

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
November 25, 2014 Meeting**

19. **CAR No. 14-135** (Progress Realty Group) **3000-3006 East Franklin Street**
St. John's Church Old and Historic District

Project Description: **Construct three attached townhouses**

Staff Contact: **K. Chen**

The applicant requests conceptual review and Commission comments for the construction of up to three attached, single family dwellings at lots fronting East Franklin Street in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District. The proposed dwellings are located in a largely undeveloped portion of the district. There is only one other dwelling on the north side of Franklin, 2904, in this location. On the south side of Franklin Street, there is a steep embankment at the end of Short 30th street that tapers down towards 29th and 30th streets. The lots face the sides of houses located on 29th and Short 30th streets and a noncontributing, concrete block apartment building that does not front on Franklin Street but opens onto parking areas on the east and west sides of the building. The application includes a drawing describing the general form and massing of the proposed dwelling. The application does not include a site plan or information on intended materials.

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.

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 application does not include a site plan that relates the placement of the proposed new dwellings to the one other dwelling on the north side of Franklin Street in the 2900 block, therefore this relationship cannot be evaluated.

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

- The new construction is designed to front Franklin Street, the only street adjacent to the property. An easement for 30th Street exists on paper.

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

- This requirement cannot be evaluated because a site plan was not submitted for review. Given the lack of development in this block, staff can work with the applicant and zoning to establish an appropriate set back.

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

- The applicant has not submitted a site plan or a request for waivers. The Commission may be requested to support waivers should they be required.

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 building form illustrated in the application is one found in the St. John's Church district of a simple, symmetrical block placed on a raised foundation with stairs and a portico at the entrance.

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 domestic 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 proposed dwellings 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.*

- Given the lack of consistent adjacent architecture, the proposed new construction cannot be fully evaluated based on its immediate surroundings. The one house to the west on Franklin Street is two-stories in height and the house on the southeast corner of 29th and Franklin varies from two to three stories set on a raised foundation. The height, width, proportion and massing presented are consistent with dwellings found in the district.

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.*

- This guideline is addressed in the comment immediately above.

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 with a traditional side portico.

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.*

- Proposed materials were not submitted with the application. Traditionally, this form will be constructed of brick in the St. John's Church district. In the Church Hill North and Union Hill districts this form is constructed of frame set on a brick foundation.

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).*

- Proposed paint colors were not submitted with the application.

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.

- Proposed materials were not submitted with the application.

PARKING AND SITE IMPROVEMENTS

Guidance for the design of parking areas is covered under the *Standards for Site Improvements* on pages 66-67. The proposed elevations indicate the placement of a garage door in the raised foundation on the façade of the building. This is a form not found in the district and there is no specific guidance related to garage doors in single family residential buildings. However, the guidelines do address the placement of parking lots to the sides and rears of buildings. The guidelines also suggest on page 49 that outbuildings including garages “should respect the siting, massing, roof profiles, materials and colors of existing outbuildings in the neighborhood.” The typical placement of auxiliary buildings in the neighborhood is to rear and accessed via an alley. There is a paper alley located to the rear of the proposed dwellings.

A granite curb extends from 29th down the north side of East Franklin Street where it turns and terminates on the west side of 30th Street -- a paper street. The brick sidewalk extends from 29th to the east property line of 2904 East Franklin. There are no curbs or sidewalks on the south side of East Franklin or beyond the easement for the extension of 30th Street. The guidelines emphasize the important role streetscape elements play in supporting and reinforcing the overall historic character of the district. While these elements are eroded in this part of the district, the reinforcement of this pattern could serve to better unite this proposed development into the neighborhood. If the curbs and sidewalks existed the guidelines would discourage the introduction of up to three curb cuts to access the garages because they would result in the removal of historic fabric.