



Commission of Architectural Review

7. COA-175479-2025	Conceptual Review	Meeting Date: 11/25/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Andrae Austin	
Project Description	Demolish the rear of a single-family building and construct a new addition	
Project Location		
Address: 904 North 25th Street		
Historic District: Union Hill		
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>This application proposes the demolition of an existing one-story rear portion of the building, and the construction of a new rear addition at 904 N 25th Street. The primary two-story, 1868-block facing the street will remain, while the one-story, rear block is proposed for removal.</p> <p>The project also includes partial rehabilitation of the main façade, including restoration of original window openings, replacement of deteriorated windows with 6-over-6 units, and removal of non-historic vinyl siding.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Conceptual Review	
Staff Contact	Yara Iwaz, Yara.Iwaz@RVA.gov, (804)646-6031	
Previous Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A 	
Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff finds that the street-facing 1868 portion of the building retains historic significance and must be preserved and rehabilitated as part of any rear demolition and addition proposal. The rear one-story block proposed for demolition is historic in age but exhibits significant deterioration, inappropriate roof geometry at the juncture of the two sections, and prior unpermitted modifications that may complicate feasible rehabilitation.</p> <p>Staff finds that the proposed addition is generally compatible in form but requires revision to be subordinate to the main building.</p> <p>Recommendations for proposed demolition</p> <p>Staff therefore recommends that the applicant demonstrates that demolition is necessary, and that the proposed replacement will be an appropriate, high-quality solution; include the following deliverables for final review:</p>	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Structural Engineering Report 2. Documentation of prior unsanctioned demolition 3. Potential salvaging and reuse options 4. Rehabilitation plans for the main elevation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the replacement of windows with 6-over-6 SDL wood (or aluminum-clad wood) sized to original historic openings • Use wood siding, preferably salvaged, for the original block; HardiePlank may be used on the addition but should not be used on the main façade • Preserve the existing chimney and repair with in-kind where necessary • Repair the roof, or replace it with an in-kind standing-seam metal roof if too deteriorated; final roofing material and details to be submitted final review. • Remove the existing awning to restore the original historic transom, or submit a new, simplified compatible entrance covering for final review. <p>Recommendations for proposed addition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the massing to strengthen the subordinate relationship of the addition to the historic portion • Provide context elevations, sightline drawings and photos to confirm visibility from N. 25th Street and the public right-of-way • Consider lowering the roof height and stepping down portions of the addition to clearly distinguish it from the historic block • Explore design options that more clearly reinforce the hierarchy between old and new
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Staff Analysis

<p>Historical Background & Context</p> <p><u>History of the Site</u></p> <p>According to records from the Valentine Museum, the building at 904 North 25th Street was constructed in 1868. The Union Hill Historic District nomination describes it as a “2-story, 3-bay gable-roofed frame house.”</p> <p>Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps help illustrate how the property evolved, though they do not capture a complete record of changes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1905 Sanborn Map: Shows the original two-story building at the street frontage and a detached rear structure at the back of the lot. • 1925 Sanborn Map: Shows a substantially expanded footprint, including a one-story rear block that corresponds to the portion the applicant now proposes to demolish. <p>These maps indicate that while the primary 1868 structure remains intact, the rear portions evolved over time, with multiple phases of construction and removal.</p>
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Building Description & Evolution

For clarity, the building can be understood through four components (A, B, C, D) as represented in the residential card sketch in the parcel mapper documentation.

A. Primary Original Block (Facing N. 25th Street)

This is the 2-story, gable-roofed portion constructed in 1868, the historic core described in the district nomination. Existing conditions include:

- Vinyl siding installed over wood siding.
- Mismatched windows where openings were altered or infilled; includes two 6/6 windows and three 1/1 windows.
- Visible deterioration of wood windowsills.
- Parged foundation.
- Metal roof appearing in poor condition.
- A small asphalt-shingled entrance awning mismatched to the building's architectural character.

This section retains the building's historic massing, but materials and detailing have been compromised through later alterations.

B. One-Story Rear Original Block (Proposed for Demolition)

The existing one-story building features a gabled roof, attached to the primary structure. Key characteristics are:

- Roof configuration creates a roof valley, allowing water to run toward the rear and side of the building. Site photos show evidence of water accumulation and deterioration in those areas.
- Rear elevation exhibits two conditions:
 - Left side: Some intact wood siding and a surviving window; overall in fair condition.
 - Right side: Siding removed and replaced with boarded material, suggesting deterioration and temporary enclosure.

Interior photographs show surviving wood siding that could potentially be reused or salvaged for restoration on the primary structure (A).

C and D. Former Rear Portions (No Longer Existing)

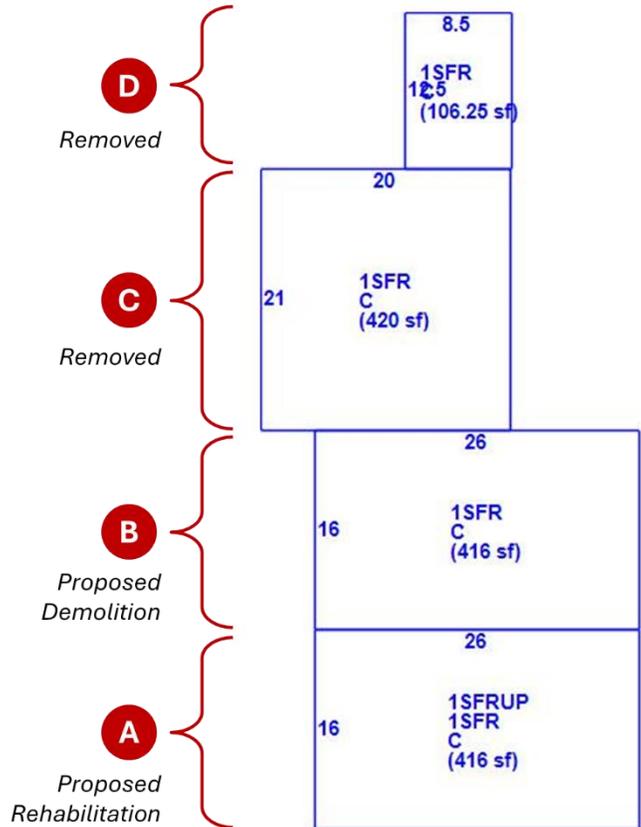
A 2011 photograph shows a rear section that has since been removed, including:

- Horizontal siding
- A projecting volume with a window (D)
- A side entrance with steps leading up to a possible side porch
- A possible porch extending to the lot line, consistent with the dimensions of the parcel mapper report sketch.

This portion likely shared a wall with Section B; the removal left exposed framing later covered with temporary panels.

Overview of previous demolitions

Staff reviewed historic maps, aerial imagery, assessor documentation, and available site photographs to establish a chronology of alteration and demolition on the parcel. The 1905 Sanborn map shows a detached rear building behind the 2-story street block; by 1925 the building footprint has expanded to include an attached one-story rear block that corresponds to the present Section B. Historic aerial and street imagery from **2004 through 2018** show the parcel retaining a rear complex consistent with the parcel-mapper sketch. **By 2020** the images indicate that two rear sections (corresponding to portions C and D in staff's analysis) had been removed. A conversation with the applicant confirmed



that the removal of portions C and D took place after severe deterioration of the building and following complaints from the neighbors.

While no formal demolition permits or acceptable permit records have been located for these removals, staff records and code searches did identify a related code case (016045-2018) documenting a “large amount of construction debris at the rear of the property”. Taken together the documentary and photographic evidence indicates that portions **C and D were removed from the property possibly around 2018 without permitting**, leaving exposed framing and temporary infill on the right side of the rear elevation. Interior photographs provided with the current application show remaining original siding and materials in portions of the rear block (indicating salvageable fabric may still exist on site).

Conclusion

One interpretation of the above can be as follows: blocks A and B are originally constructed). Buildings C and D are constructed somewhere between 1905 and 1925. Buildings C and D are demolished in 2018.

Based on the Sanborn maps (1905 and 1925) and photographic evidence, the rear one-story portion (Section B) now proposed for demolition is suggested to be original to the 1868 structure. The earliest conclusive evidence of the building suggests the main historic resource is the front 2-story block and the attached 1-story block, while rear portions evolved through secondary expansions and later removals.

Analysis under CAR demolition guidelines

Staff evaluated the proposed demolition of **Section B** with respect to the principal CAR considerations used when reviewing demolition requests: (1) historic and architectural value of the element proposed for removal; (2) effect of demolition on the surrounding neighborhood and streetscape; (3) the quality and appropriateness of proposed replacement construction; and (4) feasibility of repair/rehabilitation alternatives.

1. Historic and architectural value of Section B

- Section B appears on the 1925 Sanborn map and thus is at least early 20th-century in age; it therefore represents historic fabric that contributes to the building’s multi-phased evolution.
- Section B is physically connected to the 1868 front block (Section A) and the roof and wall relationships negatively influence stormwater management and structural integrity of the front elevation. Photographic evidence shows that roof valleys and water runoff at the junction have produced deterioration that affects both the rear block and nearby primary fabric.
- Exposed and boarded areas on the right side of the rear façade indicate past unsanctioned removals; remaining original siding and other materials were observed and may have salvage value.

2. Effect on the surrounding neighborhood and public right-of-way

- The primary street façade (Section A) is the prominent public face and remains intact. Removal of Section B will be visible from the public right-of-way where the rear volumes read beyond the roofline and side elevations; any new work will therefore be highly visible from the street.
- Because portions C and D were previously removed, the site and neighborhood have already experienced a degree of fabric loss at this lot. A high-quality replacement, along with an appropriate rehabilitation of the main elevation, are necessary to maintain the block’s historic composition.

3. Type and quality of the proposed replacement

- Given the prominent visibility of the site, an oversized replacement addition could further diminish the building’s historic character. The design of the addition should not overwhelm the main building on site, and read as new construction to avoid false historicism.

4. Feasibility of repair and alternatives to demolition

- The application did not include a structural engineering report, photography of the damaged interiors and structural areas, or other documentation demonstrating that repair of B is infeasible.
- Staff notes that interior photos show salvageable materials; reuse of these materials for in-kind repairs to portion A are possible and align with preservation best practices.
- The existing one-story rear block (Section B) has a roof configuration that is inherently ill-suited for long-term performance. The gable roof intersects the rear wall of the original 1868 block (A) at a sharply formed valley that

directs water toward the junction between the two structures. Site photographs confirm water runoff and deterioration at this connection point

- Any attempt to rehabilitate Section B would require significant roof restructuring to correct the geometry. Repairing the current roof form “as-is” would not resolve the underlying design deficiency, and stabilizing the structure without altering the roof could perpetuate damage to the primary block.
- Staff acknowledges that such a redesign and reconstruction may be difficult.

Staff Recommendations:

Section B is demonstrably historic in that it appears on the 1925 Sanborn map and potentially retains historic material in places. Portions C and D were removed possibly between 2018 and 2020, leaving the rear elevation partially infilled and in compromised condition. The front block (Section A) **remains the primary character-defining element and must be prioritized for preservation and high-quality rehabilitation.**

Staff therefore recommends that the applicant demonstrates, through documentation and design, that demolition is necessary and that the proposed replacement will be an appropriate, high-quality solution. Staff recommends including the following deliverables for final review:

1. **Structural Engineering Report**
2. **Documentation of prior unsanctioned demolitions:** provide any available documentation that explain the removal of portions C/D
3. **Explore salvaging options:** inventory of potentially salvageable materials with a plan for reuse on site (acknowledging that salvage of wood might pose a challenge). Salvageable materials should be prioritized for reinstallation on the front façade, if possible.
4. **Rehabilitation of main elevation:** staff emphasizes that the front block (A) should be rehabilitated as part of the overall project, with particular attention given to the preservation of the chimney, restoration with original salvaged wood, restoration of the metal roof and appropriate replacement windows.

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards for New Construction, Siting, pg. 46	<p><i>1. Additions should be subordinate in size to their main buildings and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating additions at the rear or on the least visible side of a building is preferred.</i></p>	<p>The proposed rear addition has a footprint and overall volume significantly larger than the remaining historic block (Section A). As designed, the height and mass appear visually dominant when read from the side yard and along the public right-of-way.</p> <p>While the addition is not subordinate to the surviving 1868 block, its footprint is comparable to the combined historic footprint that existed before the demolition of Sections C and D.</p> <p>The massing risks overwhelming the historic core unless additional design steps are taken to recess, reduce, or visually break the volume. The proposed inset between the historic block and the new construction is a positive treatment.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends revising the massing to strengthen the subordinate relationship of the addition to the historic portion, including potentially increasing the inset depth to push the addition farther back on the site.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends providing context elevations, sightline drawings and photos to confirm visibility from N. 25th Street and the public right-of-way.</u></p>
Standards for New Construction, Form, pg. 46	<p><i>1. New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the historic district. 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.</i></p>	<p>The proposed roof is considerably higher than the roof of the historic block, which increases the perceived scale of the addition in relation to the 1868 structure. While an alternative roof form (such as a connecting gable roof) could provide a gentler transition, staff acknowledges that a gabled connection could replicate the drainage issues present in the existing one-story block.</p> <p>Nonetheless, the current roof height reinforces the addition's mass and overwhelms the primary structure.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends lowering the roof height and stepping down portions of the addition to clearly distinguish it from the historic block.</u></p>
Standards for New Construction, Siting, pg. 46	<p><i>1. Additions should be subordinate in size to their main buildings and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating additions at the rear or on the least visible side of a building is preferred.</i></p>	<p>The proposed addition will be highly visible from N. 25th Street due to the prominence of the original house, and the rear structure's height. The current siting does not sufficiently minimize public visibility or reinforce the hierarchy between old and new. The addition risks appearing as a continuation of the historic block rather than a secondary structure.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends exploring design options that more clearly reinforce the hierarchy between old and new:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rather than using the existing compromised rear roof form as a precedent, the design could reference the building's historic massing patterns (visible in the parcel mapper sketch) which show the house historically expressed as a series of smaller, human-scaled volumes

		<p>added over time. A compatible new addition would therefore benefit from being broken into clearly legible subordinate masses that progressively step down deeper into the site, rather than a single large monolithic block.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another strategy is to increase the physical and visual separation between the historic block (Section A) and the new construction. Introducing transitional connecting volume (either a one-story link or a stepped-down volume) could buffer the original house from the full height of the addition, and help ensure that the new work reads unmistakably as modern construction. This buffer would also allow the majority of the addition's height and mass to be pushed farther back on the lot, reducing visibility from N. 25th Street and minimizing its presence in the streetscape.
Standards for New Construction, Doors and Windows, pg. 49	<i>2. The architectural appearance of original windows should be used as models for new windows. Changes in the sash, depth or reveal, muntin configuration, frame or glazing is strongly discouraged. New glass should be clear without reflective coatings, to be compatible with original glass.</i>	<p>The replacement of non-original windows on the front block and restoration of openings to their historic dimensions is consistent with guidelines. The use of 6-over-6 windows is appropriate for the 1868 structure and is in keeping with the historic window pattern. The restoration of original openings will improve the façade.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approval of replacing the windows with 6-over-6 SDL wood (or aluminum-clad wood) units sized to original historic openings.</u></p>
Standards for New Construction, Materials & Colors, pg. 47	<i>2. Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.</i>	<p>The removal of vinyl siding from the original block is a positive conservation measure. Salvaged wood siding from demolished portions can be suitable to reinstall on the main façade (acknowledging the inherent issues in old wood including nail holes, length of boards, spot deterioration).</p> <p>The applicant proposes HardiePlank elsewhere, which is acceptable for additions but not recommended on primary elevations of historic structures.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends wood siding, preferably salvaged, for the original block (Section A). HardiePlank may be used on the addition but should not be used on the main façade.</u></p>
Standards for Rehabilitation, page 59	<i>5. Retain original roof shape, size, materials and related elements including cupolas, chimneys and weather vanes; if replacement is necessary, consideration for use of slate, wood and metal, with respect to color and patterns, should be given.</i>	<p>The existing chimney on the historic block is an original architectural feature and contributes to the building's historic profile.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends preserving the existing chimney and repairing in-kind where necessary.</u></p>

<p>The Secretary of the Interior, Standards for Rehabilitation, Page 4</p>	<p><i>6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. When the severity of deterioration requires replacement or a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence.</i></p>	<p>The existing metal roof on the original appears to be deteriorated. Before constructing the addition, the historic block's roof requires stabilization and repair to prevent continued deterioration and ensure compatibility with new work.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends repairing the roof, or replacing it with an in-kind standing-seam metal roof if too deteriorated. Final roofing material and details to be submitted final review.</u></p>
<p>The Secretary of the Interior, Standards for Rehabilitation, Page 4</p>	<p><i>6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. When the severity of deterioration requires replacement or a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence.</i></p>	<p>The existing asphalt-shingled entry awning is incompatible with the architectural character of the 1868 building. Historic photos show a two-pane transom above the front door.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends removing the existing awning restoring the original historic transom, or submitting a new, simplified compatible entrance covering or canopy design for final review (see Figure 9: example of a simple canopy).</u></p>

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

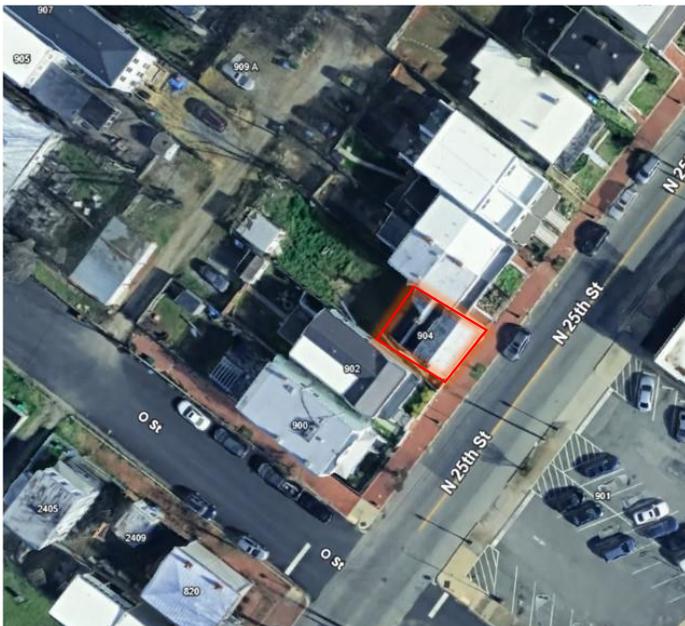


Figure 2: Aerial view 2025



Figure 3: Aerial view 2018

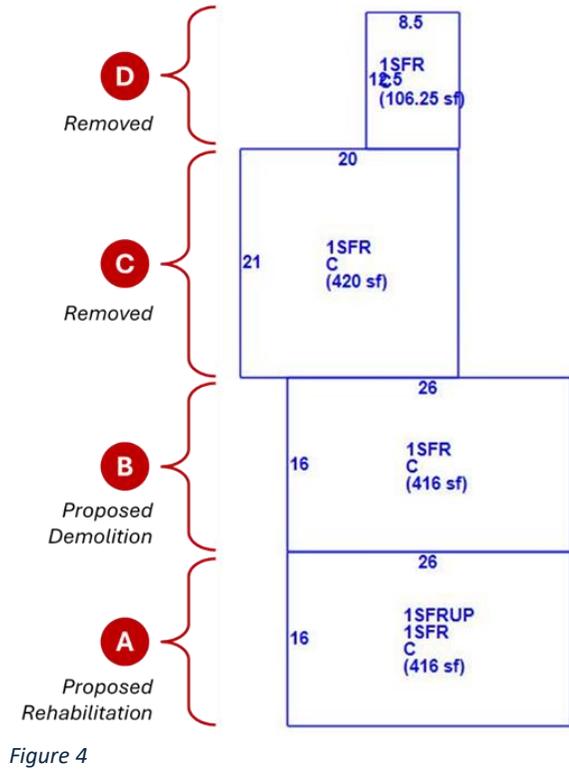


Figure 4



Figure 5

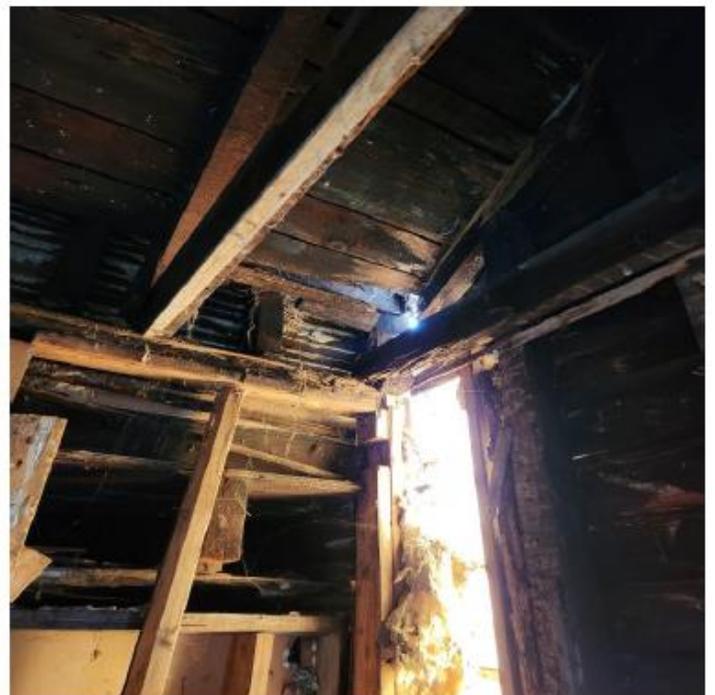
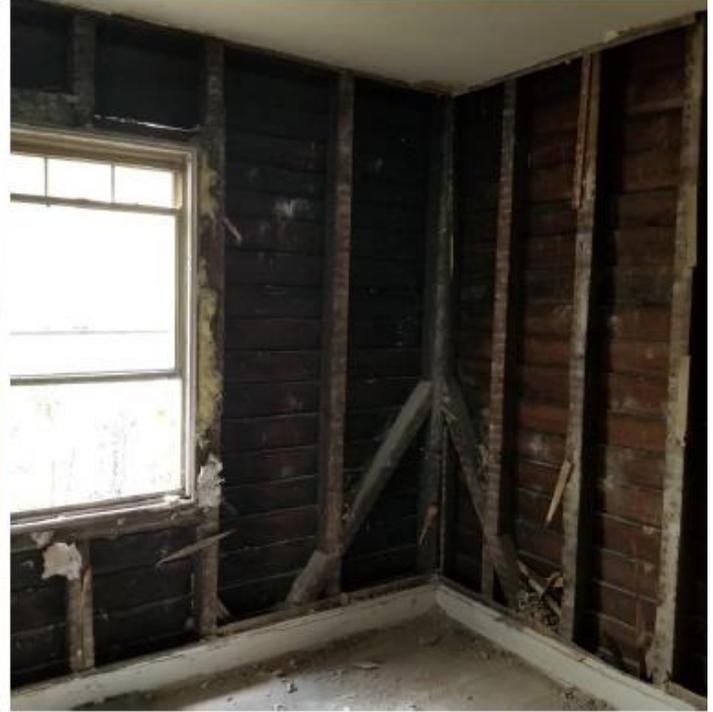


Figure 6: Interior photos of portion proposed for demolition



Figure 7: the side elevation of 904 N 25th street is seen on the right of the image



Figure 8: 1950s Historic photo, showing original entry door transom



Figure 9: example of a simple canopy

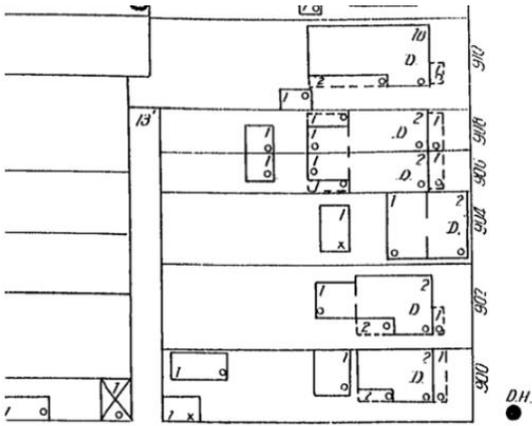


Figure 10: Sanborn Map, 1905

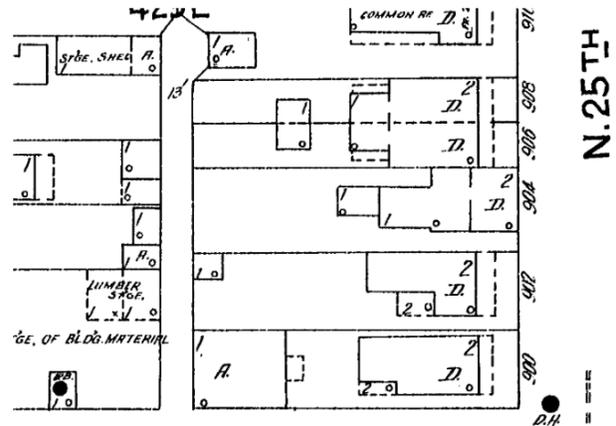


Figure 11: Sanborn Map, 1925

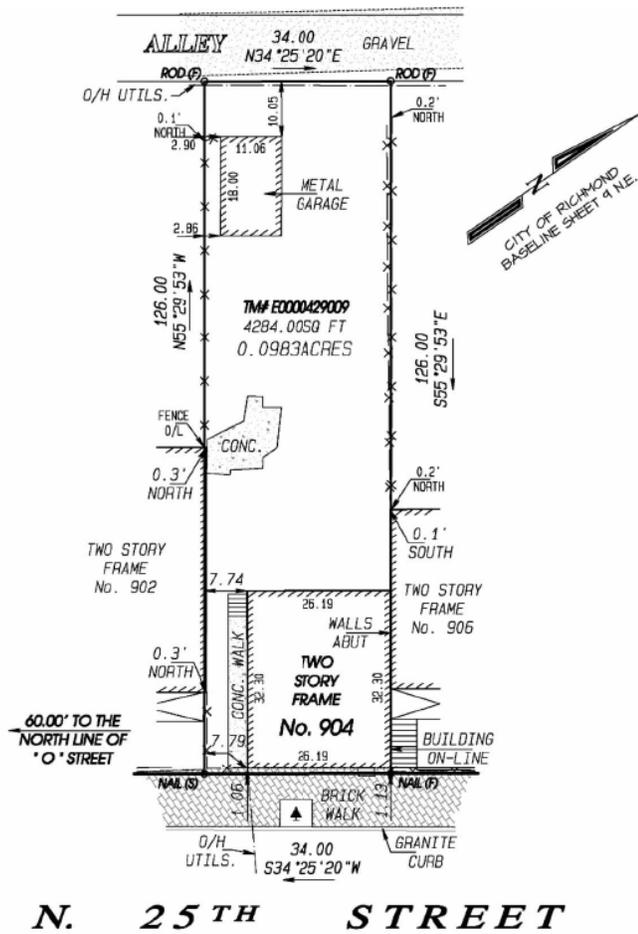


Figure 12

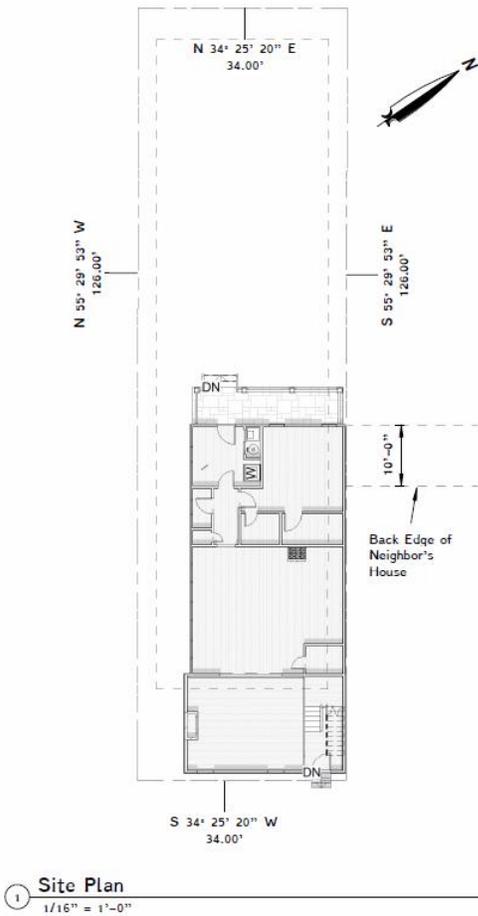
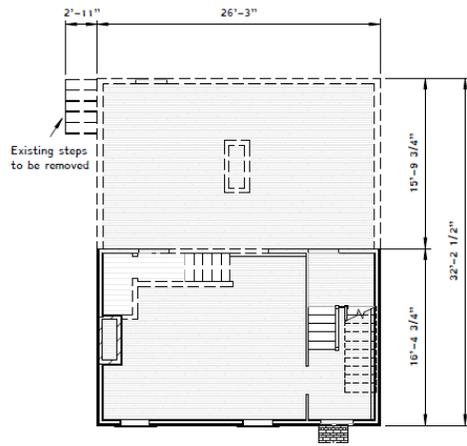
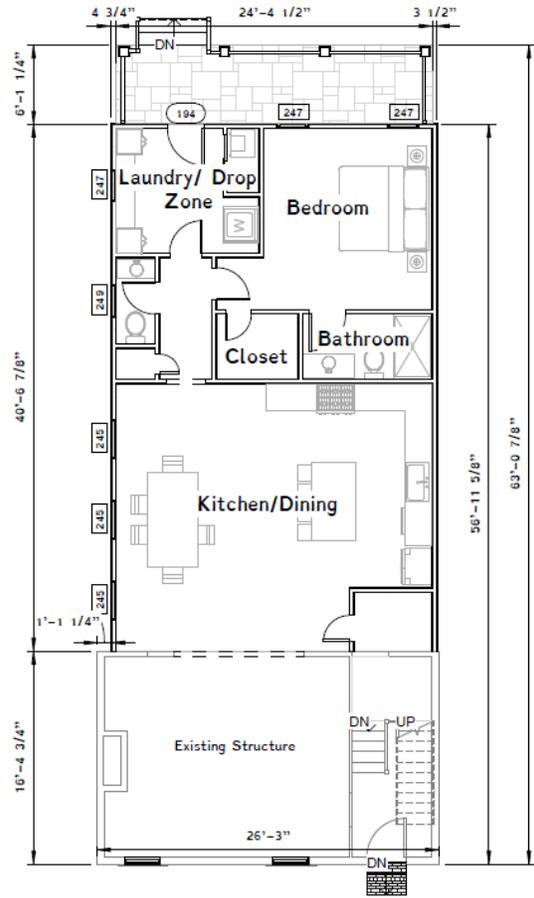


Figure 13: Setbacks



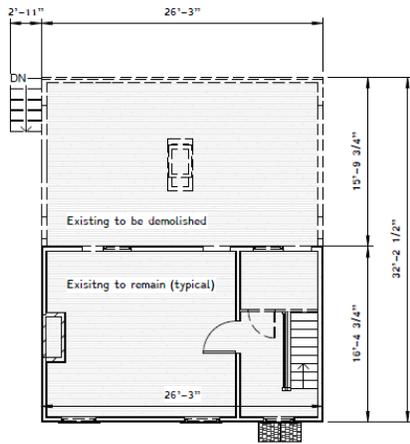
1 1st Floor - Existing
1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 14



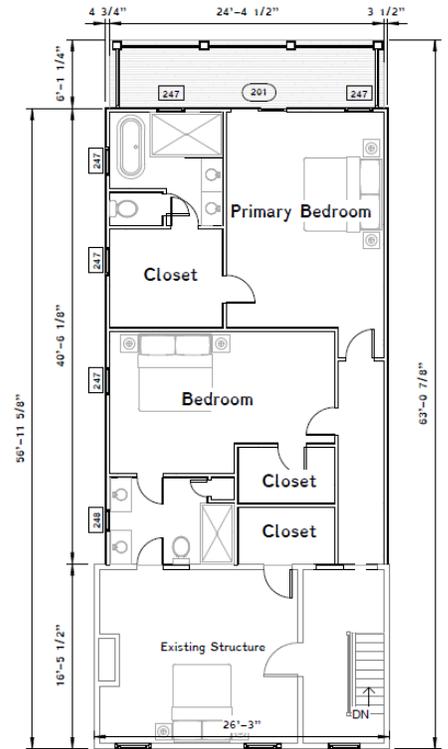
2 1st Floor - Proposed
1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 15



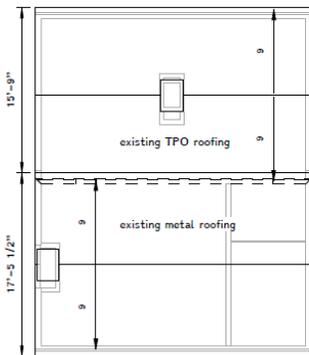
① 2nd Floor - Existing
1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 16



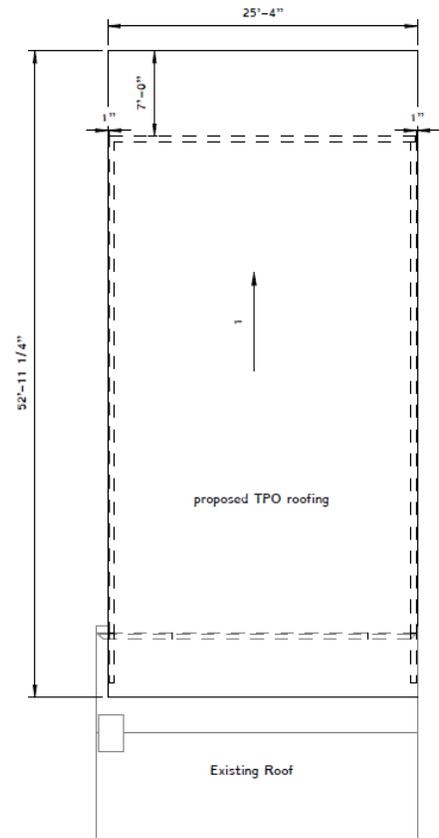
② 2nd Floor - Proposed
1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 17



② Roof - Existing
1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 18



① Roof - Proposed
1/8" = 1'-0"

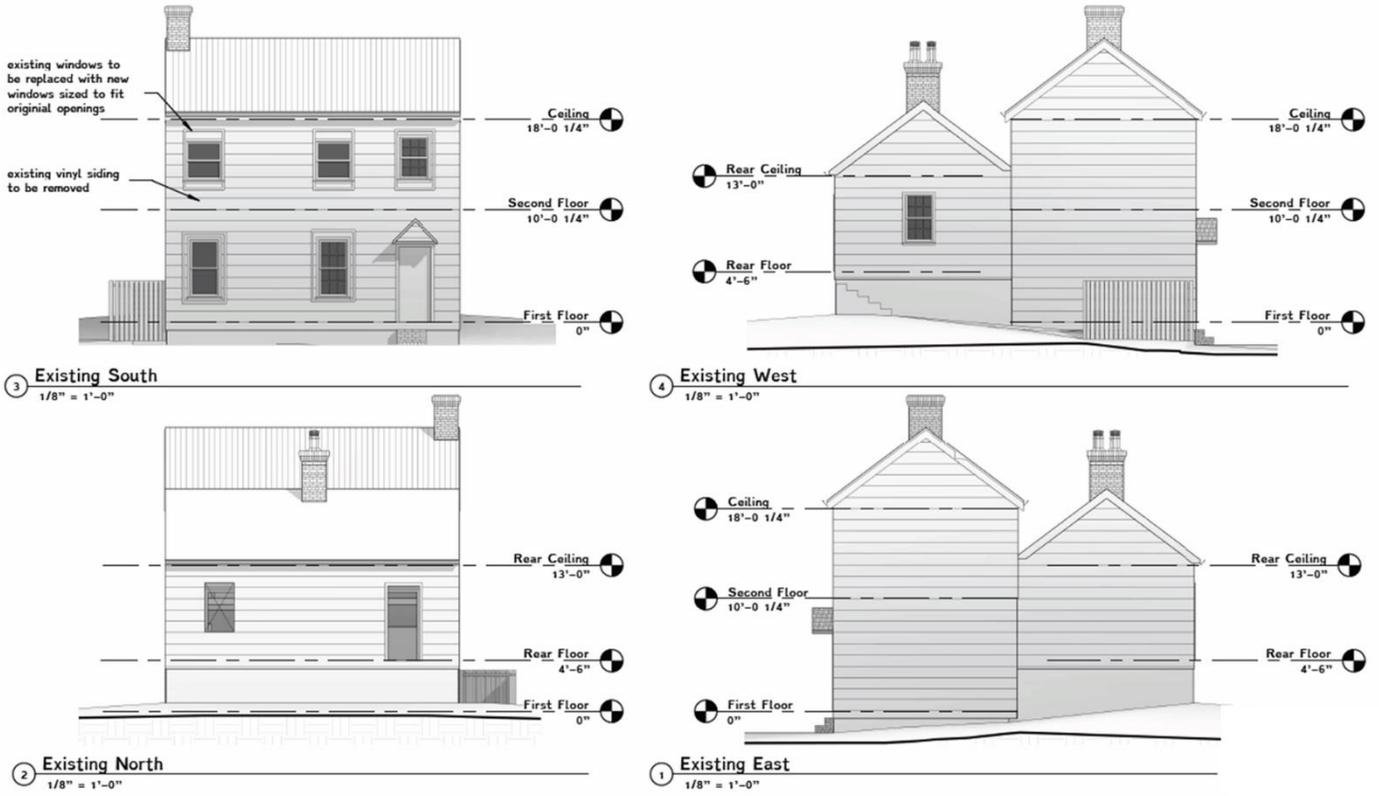


Figure 19

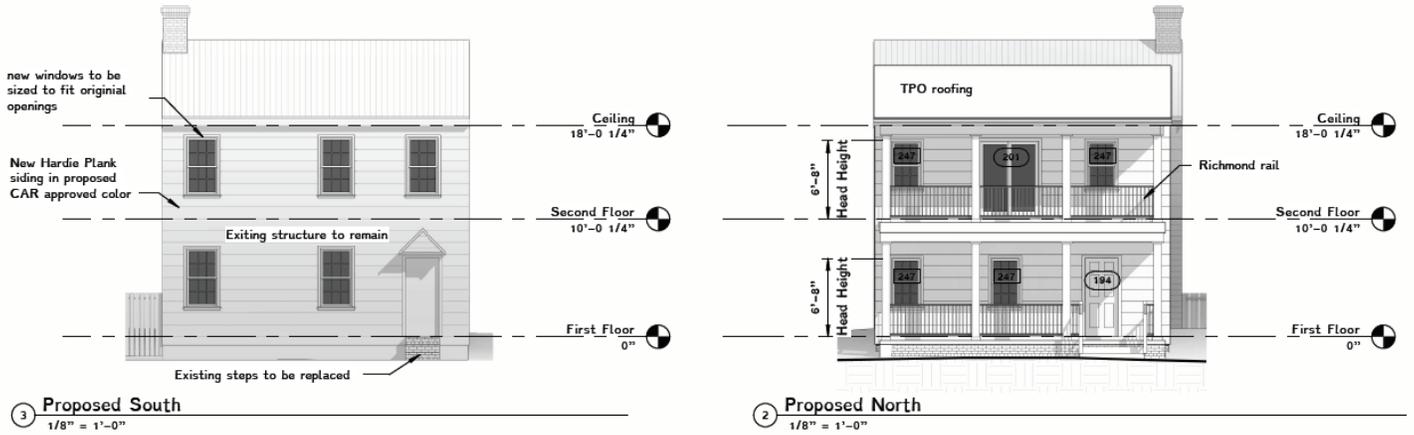
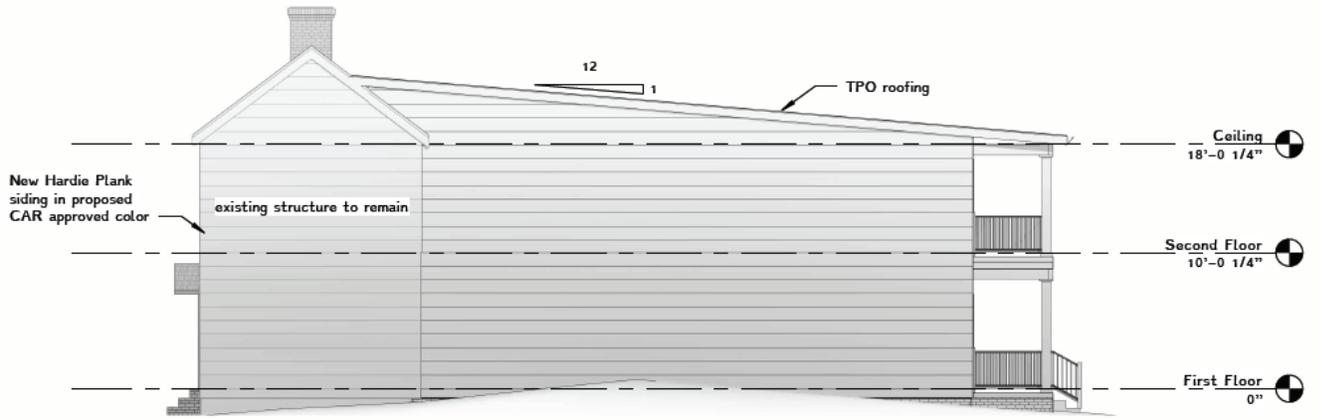
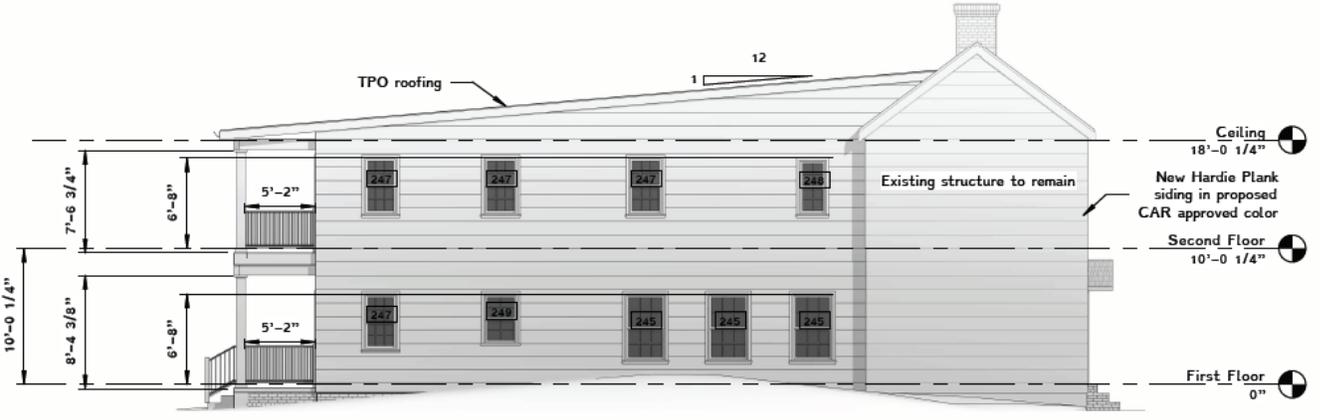


Figure 20



2 Proposed East
 1/8" = 1'-0"



1 Proposed West
 1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 21