fences that will be installed in association with the new construction. <u>Staff recommends that details on any proposed walls or fences be submitted for Administrative Review.</u> Walls and curbing will require review by the Commission, whereas wooden fences may be administratively approved if in compliance with the Commission’s adopted administrative approval guidelines.</p>

## Figures

Figure 1. 1905 Sanborn Map. 2111-2119 Venable Street features mostly frame, two story buildings with front porches. All were demolished between the 1970's-1990's. As of 1905, there were not any buildings on the corner of Burton Street and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street that fronted on Burton Street.

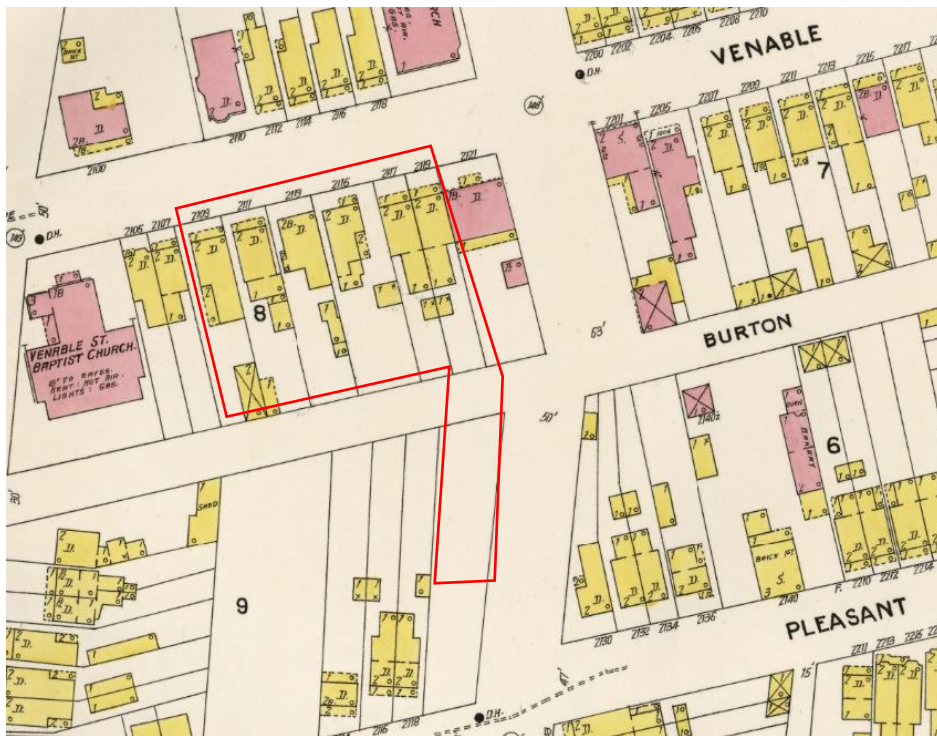


Figure 2. Subject block (2111-2119 Venable) in historic configuration, built-out. Photographs ~1955-1977. 2115 Venable picture below may not be the original building on that site.

