

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
August 23, 2016 Meeting**

8. **CAR No. 16-126** (D. Kapella) **2400 East Franklin Street**
St. John's Church Old and Historic District

Project Description: **Construct a single family dwelling**

Staff Contact: **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests approval to construct a single family dwelling on a vacant lot in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District. The applicant appeared before the Commission at its January 26, 2016, for conceptual review of siting the dwelling at the top of the hill at the northwest corner of the lot adjacent to the alley and N. 24th Street. The Commission expressed their support for the proposed siting. The applicant returned to the Commission on April 26, 2016, seeking review and comment on the height, width and massing of the proposed single-family dwelling. The applicant proposed to construct a three-story dwelling with a basement that will not exceed the 35' height allowed under R-6 zoning with a foot print of approximately 36' x 36' and a simple, block-like form and massing. The Commissioners, in general, were supportive of the proposed height and massing. The Commission noted that the design could be contemporary and that all four sides of the structure should be treated as primary elevations.

The applicant has presented a contemporary design in response to the Commission's comments. The proposed structure will be three stories and constructed of black brick, glazing, painted siding and metal siding. The home will be setback 18 feet from the alley and 10 to 15 feet from North 24th Street. The northwest elevation which addresses North 24th Street provides the singular pedestrian entrance to the home and is primarily of brick construction that transitions to glazing and metal siding which wrap the west corner. The upper two stories of the southwest elevation include glazing with large scale windows and metal siding, and the lower story is brick with glazing. The southeast elevation is constructed of brick with smaller windows and a metal screen which shields an external staircase. The northeast elevation which fronts the alley provides the vehicular access to the home with two garage doors framed with lap siding on the first story and brick upper stories with a pair of long narrow ranked windows and a separate single window.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the "Standards for New Construction: Residential" on pages 44 and 45 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 project's setback from North 24th Street reflects the front yard setbacks of residential property in the district.

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 project's setback from North 24th Street reflects the front yard setbacks of residential property in the district.

New buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site

The proposed home will address North 24th Street which is a prominent street bordering the west side of the lot. The Commission reviewed the siting during the January Conceptual Review and, at that time, expressed support of the building addressing North 24th Street rather than East Franklin Street.

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 massing, size, and roof shape are compatible with that found elsewhere in the district. Staff has concerns regarding the fenestration and lack of symmetry in the project. The proposed fenestration does not display the symmetry that is characteristic of the window spacing found in the district.

New construction should incorporate human-scale elements such as cornices, porches and front steps.

The applicant incorporates human scale elements including front stairs to a second floor porch.

New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings

Heights in the surrounding area vary from two to three stories over raised basements. The proposed three story home with a 35'-4 1/2" height respects the building height of the existing buildings in the district.

New construction should respect the typical width, organization of bays, vertical alignment and symmetry of surrounding buildings.

The proposed project does not maintain the typical three bay pattern nor the symmetrical fenestration found in the District. Staff believes respecting the typical

building form is of increased importance on the northwest and northeast elevations which address the residential district. Both of these elevations lack upper story ranked windows on the brick portions and lack symmetrical window spacing.

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

The windows on structures in the district are typically of similar size, regularly placed, and ranked. Staff has concerns as the windows vary greatly in size. Additionally, their placement, especially on the northwest and northeast elevations, results in large expanses of wall with no windows. Staff recommends the applicant install upper story ranked windows and propose a revised fenestration pattern with symmetrical window placement on the northeast and northwest elevations.

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

The porch height is similar to other 2nd story porches in the district.

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

The proposed construction utilizes brick, metal siding, wood siding, glazing, and metal screening and railings. The proposed use of brick, the most prevalent building material in the district, is in keeping with *Guidelines*, but the dark color is not, however, the color reinforces the contemporary design of the building. While staff supports the use of metal siding on the portion of the structure which addresses the commercial area to the southwest, staff has concerns with using the metal siding on the northwest elevation which addresses the residential neighborhood as metal siding is not a building material found in this portion of the district. Though siding is a typical building material found in the district, the use of siding on the ground floor of the northeast elevation with brick above is not a typical arrangement of these building materials.

Staff does not recommend approval of the project, and recommends the Commission defer the application to allow the applicant the opportunity to address staff concerns regarding the North 24th Street and alley facing elevations. The proposed project appears to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines* in regard to its siting, height, and massing. Staff has concerns regarding the compatibility of the details of the northwest and northeast elevations with the adjacent residential neighborhood. Staff recommends the applicant alter the fenestration and building materials on these elevations to better relate to the building form and design that characterize the district. This would include incorporating upper story ranked windows, symmetrically spaced windows, and limiting the use of the metal siding on these elevations.

It is the assessment of staff that application is only partially 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; and therefore staff recommends the Commission defer the application to allow the applicant to provide more information about how they will address the above mentioned concerns.

Conceptual Review

Application No. 16-017 (D. Kapella)

2400 E. Franklin Street

Ms. Chen presented the staff report and summarized the applicant's request conceptual review of the siting of a free standing single family dwelling to be constructed in a vacant lot in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District that offers a variety of challenges. The parcel consists of a hill that rises from Franklin Street on the south to an alley behind Grace Street on the north. The parcel consists of a hill that rises from Franklin Street on the south to an alley behind Grace Street on the north.

Mr. Elmes stated that it can face the 24th Street and inquired if it's a non-hardship issue because that is the closest street to it. Ms. Chen stated that based on the Guidelines, it has to front one of the primary streets adjacent to the property and stated that they are saying that it is hardship to face Franklin Street which is the street to which it is addressed because of the slope. Ms. Chen stated that because it is more level at the upper portion of the lot it might be possible to front the house on 24th Street to meet the Guidelines. Mr. Elmes stated that there is no hardship reasoning for them not to face 24th Street, and Ms. Chen stated not that she is aware of.

Mr. Green opened the floor for applicant and public comment.

Mr. Robbie Johnson, representing the owners David Kapella and Annie Dowdy, stated that staff's summary was very thorough. Mr. Johnson stated that there were a couple of additional items that they might bring to the Commission at this time and stated that one of them would be the zoning hardship, context, and location. Mr. Johnson stated that with the zoning specifically it is M1 and which does not allow single family residential and stated that they are seeking R6. Mr. Johnson stated that the setbacks which would be on 25th Street would be consistent with houses on the corner of 24th and Grace. Mr. Johnson stated that the R6 will require them to use alley that they have access to as a rear entry point. Mr. Johnson stated that regarding the hardship that staff has discussed the grade on the front of the property they are changing elevations 30ft over the first 50ft of the site.

Mr. Green inquired if it was 30ft from the street level up and Mr. Johnson stated to the platform and stated that if you continue to go up there where they are suggesting that the house be located they will closer to an 80ft range and climb an additional 6 to 8ft. Mr. Johnson stated that they are approaching the Commission at this time in the interest of their clients resources both time and money to have a conversation about an alternative siting before they really get into schematic design. Mr. Johnson stated that the other hardship that they are looking at is that there is currently no sewer or gas access along E. Franklin Street but states that the site does have a unique access point to 25th Street where they would be able to access utilities versus extensive expense to bring those in across E. Franklin. Mr. Johnson stated that there is an existing easement for the adjacent property that provides 4 parking spaces. Mr. Johnson stated that if they would follow the edge of the embankment to the back edge of the parking is on their property.

Mr. Johnson stated that with the context and location, they do feel that the siting of the building at the top of this hill actually takes advantages of some of the things that makes St. John's Old and Historic District unique and stated that as the Guidelines states their impressive use of downtown Richmond and the James River. Mr. Johnson stated that clearly the higher they climb on the site while respecting the building height requirements and stated that they have the opportunities to pick up on some of those views that make this such a distinctive neighborhood. Mr. Johnson stated that additionally the Guidelines describes St. John's as a having large areas of public open space and stated that they think that along the street front on East Franklin you would encounter a city property with the stairs, the school property and then you would encounter a public park that is currently open green space. Mr. Johnson stated the owner is willing to look at the hillside and clean it up. Mr. Johnson stated that the last thing is acknowledging the adjacency they are seeking to the resident scale that they find north of the property versus the commercial scale to the south of the property.

Mr. Green inquired was anything ever built on this site before. Ms. Chen stated that she did not know but will look into it. Mr. Green stated that it is an interesting site and inquired how they felt about staff's thinking about 24th Street as the front. Mr. Johnson stated that he wants to see how pedestrians interface with the house and how it addresses the street front and stated that some of the schematics suggests that it will front 24th Street which the owners are open to. Mr. Johnson stated that one thing they want to be careful about is the further you move southeast away from that edge you moving into a pretty significant bold typography of this site which would be a pretty significant hardship. Mr. Green stated that the thing that struck him when about the site is that it's almost like a pavilion a building that really does not have a traditional front or back a building but with multiple fronts. Mr. Johnson stated that in his architecture practice he treats all buildings as having at least four entrances unless they are on a triangular lot and stated that they would be sensitive to every elevation and there is a desire to be clever with design to create some exterior space. Mr. Johnson stated that there is further discussion about how the building connects with site and the street.

Mr. Bond stated that it is an outstanding opportunity for them to do an incredible building in this environment and stated that it could be a fine contemporary building given the location and the nature of the lot. Mr. Bond stated that it really demands some real study and hopes that the next time they see them with a design model. Mr. Johnson stated that they would be happy to bring a model and stated that they have full potential to do something respectful and studying the neighborhood in a larger context and study some of the density patterns.

Mr. McRoberts stated that they see a lot of infill development in the areas where there are apartments that are in-filled and inquired that is not what the owners want to do. Mr. Johnson stated correct and stated that they purchased the property with the understanding that it was not zoned for a single family residential and stated that understanding what challenges might lie ahead of them with the rezoning application which has already been submitted and is waiting to hear feedback from staff. Mr. McRoberts stated that it is an amazing location and an interesting historic context and stated that as far as putting it on the top of the hill it is the obvious choice. Mr. McRoberts stated that if they front it 24th Street they would avoid some of that need for hardship and stated that given the setback because the hill of the school and the park on the other side, it is quite an amazing avenue to front a house looking that way. Mr. McRoberts stated that he commends them for coming in and talking to the Commission

at an early stage and stated that he thinks the idea of having a brand new single family home on top of the hill is an amazing opportunity.

Mr. Green stated that this really a unique site and stated that some of the Commission concerns are that the Commission wants them to make sure that they have an entrance that is addresses 24th Street and addresses south to the extent where they can see it.

Mr. Green opened the floor for applicant and public comment.

Mr. Jeff Williamson, residents in the St. John's Old and Historic District speaking as a member of the public, came up to speak about the project.

Ms. Nancy Lambert, speaking as a member of the public, came to speak about the project.

There were no additional comments from members of the public and the meeting was adjourned.

The meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

Marianne G. Pitts

Secretary to the Commission of Architectural Review

Application No. 16-055 (D. Kapella)

2400 East Franklin Street

Ms. Chen presented the staff report and summarized the applicant's request for conceptual review and comment to construct a new, single-family dwelling on a vacant lot in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District. The applicant appeared before the Commission at its December 15, 2015 for conceptual review of siting the dwelling at the top of the hill at the northwest corner of the lot adjacent to the alley and N. 24th Street. The applicant is now seeking review and comment on the height, width and massing of the proposed single-family dwelling. The applicant is proposing to construct a three-story dwelling with a basement that will not exceed the 35' height allowed under R-6 zoning. A foot print of approximately 36' x 36' is being proposed to minimize the amount of grading required on the steep lot. In the neighborhood, heights vary from two to three stories over raised basements. With the exception of the adjacent Bellevue school, the typical width is three bays, approximately 33' feet, with a rectangular foot print of approximately 65'. The typical massing is block like with few projects except for front porches and in some instances rear or side porches and the occasional projecting bay. Staff finds that the proposed 3-story height, not to exceed 35', and the 36' width and simple, block massing meets the Guidelines to protect the context of the surrounding historic district, by referencing the size, scale, proportions, and massing of the existing historic building or buildings in its setting.

Mr. Green opened the floor for applicant and public comment.

Mr. Robbie Johnson, the architect, came up to answer questions. He stated that the project will require a zone change from M1 to R6 and that they did a lot to reduce the width and massing to address the neighbor's concerns.

There were no additional comments from members of the public. Commission discussion began.

Mr. Yates commended the architects for the modest massing and noted that the design can be contemporary.

Mr. Hendricks stated that this is a great site and opportunity. He also appreciated the architect's constraint and had no complaints about the proposed height and massing.

Mr. Green liked the siting and noted that the house has all primary elevations.

Mr. Cooley would like to see it use up more of the site with less height.

Mr. Hughes stated he would not like the design to be too contemporary and would like the design to respect what the neighbor's wants.

Mr. Green stated that as all elevations should be treated as important the applicant should look at the Commission's corner guidelines in crafting the design.