Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia

RICHMOND PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT REVIEW
PDR

Commission of Architectural Review

9. COA-167496-2025	Conceptual Review Meeting Date: 6/24/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Will Gillette
Project Description	Construct a new multifamily dwelling on the vacant lots
Project Location Address: 874 & 876 Jessamine Street Historic District: Union Hill High-Level Details: The applicant proposes to construct a three story nine-unit multi-family building on two vacant parcels.	
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, Alex.Dandridge@RVA.gov, (804)646-6569
Previous Reviews	• N/A
Staff Recommendations	Staff finds that while the proposal is generally compatible with the Guidelines, additional clarification and enhancements are required for final review: • Confirm final exterior material colors, brick type, and mortar for review and approval • Consider alternative locations for the trash enclosure, as its current placement is very close to the building porch • Revise window alignment and sizes along the Carrington Street elevation to achieve consistent fenestration patterns • Review utility door placement to avoid occupying visually prominent or symmetrical bays intended for primary entrances • Enhance the pedestrian scale and human interaction on the Carrington Street façade by articulating more clearly defined entry features or porches.

Staff Analysis

Surrounding Context		
The subject parcels are located at the northeastern edge of the Union Hill City Old and Historic District at the corner of Jessamine Street and Carrington Street. The existing built environment surrounding the site includes two story frame, three bay buildings with full-width covered front porches, constructed between 1890-1945. The east side of Jessamine Street across from the subject site has a larger, newer development constructed in 2018 that consists of one large four story building, two large three story buildings, as well as two two-story building's that face Venable Street. Carrington Street consists of a conglomerate of cobblestones and asphalt, while Jessamine Street is asphalt. There are not any sidewalks existing adjacent to the subject site. Just to the north, there are several vacant parcels as vacant land owned by the city. Most of the surrounding area are residential uses, and some institutional uses.		
For large scale, multi-family residential, the Guidelines suggest using the Standards for New Construction: Commercial		
Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards for New Construction: Commercial. Siting, pg. 52	*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.* *3. New commercial buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site.* *4. If setback waivers, or any other waivers are needed, the Commission can be petitioned to support a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) waiver.* *5. 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.*	The proposed building will be set back from Jessamine Street by 14 feet. The submitted site plan indicates that the face of the new building will align with that of the extant building at 870-872 Jessamine Street. The new building will face the most prominent Street, Jessamine; however, will have a large elevation facing Carrington Street to the north. There are not any parking lots or structures proposed in the scope of work. <u>Staff recommends approving the siting of the project, and confirming setback compliance with zoning.</u>
Standards for New Construction: Commercial. Form, pg. 52	*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. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.* *2. New commercial construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic commercial buildings in the district.* *3. New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.*	The new building will have a rectangular form, similar to existing new and historic buildings in the immediate area; however, the scale of the building is larger than historic residential buildings in the district and relates more to the scale of the multi-family building directly across Jessamine Street which was approved by the Commission in 2018. The building breaks up its massing with a deep inset on the Jessamine elevation, which helps reduce its bulk and better reflects the rhythm seen in historic homes in the district. Staff recommends maintaining the deep inset layout

Standards for New Construction: Commercial, Height, width, Proportion & Massing, pg. 53	*1. New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.* *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.* *3. The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.*	The new building will be three stories in height and taller than the historic residential buildings surrounding it. The height of the building is compatible with the new construction across Jessamine Street. The Jessamine Street elevation will consist of three main bays. The massing of the building will be broken up on the Jessamine Street elevation by a deep inset between the southmost bay and the center bay. This will aide in having the building read as two masses rather than one large one. The rear elevation will mirror this arrangement of bays and massing. The Carrington Street elevation will feature a shallower inset at the side entrance, but overall will read as one mass. Staff recommends explore further articulation on Carrington elevation to break up its massing, especially given its visibility.
Standards for New Construction: Corner Properties – Commercial, pg. 54	*1. Secondary elevations of corner properties should reference massing similar to other corner locations in the historic district.* *2. The material used in the primary elevation should be continued along the second, corner elevation.* *3. Particular attention should be paid to the height of foundations to create an appropriately scaled appearance that relates to neighboring structures and is consistent with neighboring properties. Heights should be kept to a level that will enhance, not detract from, the pedestrian experience. Foundation materials should be selected that are compatible with historic materials and consistent with properties within the district. If the foundations are parged, the parge coat must be opaque, and the coursing beneath must not telegraph through the parge coat.* *4. Windows and doors on the secondary, corner elevation should be organized following the principals of the primary elevation: windows should be proportioned appropriately, aligned vertically, and arranged as though designing a primary elevation.*	The materials used on the primary elevations are continued along the second corner elevation. The variation in material contributes positively to the building's overall articulation. Brick is used on the ground floor along portions of the Jessamine Carrington Street elevations, creating a strong visual base and helping to differentiate it from the siding used on the upper levels. On the bay closest to the adjacent plot corner (which is differentiated from the rest of the block by the deep inset and reads as a more vertical massing element), brick cladding extends up through the first and second floors. This variation strengthens the reading of that bay as a distinct vertical component and lends the elevation more architectural interest. The horizontal fiber cement siding and masonry reinforce the building's base-middle-top composition, and align with both historic and contemporary materials in the district. <u>Staff recommends that the final exterior colors and brick selections be submitted with the final review or for final approval.</u>
Standards for New Construction: Materials & Colors, page 47	*2. Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.* *3. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found*	The exterior of the building will have a brick base and horizontal, fiber cement lap siding. The windows will be double-hung two-over-two. The porches will be wrapped in composite trim and supported by square columns and enclosed with a simple composite handrail.

	in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district (see Painting Section starting on page 60). *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.*	Staff finds the materials to be compatible with materials found throughout the district. Staff recommends that windows be aluminum clad wood or wood and feature simulated divided lights (SDLs).
Standards For New Construction, p.47	*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.* *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.*	The roof plan submitted with the application demonstrates that the HVAC equipment will be located at the center of the roof and obscured from view by a parapet wall. A trash enclosure will be located at the rear of the building adjacent to the alley easement. Staff recommends that the design and materials of the rear trash enclosure be submitted for final review, and that the applicant explore other locations and configuration for the trash enclosure, as it is very close to one of the rear porches.
Standards For New Construction: Doors and Windows, p.56	*2. The size, proportion and spacing patterns of door and window openings on free-standing new construction should be compatible with patterns established in the district*	Side entrances on Carrington street and along the left side elevation will be located within an inset and there appears to be a small canopy covering. On Carrington Street, a utility/mechanical door occupies the central protruding staircase bay where one would expect a formal entry, and appear as prominent on the street level. Lobby Entrances are inset, but lack pronounced architectural treatment typical of residential lobby entrances that define it as a primary street-facing entrance. Staff recommends minimizing the visual prominence of utility doors, and introduce stronger pedestrian elements on Carrington street to indicate the main lobby entrance.
Standards For New Construction: Doors and Windows, p.56	*2. The size, proportion and spacing patterns of door and window openings on free-standing new construction should be compatible with patterns established in the district*	Windows and doors on the Carrington Street elevation are arranged similarly to those on the Jessamine Street elevation, being vertically aligned, which is consistent with the typical rhythm found in residential buildings throughout the district and neighborhood. However, the current design introduces variations in window sizes on the same elevation, which undermines the sense of consistency and hierarchy expected of the

		prominent and more visible public-facing façade on Carrington Street. Staff recommends that all windows on this elevation be revised to match in size and proportion, to further strengthen the building's residential character and harmony with the district's established patterns.
Standards for New Construction: Form, page 46	*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.*	Based on the provided elevations, the Carrington Street façade appears to accommodate a grade change along the site, which results in larger brick base further down the street. The use of brick is appropriate and compatible with district materials and helps distinguish the base of the building. However, the extent of unbroken wall surface at the ground level risks appearing out of scale, given the building's overall length and height on this side. Staff recommends introducing stronger human-scale features along the Carrington façade (such as additional canopies or vertical expression lines that break up the horizontal span), to provide a better articulation of pedestrian elements along this elevation.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, the application is consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation and New Construction outlined in Section 30-930.7 (b) and (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 the code.

Figures

Figure 1: Context photo and elevation

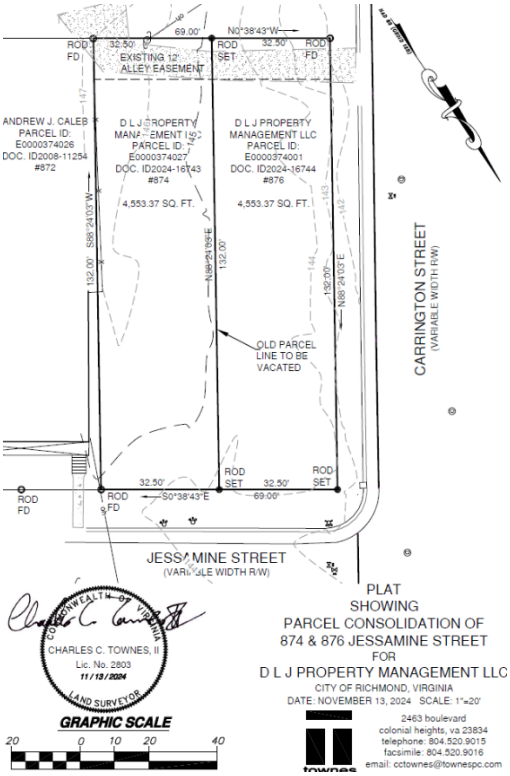

Figure 2: 874 and 876 Jessamine Street plots

Figure 3: Site location

Figure 4: Context elevation

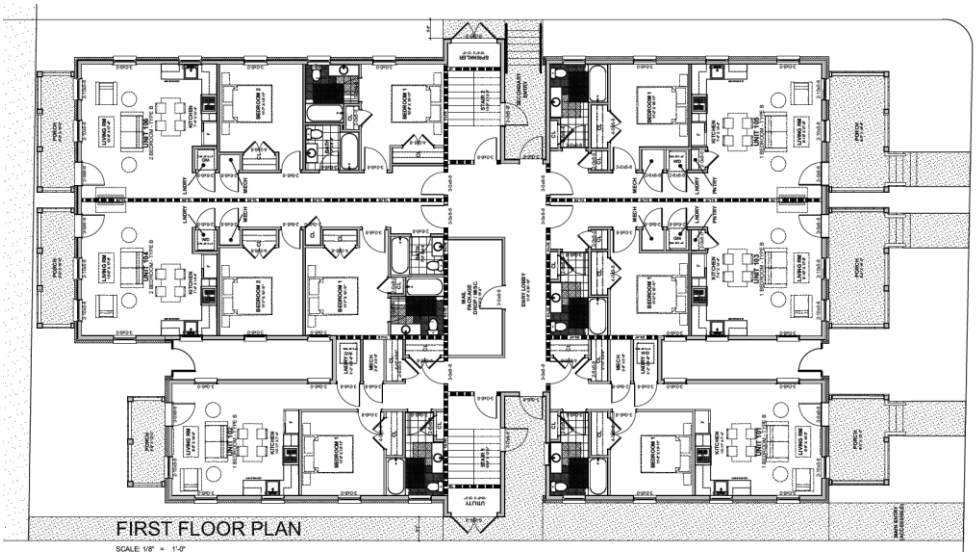

Figure 5

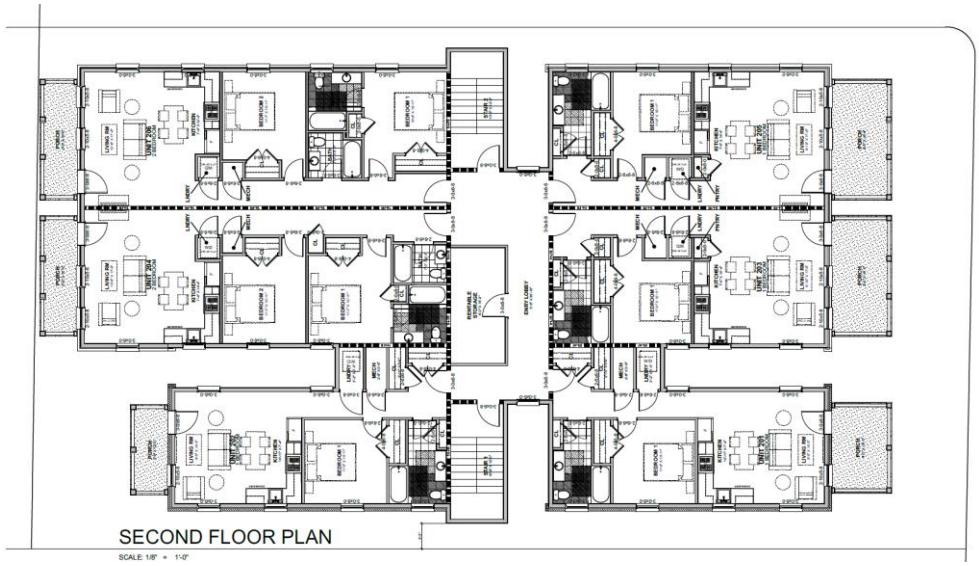

Figure 6

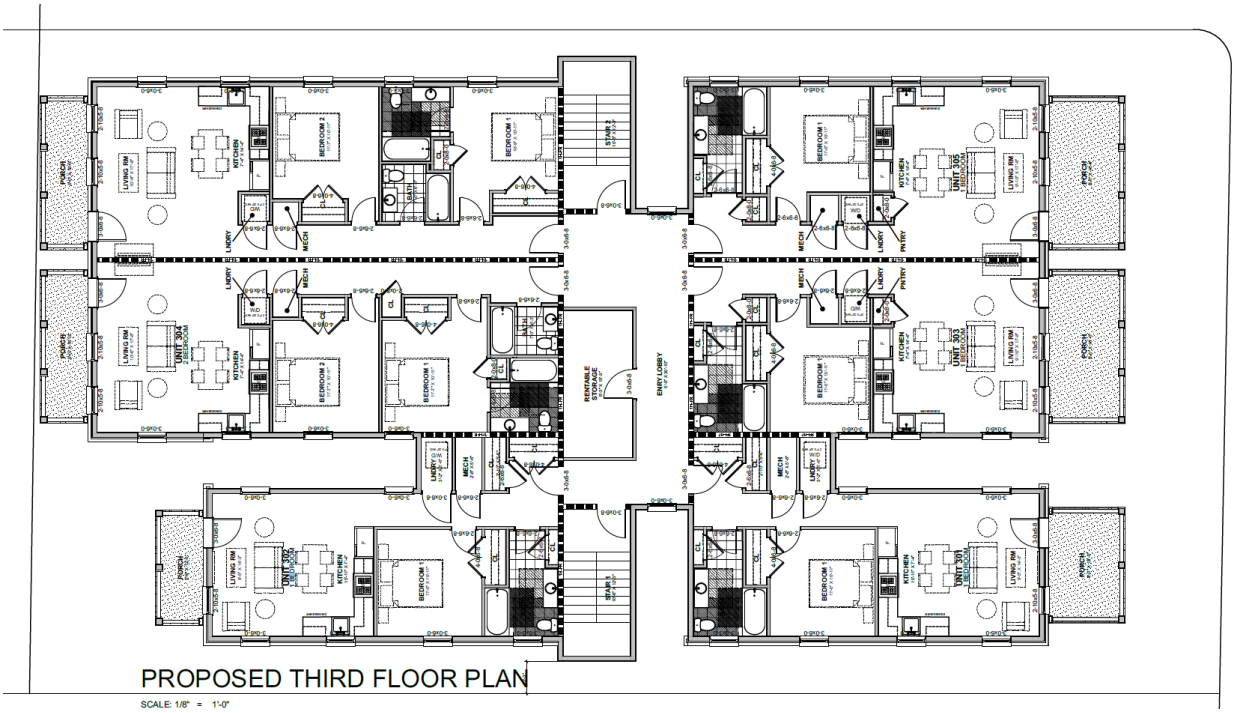

Figure 7

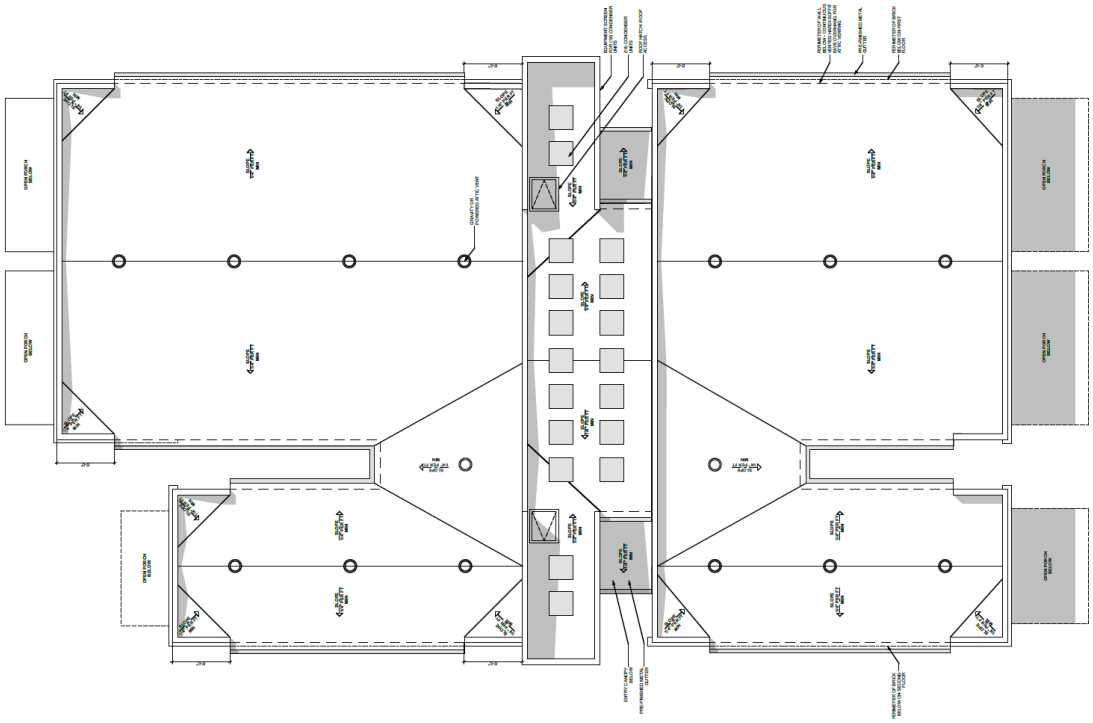

Figure 8: Proposed Roof plan

PROPOSED FRONT ELEVATION - JESSAMINE STREET

SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"

CAR PRE-APPROVED DESIGN GUIDELINES COLOR PALETTE TO BE IMPLEMENTED

Figure 9

RIGHT SIDE ELEVATION - SIDE ENTRY - NON-ADA (CARRINGTON) ST)

SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 10

LEFT SIDE LEEVATION (ENTRY)

Figure 11

PROPOSED REAR ELEVATION

Figure 12