

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
September 22, 2015 Meeting**

3. **CAR No. 15-113** (D. Johannas)

**2325 Venable Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

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

Staff Contact: **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval to construct a new mixed-use building on a vacant lot in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The project was conceptually reviewed at the May 2015 CAR meeting. Minutes from that meeting are included for reference.

The proposal is for a three-story mixed-use building located on the southwest corner of Venable and Pink Streets. The front, first story will be a commercial space with residential units at the rear first story, and second and third stories.

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 brick with masonry accents of ground- or split-faced block. The third floor and the rear first and second stories 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 which will have a flat roof, whereas the front and rear portions of the building will have a butterfly-style roof that slopes towards the middle.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design that was conceptually reviewed at the May 2015 meeting. 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 has no setbacks along Venable and Pink Streets, except for its northeast corner which allows for corner entry into the commercial space. The lack of a setback is typical with corner commercial structures throughout the district and on this corner in particular. The two existing corner buildings on the northeast and southeast corners have no setback, and the building that previously existed on the northwest corner until it was demolished several years ago likewise had no setback. A 5' side yard setback exists to the building's west between it and the property line between existing buildings.

The proposed structure does transition from two to three stories at the setback distance of the existing row of buildings to the west creating a sense of conformity along the block.

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

The proposed in-fill is located on a corner and is oriented with the primary elevation facing Venable Street and a corner entrance that is oriented towards Venable Street as well. The proposed storefront engages both Venable and Pink Streets. One storefront bay and entrance faces Venable Street while two storefront bays face towards Pink Street.

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.

Parking for this proposed building has not been addressed or is not provided on-site.

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.*

Overall, the proposed building form is compatible with the massing, symmetry, proportions, and projections of other corner commercial buildings found in the area. The projecting storefront is a feature found on similar buildings in the immediate vicinity and the larger district. The proposed structure's size is higher than nearby structures. While three-story buildings existing throughout the Union Hill Old and Historic District, there are none located in the vicinity of this project. However, a four- to five-story, warehouse-style building exists to the east across from Pink Street and the proposed structure could serve as a step between the two-story structures to its west and the four- to five-story structure to its east.

The proposed butterfly roof structure is unusual to the immediate area and larger district in that it is not a roof style seen on historic structures. However, this design may help reduce the massing of the building along the Pink Street elevation. Also, the front, rear-sloping section of the roof does match the pitch and length of the existing, adjacent row of historic houses with shed roofs, which helps to integrate the form of the proposed structure with the existing structures.

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 which engage Venable and Pink Streets.

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 incorporating large areas of storefront glazing on the Venable and Pink Street elevations.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

The proposed building is taller by one story than the row of buildings immediately to its west. Dimensions are not provided on the context rendering, so an exact discrepancy in height cannot be calculated. The proposed structure offers some transition, in that it is two stories tall from the street until the setback of the

existing row of buildings, at which point it is proposed to be three stories which may lessen the discrepancy in height. The scale of the proposed structure is reduced along Pink Street by dividing the building into two block forms. The connecting mid-section between the two blocks will be setback minimally from the street, delineating the entry and stair.

As mentioned previously, there is a four- to-five-story, warehouse-style building to the east across Pink Street. The proposed structure could help to provide a transition between the existing two-story row of houses and the existing four- to five-story warehouse-style building.

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.

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

The cornice on the projecting, two-story storefront aligns in height with the cornice of the existing row of two-story buildings to the west.

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 proposed materials include brick on the first two stories of the front block form, prefinished cementitious siding on the remainder of the structure, masonry accents with ground- or split-faced block, commercial aluminum storefront, residential aluminum-clad wood windows, and composite trim.

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

At this point the applicant has not determined the colors of the brick or the cementitious siding.

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 proposes to use brick, cementitious siding, aluminum storefront, residential aluminum-clad wood windows, and composite trim.

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.

Staff recommends approval of the project with a condition. The proposed structure appears to be a compatible infill development which will help anchor the block. It differentiates itself from older, historic structures while responding to the predominant building forms for commercial buildings through the district. While the building height is taller than the immediately adjacent row of historic buildings, it can help serve as a transition between these two-story structures and the four- to five-story warehouse-style building directly across Pink Street.

Staff recommends that approval be conditioned with the applicant submitting final brick and siding colors to staff for administrative review and approval.

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.