

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
May 26, 2015 Meeting**

19. **CAR No. 15-066** (Eastern Edge Development) **2325 Venable Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Construct a new mixed-use building**

Staff Contact: **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests conceptual review and Commission comments for the construction of a new mixed-use building on a vacant lot in the Union Hill Old and Historic District at the corner of Pink and Venable Streets. The proposal is for the construction of a three-story building with commercial on the first floor facing Venable Street and residential at the rear along Pink Street and on the second and third floors. The third floor is set back from the façade. The applicant proposes to construct a commercial aluminum storefront on the first floor at the front of the structure and the front portion of the Pink Street facing façade. The first two stories of the front half of the structure will be composed of light shade brick with masonry accents of ground- or split-faced block. The third floor and the rear first and second floors will be clad in prefinished cementitious siding. The applicant is proposing to divide the building face along Pink Street into two building forms connected by a minimally inset area. The inset portion of the building will have a stucco finish and a ground floor entry. The applicant is proposing to install aluminum clad wood windows.

Conceptual review is covered under Sec. 114-930.6(d) of the City Code: *The commission shall review and discuss the proposal with the applicant and make any necessary recommendations. Such Conceptual Review shall be advisory only.* Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the “Standards for New Construction: Commercial” on pages 50 and 51 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 on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This guideline does not apply.

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 proposed building will not be set back from Venable Street or Pink Street. The commercial space's corner entry will be setback from the property lines similar to other commercial buildings in the district. Though the buildings adjacent to the subject property are set back from Venable Street, the proposed building is located on a corner and respects the commercial corner conditions prevalent in the historic district in which the buildings are developed to the property line. The setbacks for the proposed construction to the property line are consistent with the pattern that has been established by the other structures which face the corner of Venable and Pink Streets.

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

The proposed project which its primary commercial entrance and proposed commercial storefront is oriented towards Venable Street which is the most prominent street bordering the site. Access to the residential portion of the project is provide by a secondary entrance on Pink Street.

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.*

This guideline does not apply. The applicant will be applying for a Special Use Permit regarding the parking requirement for the project.

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 proposed building form is compatible with the massing, size, symmetry, proportions, and projections of other corner commercial buildings found in the area. The third floor will be setback to transition from the two story buildings to the west along Venable Street to the four story structure to the east across Pink Street from the subject. The Commission may wish to consider whether it would be more appropriate to step back the third floor at a distance equal to the setback of the existing buildings to the west on Venable Street to reference the existing street wall rather than the current distance that is proposed.

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

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of nearby historic commercial buildings by incorporating large areas of storefront glazing and an intermediate cornice on the Venable and Pink street elevations.

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

The proposed building incorporates human scale elements at the pedestrian level by proposing large areas of storefront and an intermediate cornice on the Venable and Pink street elevations. The applicant also proposes to create a recessed entry at the corner with a support column similar to the pedestrian entrances for other commercial corner properties in the district.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

To the west of the proposed project, the majority of the existing structures are two-stories in height. Immediately to the east of the proposed project is a four story structure which spans the entire block and smaller two story buildings across the street. The proposed project respects the two story structures to the west by setting back the third story portion of the structure and installing a cornice at the height of the two story structures.

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 proposed building respects the vertical orientation typically found in corner commercial buildings. Along the Venable Street elevation, the first story has a horizontal orientation organized by the use of storefront and intermediate cornice. The second and third stories are organized into a typical three bay arrangement found in the area.

Along Pink Street, the project occupies more than a third of the block. The scale of the building is reduced by dividing the building into two block forms which still read as a single piece of architecture. The forms are connected by a minimally inset single bay which is proposed to have a stucco finish and entry to the residential portion of the structure.

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

The cornice height for the two story portion of the structure reflects the cornice height of the housing to the west along Venable. The third story cornice height is not typically found in the area.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This guideline does not apply.

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

The applicant is proposing to use a light shade of brick, prefinished cementitious siding, commercial aluminum storefront, residential aluminum-clad windows and stucco. These materials are compatible with the original materials found throughout the district though actual appropriateness will be determined when more details are provided regarding the specific types of materials used. Details on the mullion and muntin configuration for the proposed windows are not provided though the applicant has indicated that the intent is to use something that is clearly contemporary yet compatible with the district.

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

Information on proposed paint colors was not provided.

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 applicant is proposing to use smooth cementitious siding on the setback third story and the rear portion of the project.

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.*

Information on the proposed location of mechanical equipment was not provided.

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.*

Information on the proposed location of dumpsters or other garbage collection devices was not provided.