



Commission of Architectural Review

4. COA-172312-2025	Final Review Meeting Date: 9/23/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Jennifer Lauer
Project Description	Undertake site improvements, including parking reconfiguration, new pathways, plantings, lighting, and signage.
Project Location	
Address: 12 E Franklin Street	
Historic District: Zero Blocks East and West Franklin Street	
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant proposes landscape and site improvements at the subject property, including the reconfiguration of circulation paths, new native plantings, expanded tree canopy, subtle site lighting, and the installation of a freestanding sign. The scope also includes selective demolition of brick paving at the rear, while retaining the historic front brick walkway and mature magnolia trees. Additional elements include granite curbing, new connected garden areas, utility screening and limited site furnishings. No exterior alterations to the primary historic building are included in this application.</p>	
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, Alex.Dandridge@RVA.gov, (804)646-6569
Previous Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 2002: CAR approved an application to remove rear wood steps and eliminate rear door opening • February 2004: CAR approved an application to replace Non-original Wood Balusters
Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff recommends approval of the proposed site improvements to the subject property, with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final siting of the freestanding sign to be confirmed and submitted for staff approval • All construction to be carried out in a manner sensitive to adjacent historic fabric • Any exterior alterations to the primary historic building to be submitted under a separate application.

Staff Analysis

Project Scope Summary

Parking & Circulation

- Reorganize rear entry drive and parking into 90-degree spaces, including one van-accessible ADA space
- Add new granite curbing in parking area
- Improve pedestrian pathways with wider accessible paths through the garden.
- Reconfigure “river” path to be longer, connecting the lawn facing East Franklin Street to secondary seating areas and rear brick patio, and activating multiple new garden zones

Lighting

- Subtle downlighting along paths for safety and accessibility
- Accent lighting for two historic magnolias, with limited uplighting of rear brick wall during occasional events

Signage

- Freestanding wrought iron post with painted aluminum sign, referencing historic ironwork.
- Final sign location in relation to the setback to be confirmed

Landscaping & Plantings

- Preserve and protect two historic Southern magnolias on East Franklin Street.
- Remove invasive English ivy
- Introduce native trees, shrubs, and perennials to enhance biodiversity, create seasonal interest, and reinforce canopy cover
- Add micro-bioretenion area to manage stormwater runoff

Site Furnishings & Garden Features

- New seating (benches, tables, chairs) in select locations
- New fountain for habitat and ecological feature
- Timber utility screen enclosure for service areas.

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards for Site Improvements, p.76	<i>Commercial parking should be confined to the sides and rears of buildings.</i>	The project reorganizes the rear parking with 90-degree spaces, including one ADA space and aisle, and improves circulation with stabilized decomposed granite pathways edged in steel. <u>Staff recommends approving the reconfigured parking and circulation.</u>
Standards for Site Improvements, p.76	<i>8. Landscape design should enhance the streetscape and contribute a strong aesthetic along street frontages. Appropriate landscaping should buffer the visual severity of surface parking lots from view. Vacant lots, large expanses of blank wall and other unattractive streetscape features (i.e. utilities, rear yard trash depots, etc.) can also be screened effectively with appropriate landscaping.</i>	The “river path” reconfiguration introduces a longer winding pedestrian route that connects the formal lawn with seating areas and smaller thematic garden spaces, which activate the the garden while maintaining the property’s main elevation layout. This new pathway enhances the pedestrian experience of the gardens and adds functionality without diminishing historic character. <u>Staff recommends approving the design of the “river path” as compatible with the site’s character.</u>

Signage, p.75	<p>1. <i>Signs should be easy to read.</i></p> <p>3. <i>Signs should relate to the architectural features of an individual building.</i></p> <p>5. <i>Signs should not obstruct important architectural elements or details.</i></p> <p>7. <i>Signs should not be internally illuminated.</i></p>	<p>The freestanding wrought iron supported sign with painted aluminum panel references historic ironwork on site and is appropriately scaled. The sign does not appear to be backlit, which aligns with the signage guidelines. The sign placement will differ based on the zoning variance.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approving the freestanding sign design; final siting to be confirmed and submitted for staff approval.</u></p>
Standards for Site Improvements, p.76	<p>9. <i>Landscape plans should select plant materials based on their: a) suitability to the site and urban surroundings, b) appropriateness to the local climate, soils and light conditions, c) ability to provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest, d) avoidance of non-native or invasive planting material.</i></p>	<p>The project aims to remove invasive ivy growth, and re-establish beds with native perennials, shrubs, and trees. The mature magnolias on Franklin Street are preserved. Select declining trees are proposed for removal with replacement canopy, and removal is limited to the declining trees. This approach is consistent with ideal landscape practices as highlighted in the Guidelines.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approval of the planting plan.</u></p>
Standards for Site Improvements, p.76	<p>4. <i>Brick or granite pavers are the most appropriate choice in most Old and Historic Districts.</i></p>	<p>The project proposes using granite curbing, stabilized decomposed granite, and brick paving, which are compatible materials to the site that maintain continuity with the district's character. Minimal new hardscaping is proposed at the front elevation, preserving the historic streetscape.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approving paving materials as proposed.</u></p> <p><u>Staff further recommends that construction be carried out in a manner sensitive to adjacent historic fabric.</u></p>
Standards for Site Improvements, p.76	<p>2. <i>Contemporary lighting may be considered for use in those portions of a site that are not directly in the public view. In these cases, minimal designs that do not detract from the character of the district may be acceptable.</i></p>	<p>Lighting design emphasizes safety and highlights significant landscape elements. Magnolia downlighting is subtle, and uplighting on the rear wall is restricted to events. Fixtures appear low-profile and appropriate, and they are located mostly in the rear portions of the site.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approving the lighting plan.</u></p>
Mechanical Equipment, p.68	<p>3. <i>HVAC equipment on the ground should be appropriately screened with fencing or vegetation.</i></p>	<p>The proposed plan includes a timber enclosure fence to screen utility equipment on the east side of the property. This is consistent with guideline recommendations, minimizing visual impact of mechanical equipment from the public right-of-way.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approval of the proposed utility screening.</u></p>
Standards for Site Improvements, p.76	<p>5. <i>Mature trees contribute to the character of Old and Historic Districts, provide visual interest, reduce the negative impacts or parking areas and ease the effects of temperature and wind conditions. Every effort</i></p>	<p>The application maintains the historic magnolia trees on East Franklin Street and existing brick entry walkway (as confirmed by applicant, stating that the demolition plan incorrectly designates the entry walkway bricks as an area to remove), and demolition will be limited only the paving in the rear patio, in the context of improving the parking footprint</p>

	<p><i>should be made to preserve and maintain them.</i></p>	<p>and “river” pathway. This approach preserves key site features visible from the public right-of-way, consistent with best preservation practices. There are no planned alterations to the building on site.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that any exterior alterations to the primary historic building must be submitted under a separate application for review and approval.</u></p>
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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: Site photos



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5: photos submitted by applicant

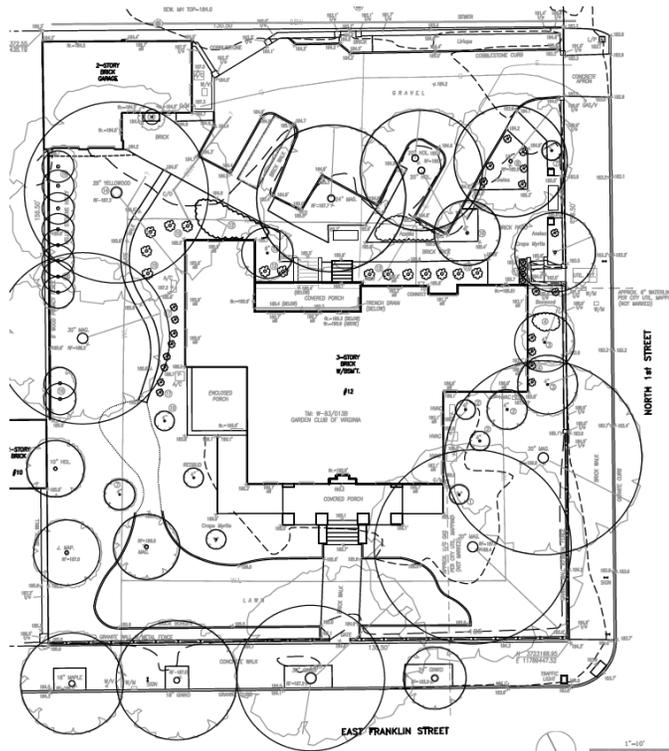


Figure 6: Existing Plan



Figure 7: Proposed Plan

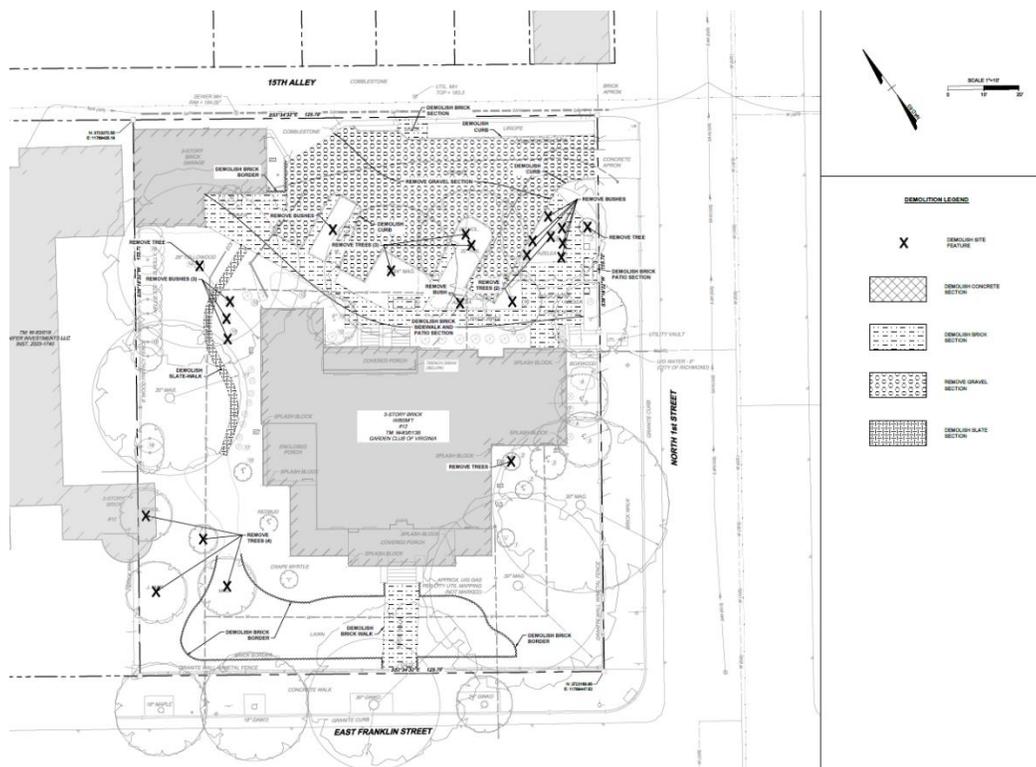


Figure 8: Demolition Plan

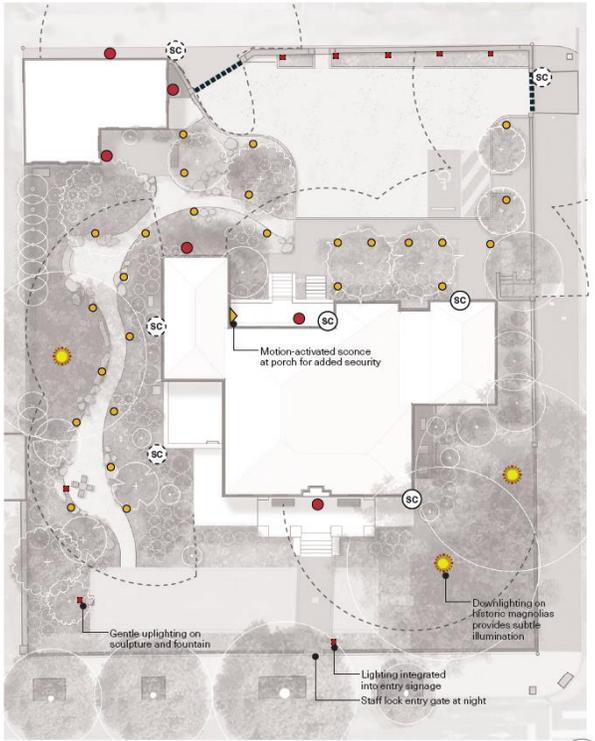


Figure 9: Lighting Plan



Figure 10: Signage