

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
May 26, 2015 Meeting**

6. **CAR No. 15-041** (W. R. Jones)

**425 North 25th Street  
Church Hill North Old and Historic District**

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

**Staff Contact:** **K. Chen**

The applicant requests approval to construction a new mixed-use building on a vacant lot in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The proposal is for the construction of a two-story building with commercial on the first floor and residential on the second floor with roof access and decks above. The roof top access is centered in the building and set back from all elevations. The application includes a site plan, and architectural drawings with dimensions and materials.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design that was conceptually reviewed at the February 24, 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 site plan indicates that the proposed new building is constructed with minimal 6" front and side yard setbacks and a 9'-8" rear yard setback. The proposed setbacks are in keeping with the pattern for corner commercial buildings in the district that are set at the edge of the public sidewalk with no front or side yard setback.

- 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 25<sup>th</sup> Street and a corner entrance that is oriented towards Clay Street. There are also two sets of paired, glazed-doors and a single, glazed-door that open onto Clay Street.

- 4. 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.*

This guideline does not apply.

## **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, size, symmetry, proportions, and projections of other corner commercial buildings found in the area. A similar roof access and roof deck is found at 2500 East Leigh Street, northeast corner of Leigh and 25<sup>th</sup> streets in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District.

- 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 and an intermediate cornice on the 25<sup>th</sup> and Clay street elevations.

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 25<sup>th</sup> and Clay 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 located in an area with residential, commercial, and a few larger institutional buildings, the majority of which are two-stories in height. The context drawing suggests that the proposed new construction is similar in height to the adjacent residential buildings and the commercial building to the north across Clay Street. The south end of the block is anchored by a three story commercial building and across the street are two large commercial buildings – a theater and retail building. There are no dimensions on the context drawing so a definitive comparison cannot be made.

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. The first story has a horizontal orientation organized by the use of storefront and intermediate cornice. The second story is organized into a typical three bay arrangement found in the area.

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

Context drawing suggests that the intermediate cornice above the storefront is in line with the adjacent porches and the upper cornice and parapet are compatible with the cornice lines of the adjacent dwellings. The drawings include vertical dimensions for the new building but no dimensions are included for the adjacent buildings so a direct comparison cannot be made.

### ***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 included cement lap board siding, composite trim and 1/1 double hung wood windows. These are all materials that are compatible with the original materials used in the district.

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

Information on proposed paint colors was not provided. Colors when submitted can be approved by staff.

- 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 a cement lap siding, 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.

It is the assessment of staff that the application 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.