

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
March 24, 2015 Meeting**

7. **CAR No. 15-023** (Michaux, LLC) **601 - 601 ½ N. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Construct two attached single-family houses**

**Staff Contact:** **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval to construct two attached single-family houses on two vacant lots in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed building is an Italianate-influenced structure with front and rear porches and a shed roof.

The new building will be situated on the corner of N. 23<sup>rd</sup> and E. Leigh Streets, adjacent to a contemporary double house built in 2006. The structure will be a total of 29' in height. It will have side yard setbacks of 3'-6" and 1'-6" and a front yard setback of 15'.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the "Standards for New Construction: Residential" on pages 44 and 45 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* and the resulting comments follow.

**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 or on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

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 proposed 3'-6" and 1'-6" side yard setbacks mostly reflect the typical pattern along the block, which also has several vacant parcels and more contemporary structures built with wider side yard setbacks. The proposed 15' front yard setback would closely align the structure with that of the existing, adjacent structure located at 603 – 603 ½ N. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street.

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

The new house will face N. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, the most prominent street bordering the site.

## **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 form of the proposed building is typical of two-story Italianate buildings located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District.

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

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of the neighborhood.

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 proposed buildings design calls for a front porch which lends human-scale elements to the building's design.

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

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

The proposed building will be a total of 29' in height which would match the height of the existing, adjacent structure as demonstrated by the façade rendering provided by the applicant. The building height is also consistent with other structures found along the block.

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 proposed building design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district.

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

The cornice height of the proposed structure aligns with that of the adjacent building.

### ***MATERIALS & COLORS***

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

This standard is not applicable.

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

The applicant proposes smooth fiber cement siding, parged block foundation, black EPDM porch roofs, a white TPO main roof, composite trim, Richmond rail, Turncraft Colonial porch posts, tongue and groove porch decking, brick porch piers, composite lattice below the front and rear porches, 1-over-1 aluminum-clad windows, pre-manufactured corbels, and two 6-paneled steel front doors with a transom above. Smooth fiber cement siding will be installed between the rear porches to act as a privacy screen.

*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.*

The applicant has not proposed paint colors for the proposed structures, but is encouraged to work with CAR staff to seek administrative approval for compatible colors chosen from the CAR paint color palette.

- 3. 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 building design calls for smooth fiber cement siding.

- 4. 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.*

This standard is not applicable.

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**Staff recommends approval of the project with a condition.** The proposed infill project appears generally to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines*. Staff recommends that approval be condition on the brackets of the cornice aligning with the second-floor windows.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the condition above, 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*, specifically the pages cited above, adopted by the Commission for review of Certificates of Appropriateness under the same section of code.