

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
February 27, 2018 Meeting**

12. **COA-028538-2018** (St. John's United Church) **1131 & 1137 West Grace Street
West Grace Street Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Construct a new multifamily building.**

Staff Contact: **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests approval to construct a new multifamily structure at the corner of North Lombardy and West Grace Streets in the West Grace Street Old and Historic District. The applicant is proposing a 6 story building which steps down to 5 stories on the West Grace Street elevation.

Surrounding Context: The subject parcels are currently developed with a parking lot which serves the adjacent church. To the west on West Grace Street, the lots are developed with two to three story brick row houses. The structures to the east on West Grace Street are three story brick apartment buildings and two story brick row houses. The structures at the corner of Monument Avenue and Lombardy Street have considerably more height and massing than the structures along West Grace Street. These structures include the eleven story William Bottomley designed Stuart Court Apartments at the northwest corner, a six story mixed use building at the southeast corner, and two churches on the remaining corners.

Previous Reviews: The applicant came before the Commission on September 26, 2017, requesting conceptual review and comments on the siting, form, height, width, proportion, and massing of the proposed structure. At that time, the applicant presented a massing model for a six story residential structure with an H-shape configuration, a front courtyard that did not extend to the ground plane, and a sixth story setback from the alley. The applicant did not provide details related to the materials or the articulation of the structure. Though in general the Commission did not express concerns regarding the massing and height of the structure, several members of the public shared concerns. The Commission recommended the structure step down in height towards West Grace Street and have a true entrance from West Grace Street.

In response to the Commission's concerns, the applicant returned for a second round of conceptual review on November 28, 2017, with a design that altered the massing by setting back the 6th story from West Grace Street rather than the alley while still maintaining the H-shape configuration. Additionally, the applicant provided an entrance from grade to the front courtyard which consisted of a large staircase in response to the Commission's and staff's comments regarding the inaccessibility of the above grade courtyard. The Commission expressed concerns that the changes to the courtyard did not respond to the Commission's comments

regarding the presence of an above grade terrace. Several Commissioners expressed concerns that the structure was too tall and overwhelming, and they suggested the applicant consider lowering the building. The Commissioners also emphasized the importance of details and increasing the ornamentation including enhancing the cornice, including window heads and sills, and regulating the height of the limestone.

The applicant returned to the Commission on January 23, 2018 for final review. The revised plans brought the terrace closer to grade, lowered the building, and reduced the depth of the 5-story portion by 2 bays from 4 bays to 2 bays. While some Commissioners continued to express concerns regarding the scale of the project, Commissioners noted the project was greatly improved from previous submittals but noted there were issues with the details that needed to be resolved. The Commission deferred the application to allow the applicant the opportunity to work with staff to amend the plans to clarify the plans in regard to the setbacks, the treatment of changes in the grade of the property, and discrepancies between the elevations and the renderings, to address concerns raised by staff and the Commission regarding the reduction in the 5-story portion, the use of large casement windows, the location of the termination of the limestone base and belt course, and the porch column details.

Changes to the Plans: The applicant has modified the project as follows in response to concerns raised during the previous review:

- The plans and applicant's report clarify the changes in grade and the front yard setback. The applicant has not provided renderings.
- The 5-story portion of the structure returned to a depth of 4 bays. The 6-story portion now begins approximately 34' from the front building wall.
- The large casement windows have been replaced with double hung 2/2 paired or single windows.
- The limestone base terminates at the window sill and the belt course at the floor levels.
- The front porch balcony columns have been minimized by incorporating a 4 inch wide relief of a two inch depth.

In addition to the changes recommended during the previous review, the following changes have been made to the plans:

- On the rear elevation the glazing at the garage level has been replaced by metal grates.
- On the 5-story portion of the east elevation, a bay of windows has been removed.

The applicant is seeking **Final Review** for this project. Commission staff reviewed the proposed construction through the lens of the "Standards for New Construction: Commercial" on pages 52-56 of the Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines utilizing the checklist below.

S=satisfies

D=does not satisfy

NA=not applicable

S **D** **NA**

New infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns in the surrounding district

The proposed front setback is approximately 18' and the side yard setbacks are 15'. Though the proposed setback is 2 feet less than the adjacent property, it is compatible with setbacks of structures on the block.

Where the adjoining buildings have different setbacks, the setback for the new building should be based on the historical pattern for the block

The property is a corner lot with one adjacent structure.

New buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site

As the property is a corner lot, the structure has been designed to address both West Grace and North Lombardy Streets. The applicant has revised the plans to include a courtyard which better engages with the street than previous submittals through a series of stairs and landings. The plans also include a primary entrance from North Lombardy Street and undulations and material changes to emphasize this entrance.

Parking within the building is strongly encouraged with vehicle entry doors located on non-primary elevations

The proposed parking will be within the building and accessible from the alley.

New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the district. Form refers to the combination of massing, size, symmetry, proportions, projections and roof shapes that lend identity to a building.

Staff finds the proposed H-shape is appropriate and appreciates how the design breaks up the building massing. The applicant has modified the terrace to bring this element closer to grade which is more consistent with the courtyards found in the district. The project also incorporates substantial multi-story porches on the façade which is characteristic of apartment buildings on the block. Though the 6-story structure is more massive than the two and three-story structures on West Grace Street, the applicant has setback the 6-story mass from West Grace Street and maintained a 5-story mass for the first 34 feet of the building depth.

New construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level. Street level elevations should not have expanses of blank walls

The applicant has provided pedestrian entrances and glazing on the West Grace Street and North Lombardy elevations.

- New storefronts should be compatible with historic storefronts within the district. Storefronts are traditionally defined by simple piers, large storefront windows, a cornice, a signboard and/or attached signage and awnings**

The applicant has incorporated storefront glazing on West Grace and North Lombardy Streets. As this is a residential block, the applicant has revised the plans from previous submittals to reduce the amount of storefront glazing.

- New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings**

Though the structure is taller than the structures on West Grace Street, the West Grace Street and adjacent Monument Avenue Old and Historic Districts are characterized by a diversity in heights with taller buildings often found on prominent corners. Staff finds the proposed building height provides an appropriate transition from the taller institutional and multifamily buildings on Monument Avenue and smaller scale row houses and apartment buildings on West Grace Street. The applicant has responded to the Commission's concerns by setting back the 6th story from West Grace Street.

- New construction should respect the typical width, organization of bays, vertical alignment and symmetry of surrounding buildings. For larger buildings, bays should be employed as an organizational device but the building should read as a single piece of architecture**

Though the structure is wider than the apartment buildings on West Grace Street, the H-shape configuration breaks up the massing in a three part configuration which is consistent with numerous apartment buildings on West Grace Street. The applicant has also used variations in height and minor changes in setbacks to break up the massing on the North Lombardy Street elevation.

- The size, proportion, and spacing patterns of doors and window openings should be compatible with patterns established in the district.**

The applicant is proposing symmetrical, vertically aligned window placement on the primary elevations. The applicant has responded to staff's concerns regarding the varied use of the large casement windows which detracted from the symmetry of the structure by replacing these windows with paired or single, double hung, 2/2 windows.

- Porch and cornice heights should be compatible with adjacent buildings**

The structure is taller than the structures on West Grace Street though compatible with the diversity of heights in the district. Staff finds the porch heights are appropriate as the first three floors of the porches align with that of the adjacent structure, and porches that extend to the upper story are characteristic of the block.

- Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district. Vinyl, asphalt, and aluminum siding are not permitted.**

As the district is characterized by brick construction, staff supports the use of the brick and limestone or limestone colored brick. The applicant has responded to the Commission's concerns regarding the placement of the limestone base and belt courses. Staff recommends the windows be aluminum clad wood windows with true or simulated divided lites to include interior and exterior muntins and a spacer bar. Staff recommends final brick and paint colors be submitted for administrative review and approval.

Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions. Staff finds the proposed project responds to the Commission's concerns raised in the previous review. Though the structure is substantially more massive and taller than the structures in the immediate area on West Grace Street, staff finds the project's design with the courtyard and recessed 6th story help to minimize the massing and the project is compatible with the larger structures found throughout the West Grace and Monument Avenue Old and Historic Districts including the structures at the adjacent intersection of Monument Avenues and Lombardy Street.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the acceptance of the stated conditions, the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 30.930.7(c) of the City Code, as well as 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.