

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
September 23, 2014 Meeting**

4. **CAR No. 14-095** (Evolve Acquisitions LLC)

**611-613 N. 21st Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

Construct two attached duplexes

Staff Contact:

W. Palmquist

The applicant requests approval to construct two attached duplexes at two vacant lots located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed building is a two-story building with a shed roof that replicates the Italianate building style found throughout the district.

The building height is 32'-4", which is comparable to other two-story buildings in the immediate area. The dwelling will have 3' side yard setbacks and a 15' front yard setback. The proposed building would not align perfectly with adjacent structures, as the front porch would align more with the primary façades of the existing buildings to the north and south. As is typical with structures on this block, the new dwellings will be set higher from the road with stairs leading to the front porch. The proposed building has a bend where it curves to the north, following the shape of the parcels. The rear of the building has offset facades between each of the two duplexes. The building reflects the design of a double house with two, paired front doors with four lites and a transom window above each. The applicant proposes smooth cement board siding with a 7" reveal, parged foundation, Richmond porch rails, fiberglass front columns, black membrane main roof, black EPDM porch roofs, fiber cement fascia boards, wood corbels, fiberglass doors, and white vinyl windows.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the Standards for New Construction on pages 44 and 45 and the Standards for Site Improvements on pages 66 and 67 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

New construction should be compatible with the historic features that characterize its setting and context. To protect the significance of the historic context, the new work should reference the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of its setting. However, new construction should

be clearly discernible from the old to protect the authenticity of the historic district.

SITING

- 1. Additions should be subordinate in size to the main structure and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating them at the rear or least visible side of the structure is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

- 2. New infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block. The minimal setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.*

The proposed 3' side yard setbacks will reflect the typical pattern along the block. However, staff would rather see that the primary façade of the proposed structure aligns more with the buildings to the north and south. Currently, the front porch of the proposed structure aligns with the primary facades of adjacent buildings, which staff feels would create a disjointed streetscape.

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

The proposed dwelling will face North 21st Street, the most prominent street bordering the site.

FORM

- 1. New 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 structure. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

The form of the building is typical of two-story Italianate buildings located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District.

SCALE

- 1. New construction should maintain the existing human scale of historic residential and commercial neighborhoods. The inappropriate use of monumentally-scaled buildings that overwhelm pedestrians at the street level is discouraged.*

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of the neighborhood.

- 2. New additions and infill structures should incorporate human-scale elements such as storefronts and porches into their design.*

The proposed design calls for a front porch that has a form that is comparable to other porches in the area.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION, & MASSING

1. *New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures.*

The proposed structure will be 32'-4" tall at the ridge of the roof. The context rendering supplied by the applicant indicates that the height of the proposed building is similar to the height of the adjacent historic buildings.

2. *New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial and residential properties in historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing of more than 30 feet should be broken up by bays.*

The design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district.

3. *Typical massing patterns throughout city historic districts are simple and block-like; therefore, new structures should avoid the use of staggered setbacks, towers, or elaborate balconies.*

The proposed massing is generally simple and block-like, with exception to the bend in the building where it follows the parcel lines.

MATERIALS, COLORS, & DETAILS

1. *New construction should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.*

This standard is not applicable.

2. *Missing building elements should be replaced with new elements compatible in size, scale, and material to the original elements without creating a false historical appearance.*

This standard is not applicable.

3. *Materials used in new construction should be compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.*

The applicant proposes smooth cement board siding with 7" reveal, parged foundation, Richmond porch rails, fiberglass front columns, black membrane main roof, black EPDM porch roofs, fiber cement fascia boards, wood corbels, fiberglass doors, and white vinyl windows. Staff would recommend the use of wood or aluminum-clad wood windows with true or simulated divided lites in place of the proposed vinyl windows.

4. *Paint colors for new additions should complement those of the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

The applicant proposes painting the structure “Leisure Blue” which is found on the Duron Exterior Preservation Palette and is similar to the color palette developed by the Commission to help staff approve paint colors. All trim will be painted white.

5. *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 smooth fiber cement siding for the dwelling. The siding should have a smooth finish (and not a faux grain), in accordance with the Commission’s guidelines for synthetic materials.

6. *Vinyl windows are strongly discouraged and rarely permitted.*

The application specifies the installation of white vinyl windows. Staff recommends the use of aluminum-clad wood windows with true or simulated divided lites. Staff is supportive of the two-over-two grid pattern which is typical of window designs throughout the District.

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 the substitution of wood or aluminum-clad wood windows with true or simulated divided lites in place of the proposed white vinyl windows. Staff also recommends that the applicant considers aligning the primary façade of the proposed structure with those of the buildings to the north and south.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outline 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.