

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
February 24, 2015 Meeting**

7. **CAR No. 14-142** (North 29th Street LLC) **607-609 N. 29th Street**
Church Hill North Old and Historic District

Project Description: **Construct two attached single-family residences**

Staff Contact: **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval to construct two attached single-family residences on vacant lots in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The proposed structure is an Italianate-influenced structure with a front porch and shed roof. The building will be set on a concrete slab foundation with brick veneer and will be accessible from the sidewalk by two sets of concrete steps. Parking will be provided at the rear of the property with access from the alley.

The new building will be situated between an existing house at 617 N. 29th Street and a proposed structure at 615 N. 29th Street. The structure will be a total of 30' in height as measured from N. 29th Street. Measured from the top of the foundation, the building will be 21'-8" in height. It will have side yard setbacks of approximately 3'-6" and a front yard setback of 16'-2".

A retaining wall will be constructed at the base of the berm that begins at the edge of the sidewalk in order to stabilize the slope. The retaining wall will span the length of 607-609 and 615 N. 29th Street and will be constructed of brick in a running bond pattern with a rowlock course at the top. It will be divided into four sections, separated by the three sets of steps that will lead to the proposed structures at 615 and 607-609 N. 29th Street. The existing section of the wooden retaining wall will be replaced with the proposed brick wall, at least for the portion that is within the property line.

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

This standard is not applicable.

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 3'-6" side yard setbacks reflect the typical pattern along the block. The proposed 16'-2" front yard setback would align the structure with that of the proposed building at 615 N. 29th Street. However, these structures would be set further back than the existing structure at 617 N. 29th Street. This is due to the fact that a small berm begins at the edge of the sidewalk and therefore the proposed structure cannot be built against the sidewalk, whereas the existing structure at 617 N. 29th Street is built into the berm and has no front yard setback. Houses on both sides of this block of N. 29th Street have inconsistent front yard setbacks. The proposed structure is not set back so far as to compromise the integrity of the block's streetwall.

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

The new house will face N. 29th Street, the most 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 form of the proposed building is similar to historic Italianate structures with a front porch and shed roof.

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

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

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 buildings design calls for a front porch and steps which lend human-scale elements to the building's design.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

The proposed building will be a total of 30' in height as measured from N. 29th Street. The structure itself will be 21'-8" in height as measured from the top of the foundation to the top of the cornice. The existing building at 617 N. 29th Street, which is set into this berm, is approximately 26'-3 1/2" as measured from N. 29th Street. The discrepancy is due to the aforementioned berm that is situated in the front yard of the property. Other buildings along this block have heights similar to the proposed building, ranging from 23 ft. to 30 ft. in height. The context rendering provided by the applicant demonstrates that while the proposed structure will be taller than the existing house at 617 N. 29th Street, it would not dwarf it, representing a discrepancy in height of approximately 3.75 feet.

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

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

Because of the discrepancy in height between the proposed structure and the existing adjacent house, the bottom of the cornice of the proposed structure will be at close to the same height as the peak of the roof of the existing house.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This standard is not applicable.

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

The applicant proposes smooth fiber cement siding with a 7" reveal, smooth 4.5" Hardie trim, smooth Hardie vented soffit, Fypon cellular polyurethane front porch columns, Fypon brackets and cornice, Azek tongue and groove cellular front porch decking in "Oyster" color, and brick porch piers with wood lattice between. The windows will be MW Jefferson 300 series cellular PVC double-hung 2/2 with simulated-divided lites. The front doors will be a Pella Smooth Fiberglass ½ Light with clear glass, painted "Watery" on 607 and "Rembrandt Ruby" on 609. Each will have a single transom above. The rear doors will be Pella Smooth Fiberglass ¾ Light with Clear Glass in pre-painted white. The front porch roof will be done in dark grey architectural shingles, and the main roof will be a white TPO membrane. Black painted metal railings will be installed along the concrete steps leading from the sidewalk to the front porch. The rear decks will be built from pressure treated lumber on brick piers.

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.*

The applicant proposes installing "Boothbay Blue" fiber cement siding, which is similar to "Leisure Blue" found on the CAR Paint Color Palette. The applicant proposes all trim to be "Arctic 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 proposed building design calls for smooth fiber cement siding.

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.*

While no rooftop mechanic equipment is being proposed, the applicant has designated an area for HVAC units which will be effectively screened by a fence.

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 the applicant verify the ownership of the existing wooden retaining wall, or work with the property owner to replace the entirety of the wood retaining wall with the proposed brick wall. Staff recommends that a black membrane or metal roof be installed on the front porch in place of the proposed architectural shingles. Staff also recommends that vertical trim be installed between the two sides of the duplex on the front and rear elevations in order to provide a break between the two different colors of the structure.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the conditions above, 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.