

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
August 26, 2014 Meeting**

15. **CAR No. 14-082** (Mid-Atlantic Comm. Properties) **535 West Broad Street  
Broad Street Old and Historic District**

**Project Description: Construct new commercial building and parking area**

**Staff Contact:**

**J. Hill**

The applicant requests conceptual review and Commission comments for the construction of a new 13,000 square foot commercial building with parking area and drive-thru pharmacy pick-up at the intersection of Broad Street and Belvedere in the Broad Street Old and Historic District. The application includes a building summary describing general design and materials. The intersection is recognized as an important "Richmond Gateway." A canopied filling station/convenience store currently occupies the site. Construction has just begun on the VCU Institute for Contemporary Arts on the property across Belvedere to the west.

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 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**

*New construction should be compatible with the historic features that characterize its setting and context. To protect the significance of the historic context, the new work should reference the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of its setting. However, new construction should be clearly discernible from the old to protect the authenticity of the historic district.*

**SITING**

1. *Additions should be subordinate in size to the main structure and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating them at the rear or least visible side of a structure is preferred.*

- This guideline does not apply. The existing structure on the property is not historic and would be demolished to make way for the new structure. The

new construction is intended to remediate the current siting with new construction that is more appropriate for a City Old and Historic District.

*2. New infill construction should respect the prevailing setback patterns of the surrounding block faces. The minimal setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.*

- The new building is built to the property line at the intersection, establishing a traditional street wall and respecting the prevailing setback patterns of the historic streetscape within the district. The design does not establish the street wall along the entire street frontage, however. The pharmacy pick-up lane is adjacent to the existing alley off of Belvidere, and the parking area and entrance is located along the Broad Street block-face.

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

- The new construction is designed to appear as though storefronts line Belvidere and Broad, both extremely important Richmond streets. However, there are no entrances to the building on the street faces. The public entrance is on the interior of the block through the parking lot. The design would be improved and the block faces enlivened if there were actual entrances on the street elevations.

*4. New infill structures should be spaced within 20% of the average distance between existing houses on the block.*

- This guideline is more applicable within a district with an established and intact residential character. The commercial buildings in the majority of the area of the district model a continuous commercial block-face of compatible yet diverse buildings. The building currently adjacent to this site on Broad, a former McDonald's, does nothing to help establish appropriate spacing.

*5. If setback waivers are needed, the Commission can be requested to support a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) waiver.*

- The applicant has applied for a Special Use Permit to address issues raised by the Zoning Administrator and other city departments.

### **FORM**

*1. New 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 structure. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

- The overall size and form of the building do a lot in the way of remedial work for the district. This corner of the district has been underutilized with a historically incompatible structure for at least a generation. The design and proportions portray traditional storefronts, perhaps in a fashion that is more horizontal than is found in the dense and urban building form east of Henry Street in the district. Given the central location and the apparent desire of an increasing proportion of the population to live in Downtown Richmond, it would be nice to see a truly mixed-use design with additional stories.

*2. New construction should be contemporary in style yet compatible with surrounding historic structures. New construction should not mimic previous architectural styles in such a way that creates a false historical appearance.*

- The new construction takes its cues from traditional storefront architecture but does not attempt to mimic previous architectural styles and would not be mistaken for a historic structure. The compatibility of the form is discussed above.

### **SCALE**

*1. New construction should maintain the existing human scale of historic residential and commercial neighborhoods. The inappropriate use of monumentally-scaled buildings that overwhelm pedestrians at the street level is strongly discouraged.*

- The current design respects the human scale.

*2. New additions and infill structures should incorporate human-scale elements such as storefronts and porches into their design.*

- The storefronts appear successfully to communicate the human scale of the new construction.

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

*1. New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures.*

- There is very little left of historic precedent to establish typical height in the immediate area. The closest historic buildings are a historic three-story building with apartments over a store at 518 West Grace Street and a row of two-story commercial buildings on the north side of West Broad Street (504, 506 and 508). Without an established pattern immediately adjacent to the site, staff does not find the height of the proposed new construction inappropriate for establishing a strong edge to the district, although the dense urban character of the larger district would seem to support a taller building.

*2. New structures should have the same number of stories as the majority of structures on the block.*

- This guideline is addressed in the comment immediately above.

*3. New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial and residential properties in historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing of more than 30 feet should be broken up by bays.*

- The proposed fenestration and articulation of the bays on the street elevations succeed in breaking up the massing yet the building still reads more horizontal in orientation than vertical. As a result, the building has a little bit of a suburban feel in an urban setting.

*4. Typical massing patterns throughout City historic districts are simple and block-like; therefore, new structures should avoid the use of staggered setbacks, towers or elaborate balconies.*

- The proposed massing features simple and block-like forms arranged with stepped setbacks.

### **MATERIALS, COLORS & DETAILS**

*1. New construction should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.*

- This guideline does not apply in this instance of new construction as no historic architecture is present on the site.

*2. Missing building elements should be replaced with new elements compatible in size, scale and material to the original elements without creating a false historical appearance.*

- This guideline is not applicable as the project does not involve any historic structures.

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

- The materials proposed, brick cladding with EIFS trim on the cornice, colored metal storefront elements, upper story windows with the appearance of wood windows, and standing seam metal awnings appear to be appropriate and compatible with the materials used in the greater surrounding district and are similar to materials that have been approved for new construction in commercial areas of Old and Historic Districts in Richmond's downtown. Actual appropriateness is verified when more specific details are provided for final review. For instance, windows will be required to have true or simulated divided lites as shown on pages 59-60 of the *Guidelines*. Windows in Old and Historic Districts are generally required to have wood sash or aluminum-clad wood sash. Storefront façade guidelines are covered on Page 46. Awnings are discussed on page 62 and seem intended to guide placement of awnings on existing historic buildings.

*4. Paint colors for new additions should compliment those of the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district (see Painting Section starting on page 54).*

- The colors used in the illustrations may be taken as a general indication of what the applicant intends and seem appropriate. Specific colors for exterior elements can be submitted for review and approval by Commission staff.

*5. Generally, synthetic siding materials are strongly discouraged for use in City Old & Historic Districts. If used on a new rear addition, and not visible from a prominent public right-of-way, these materials may be allowed in limited cases but approval by the Commission is always required.*

- This guideline does not apply to the proposed design.

## **PARKING AND SIGNAGE**

Guidance for the design of parking areas is covered under the *Standards for Site Improvements* on page 67. The parking area is on the interior of the block with landscape buffers generally indicated. A monument sign (page 65) is also indicated at the Broad Street entrance.