

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
August 25, 2015 Meeting**

17. **CAR No. 15-111** (Ampak Properties) **2108 ½ E. Broad Street**  
**St. John's Church Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Construct new single family house**

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

The applicant requests approval to construct a new detached single family house on a vacant lot in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District.

The proposed new construction will be located on the north side of Broad Street on a narrow lot between two historic houses. The two flanking houses are frame, two-story, 2-bay vernacular Italianate-style dwellings with decorative porches, window hoods and cornices. The majority of the houses on this side of the street have shallow gable roofs. The proposed new construction is of frame construction in the Italianate-style. It features 2-story, 3-bay massing with a full façade porch with turned columns and a roof balustrade to allow access from the second floor. The main body of the house has a decorative cornice with brackets and a shallow gable roof.

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* 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 or on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This standard does not apply.

2. *New residential infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback 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 proposed new construction will be located on a narrow lot, 19.75' by 150.0', with 3' side yard setbacks and a 14' front yard setback. The site plan included with the application shows the proposed new construction to be in line with the adjacent houses but no dimensions for these setbacks is given. If a variance is required, the Commission should consider stating that a variance to the setback requirements is necessary and appropriate in order to allow for infill construction that follows the historic pattern of development in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District.

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

The proposed new construction will be oriented towards Broad Street, the prominent street bordering the site.

## **FORM**

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.*

The proposed new construction has a 2-story, 3-bay massing with a shallow gable roof. There is a full façade porch with turned posts and a cornice with brackets. The massing, roof form, cornice and porch are forms found on the block.

2. *New residential construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic residential construction in the district.*

The proposed new construction incorporates a full façade front porch which is an integral human-scale element in the district.

3. *New residential construction and additions should incorporate human-scale elements such as cornices, porches and front steps into their design. In Richmond, porches were historically an integral part of residential design and provide much of the street-level architectural character of Richmond's historic districts.*

The proposed new construction incorporates a full façade front porch with steps and a cornice which is an integral human-scale element in the district. The use of a balustrade on the porch to allow for access from the second floor is an atypical element in the area.

### **HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING**

1. *New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.*

A total height, to the top of the ridge, for the new construction is not given. The context drawing provided shows that the underside of the cornice for the new house will be at 23' while the cornices for the adjacent houses are at 22' feet. The 2100 block of east Broad Street slopes steeply down to the west. The application indicates that the first floor will be set at 2'-6" above finish grade and the illustration suggests that the grade is level across the site. Staff is concerned that the slope of the site has not been considered in the overall height of the foundation or the building.

2. *New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in surrounding historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. For example, full-block-long row house compositions are rare in Richmond. New residential buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.*

The proposed new construction respects the typical vertical orientation through the incorporation of a ranked fenestration pattern and horizontal porch and cornice elements. The new construction does not reflect the pattern of elongated first story windows that is typical of this block. The application calls for 2'-4" by 5'-2" windows on both the first and second story of the façade.

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

The context drawing sets the underside of the cornice height of the proposed new construction at 23' with the adjacent properties being shown at 22'. One of the strong characteristics in this block are the houses stepping up the slope of the hill. A total height for the building is not given and the slope of the site does not appear to have been factored into the context drawing, other than a height of

22' being indicated relative to the sloping topography. Dimensions and details for the cornice construction were not provided.

## **MATERIALS & COLORS**

1. *Additions should not obscure or destroy original architectural elements.*

This standard does not apply.

2. *Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.*

The proposed new construction will be frame with smooth, un-beaded, Hardie Plank siding with a 7" exposure. The porch will have painted wood, turned columns and a wood Richmond-style rail on the roof. There will be brick piers at the porch and parged block foundation walls. The application calls for a wood board porch deck but it is not understood if these are to be tongue and groove deck boards. It is also assumed that the steps will be of wood construction. The elevation drawing suggests a standing seam metal roof on the dwelling but the application specifies a rubber membrane roof. These materials are compatible with the frame construction found on the block.

3. *Paint colors for new additions should complement the historically appropriate colors used on the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the district.*

Paint colors for the body of the building were not specified but the trim, porch and cornice will be white.

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 application calls for the use of Hardie plank siding and PVC trim. The proposed windows are 2/2, simulated-divided-light vinyl sash. Porch elements will be painted wood. No materials were specified for the cornice.

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 was not provided for the location of the mechanical equipment. Information for other site improvements including parking and fencing were not provided.

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**Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions.** The proposed infill project appears generally to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines*. Staff recommends that approval be conditioned with:

- Elevation drawings shall be provided that account for the slope of the site and the impact of the slope on the foundation, finished floor elevation of the first story, and overall height of the building.
- Details and dimensions for the cornice shall be provided.
- Drawings shall be provided for the rear of the building, which is visible from the alley. These drawings should include details for the rear porch, balcony, and sliding doors.
- Drawings for the side elevations shall be provided that show the window placement and sizes in agreement with the floor plans.
- A site plan shall be provided that shows the front yard setbacks for the adjacent buildings, the location of mechanical equipment, and any proposed or required site improvements such as parking and fencing.
- Color selection shall be provided.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the review of the above requested materials, the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 114.930.7(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.