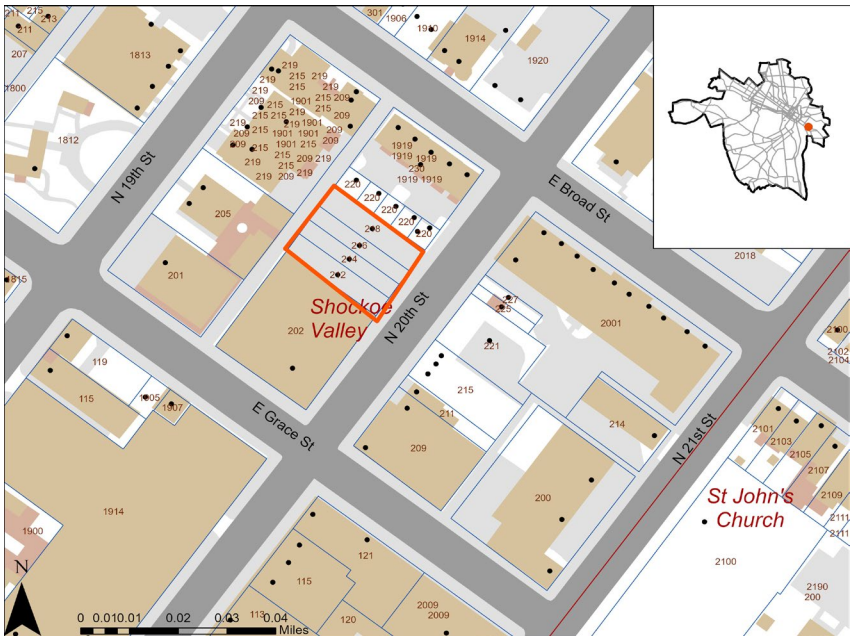
Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia

Commission of Architectural Review

12. COA-161185-2025	Conceptual Review	Meeting Date: 2/25/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Greg Shron, Center Creek Homes	
Project Description	Construct a new six-unit, three-story building.	
Project Location Address: 212-218 North 20th Street Historic District: Shockoe Valley High-Level Details: The applicant proposes to construct a three-story building that will have six dwelling units. It will be contemporary in design with a roof top deck above each unit. The building will be one unit wide and six units deep. The site is vacant; the original building was demolished sometime in the mid-2010s, likely demolition by neglect.		
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, alex.dandridge@rva.gov, (804) 646-6569	
Previous Reviews	None.	
Staff Recommendations	• A plan with setback be submitted with the final review, and that the setback of the new building be consistent with neighboring buildings to reinforce/recreate the street wall. • A sight line drawing of the stair towers be included for final review. • The primary entrance on the North 20th Street facing unit have a greater presence with more architectural interest. • The proposed entrance canopies better reflect the flat top canopies with overhead support rods commonly found in the district. • The materials, openings, and other architectural elements of the building be arranged vertically rather than horizontally. • The exterior cladding materials be uniform in dimension and reveal. • Brick be incorporated into the design of the proposed building. • Final design of fencing /screening be submitted with the final review for administrative approval. • The windows be consistent in size on each elevation and be vertically aligned. • The fenestration and materials be arranged in a way that creates greater symmetry and alignment between the building's design features. • Staff recommends more windows, window articulation, and symmetric organization of windows on all elevations.	

Staff Analysis

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW		
Surrounding Context		
The subject parcels are located on a block that has lost most of its historic fabric. There is a one masonry Italianate building on the east side of North 20th Street that is in poor condition. On the northwest corner of East Broad and North 20th Street there is a group of newer buildings that face East Broad and take on a more traditional design of attached dwellings. The northeast corner of East Broad and North 20th Street features a four story, multifamily budling circa 2011 that has a contemporary design but uses traditional materials like brick and metal. The southeast corner of East Grace Street and North 20th Street features a large, mid-century, brick industrial building with few openings and terracotta tile coping; and the southwest corner of East Grace and North 20th Street features a contemporary, four-story building circa 2013. Other than at the intersections, this block of North 20th Street is relatively undeveloped. Existing historic and new construction all feature a high level of symmetry and verticality. The Commission approved a five-unit town home development at 220 North 20th Street in 2023, but that project has not been completed. The streetscape consists of brick sidewalks and granite cubs. The street tree canopy increases toward the East Grace and North 20th intersection. The parcels are currently vacant and appear to be used as parking.		
Guideline Reference	**Reference Text**	**Analysis**
Standards for New Construction, Siting, pg. 52	*The context for review begins with the building and its immediate neighbors, but also expands to include the surrounding buildings on the block face and across the street (within the 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.* *3. New commercial buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site.* *4. If setback waivers, or any other waivers are needed, the Commission can be petitioned to support a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) waiver.* *5. 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.*	There is little historic context left on this block of North 20th Street. The immediate context consists mostly of 3-4 story new construction that is larger in scale than what historically existed on the block. Only one of the six units will front North 20th Street. The conceptual site plan does not label a specific setback for the building. <u>Staff recommends that a site plan with setbacks be submitted with the final review, and that the setback of the new building be consistent with neighboring buildings to reinforce/recreate the street wall.</u> The first unit of the building will face the primary street, North 20th Street; however, the other five units will have side entrances. Each unit will have a garage on their first-story, south elevations, which are secondary elevations.
Standards for New Construction, Form, pg. 52	*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,*	The new building will be rectangular in form, consisting of six rectangular masses, each stepping down with the terrain which gradually falls from east to west on the site. While it is uncommon for building to step down backward

	symmetry, proportions, projections and roof shapes that lend identity to a building. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure. *2. New commercial construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic commercial buildings in the district.* *3. New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.*	into a lot, Staff finds that the form is generally compatible with buildings in the immediate area. The roof will be flat, with each unit having a projecting stair tower from the third story to access a roof top amenity. The projecting stair tower is not a common feature within the district. It is unclear how visible this element will be. Staff Recommends that a sight line drawing of this feature be included for final review. There is a small stoop with a canopy at the main entrance of the unit that will front North 20th Street. Staff recommends that the primary entrance on the North 20th Street facing unit have a greater presence with more architectural interest. Looking at other historic buildings and new construction in the district, most commercial, multi-family, and industrial buildings feature flat entrance canopies that are attached to the face of the building from the top, rather than a sloped canopy supported from the bottom. Staff recommends that the proposed entrance canopies better reflect the flat top canopies with overhead support rods commonly found in the district.
Standards for New Construction, Height, Width, Proportion & Massing, pg. 53	*1. New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.* *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.* *3. The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.*	The building will be three-stories in height, which is overall in-keeping with the heights of the surrounding buildings, with a height of approximately 40', which includes the height of the rooftop stair towers. A context drawing submitted by the applicant shows that the North 20th Street-facing portion of the building will be similar in height to the proposed new construction at 220 North 20th Street, approved by the Commission in 2023. This building had a proposed height of approximately 38'. While the new building will read as one unit facing North 20th Street, each unit behind the front unit will step down from the front of the lot to the rear of the lot. The stepping down of each unit will help break up the massing as seen from the side elevations of the building. This is a similar form to the building that was approved at 220 North 20th Street. Staff finds that the building materials and openings are arranged horizontally and do not respect the vertical orientation of other buildings in the district. Staff recommends that the materials, openings, and other architectural elements of the building be arranged vertically rather than horizontally.
Standards for New Construction, Materials & Colors, pg. 53	*1. Additions should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.* *2. Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.* *3. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the immediate*	The building will primarily be clad in horizontal, mixed exposure fiber cement siding, varying from two to seven-inch exposure. Other materials include fiber cement trim, panels, and 5 V metal roofing. The cladding materials being proposed are not in keeping with the original materials found in the district. Most original materials were either brick or wood with a uniform dimension and reveal. Staff recommends that the exterior cladding materials be uniform in dimension and reveal.

	neighborhood and throughout the larger district (see Painting Section starting on page 60). *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.* *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.* *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.*	In the context of the district, nearly every historic building or new construction features some brick, making it the most prevalent building material. Staff recommends that brick be incorporated into the design of the proposed building. A site plan was submitted that indicates that exterior HVAC will be in the side yards of the units and screened by a privacy fence with horizontal slats. Staff finds that this is an appropriate location for the exterior HVAC equipment and recommends that the final design of fencing /screening be submitted with the final review or for administrative approval. A parapet wall around the perimeter of the roof of each unit will serve as the railings of the roof top terraces. This is an unobtrusive way to add railings to the terraces.
Standards for New Construction, Doors and Windows, pg. 56	*2. The size, proportion, and spacing patterns of door and window openings on free standing new construction should be compatible with patterns established within the district.* *4. Because the material cannot be manufactured to model effectively the appearance of historic windows, vinyl windows are not appropriate for contributing buildings in historic districts.* *5. 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 pedestrian entry points.*	The size, proportion, and spacing patterns of windows and doors are not in-keeping with established fenestration patterns in the district. The windows are of differing sizes. While the windows are vertically aligned in places, the combination of materials and window sizes creates an organization of features that is not typical or compatible with the district. Staff finds that the building does not feature the vertical orientation and symmetry of other multi-family buildings in the district. Staff recommends that the windows be consistent in size on each elevation, and that they vertically aligned. Staff also recommends that the fenestration and materials be arranged in a way that creates greater symmetry and alignment between the building's design features. The "primary façade" that will face North 20th Street appears to be lacking in openings. There is a large amount of "blank space". Staff recommends that there be additional windows, greater window articulation, and a symmetrical organization of windows on this elevation. Given that the building will have multiple units and garages, there are multiple entrances; however, it is unclear from the plans how many of the entrances will be visible from the public right-of-way.

Figures

Figure 1. Subject site existing conditions

Figure 1. Looking south on west side of North 20th Street.

Figure 2. 220 N. 20th Street, construction starting.

Figure 2. Looking south on east side of North 20th Street.

Figure 1. New construction located at the southwest corner of East Grace Street and North 20th Street.

Figure 2. Masonry Italianate building located on east side of North 20th Street.

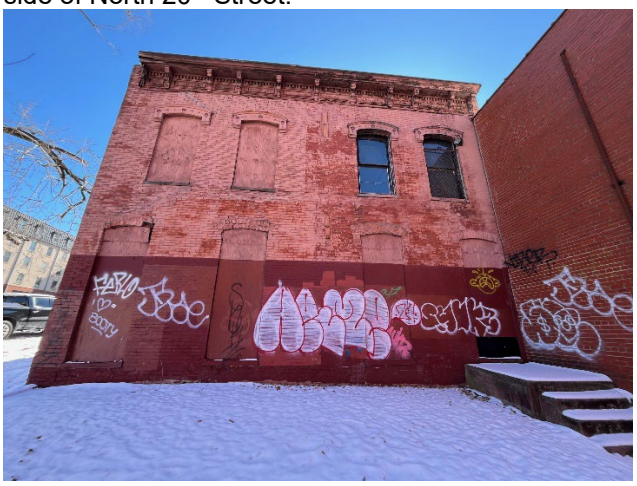


Figure 7. Large -scale historic buildings near the subject site.

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