



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Commission of Architectural Review

6. COA-106340-2022	Final Review	Meeting Date: 3/22/2022
Applicant/Petitioner	Greg Shron	
Project Description	Construct two 3-story, attached, single-family dwellings.	
Project Location		
Address: 207 N. 31 st St.		
Historic District: St. John's Church		
High-Level Details: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicant proposes to demolish the existing ca. 1950 CMU single-family dwelling. The applicant proposes to construct two 3-story, attached, single-family dwellings. The applicant proposes white, horizontal cementitious siding and a standing seam metal roof. The proposed dwelling has a recessed third story with a rooftop terrace. 		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Alyson Oliver, alyson.oliver@RVA.gov , 804-646-3709	
Previous Reviews	January 2022: Conceptual Review – At the January meeting, members of the Commission gave general feedback on the form of the new construction and requested additional information to justify the proposed demolition.	
Staff Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff recommends approval of the proposed demolition for the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff finds that the structure at 207 N. 31st Street does not contribute to the historic character of the Chimborazo Park Old and Historic District; Based information provided by the applicant it is reasonable to assume that the structure may have deteriorated beyond the point of feasible rehabilitation; The dwelling is not associated with a building style, prominent architect, or historic event sufficient to suggest that its demolition would have an adverse effect on the historic character of the district; and Demolition of the existing dwelling is unlikely to have a negative and irreversible impact to the streetscape on the surrounding block due if the form, design, massing, and 	

	<p>setbacks of the new infill development better align with the surrounding block.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the Commission approves the requested demolition, staff recommends approval of the new construction, with the following recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rear portion of the building use materials in “Pearl Grey” and offset paneling be used on the inset portions only; • The foundation use a dark colored brick and corresponding dark mortar, rather than paint; and • The second-story windows on the rear façade be modified to be vertically aligned with the third-story windows.
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Staff Analysis

Proposed Demolition

The following analysis pertains only to the proposed demolition of the existing ca. 1950 CMU single-family dwelling. Staff notes that per the guidelines “demolition is considered an option of last resort for contributing historic properties and is only permitted under extreme circumstances.”

Under the provisions of Section 30-930.7(d) of the Richmond City Code, the Commission *shall approve* requests for demolition when *any* of the following are met:

- 1) There are no feasible alternatives to the proposed demolition. Feasible alternatives include an appropriate new use and rehabilitation, relocation of the structure to a compatible site or re-sale of the property to an individual committed to suitable rehabilitation or relocation.
- 2) A building or structure is deemed not be a contributing part of the historic character of an Old and Historic District.
- 3) The Commission deems that a building or structure has deteriorated beyond the point of feasible rehabilitation.

The Richmond City Code also grants the Commission the authority to adopt additional considerations for demolition. The Commission has done so and has incorporated these standards into the Guidelines. They are as follows:

- 1) The historic and architectural value of a building;
- 2) The effect that demolition will have on the surrounding neighborhood;
- 3) The type and quality of the project that will replace the demolished building; and
- 4) The historic preservation goals outlines in the Master Plan and Downtown Plan.

The analysis below draws from the standards detailed above.

Guideline/Code Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Richmond City Code, Sec. 30-930.7(d)	<i>The Commission of Architectural Review shall not issue a certificate of appropriateness for demolition of any building or structure within an old and historic district, unless the applicant can show that there are no feasible alternatives to demolition. The demolition of historic buildings and elements in old and historic districts is strongly discouraged. The demolition of any building deemed by the Commission to be not a part of the historic character of an old and historic district shall be permitted. The demolition of any building that has deteriorated beyond the point of being feasibly rehabilitated is</i>	<p>Most of the residential development in the St. John’s Church City Old and Historic District occurred in the early- to mid-19th century. Residential in the eastern end of the district and in the adjacent Chimborazo Park City Old and Historic District largely took place during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chimborazo Park was established by the city in 1874, spurring residential growth in the surrounding area. The block containing 207 N. 31st was one of the earliest blocks adjacent to the park to develop, with most of the houses on the block constructed prior to 1895.</p> <p>The dwelling located at 207 N. 31st Street is an outlier in terms of its date of construction as well as architectural design and form. The St. John’s Church Old and Historic District is</p>

	<p><i>permissible, where the applicant can satisfy the Commission as to the infeasibility of rehabilitation. The Commission may adopt additional demolition standards for the review of certificates of appropriateness applications to supplement these standards.</i></p>	<p>home to a variety Federal Style, Greek Revival, Italianate, and Classical Revival dwellings (to name a few). Most dwellings are a minimum of two stories and feature distinctive architectural detailing. The dwelling at 207 N. 31st Street is notably different in form and design, as it is only one-story, is a simple structure with a gable-roofed, and does not feature any significant architectural detailing. <u>For these reasons, staff finds that the structure at 207 N. 31st Street does not contribute to the historic character of the St. John's Church Old and Historic District.</u></p> <p>Since the January meeting, the applicant has provided a Structural Observation Report (prepared by Klaus J. Worrell, P.C.) on the current state of the dwelling and the possibility for renovation of the structure for occupancy. Based on his findings, much of the structure, including the floor framing, roof structure, and footing would require extensive repair to ensure structural stability. The report also notes that there is no certainty the CMU walls would not collapse as a result of any efforts to reinforce the framing and footing. <u>Based on these findings, it is reasonable to assume that the structure may have deteriorated beyond the point of feasible rehabilitation.</u></p> <p>Additional information provided by the applicant indicates that it would cost upwards of \$136,000 to repair the existing structure. However, estimates on the cost of demolition and new construction have not been provided for comparison.</p> <p>The applicant has not provided information on exploring options for rehabilitation that include resale or building onto the existing dwelling.</p>
<p>Standards for Demolition, #1, p. 82</p>	<p><i>The historic and architectural value of a building:</i> <i>The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation define an "historic" building or structure as being 50 years or older. It should not be inferred from this definition, however, that any building or structure less than 50 years old does not have intrinsic historic or architectural value.</i></p> <p><i>Often buildings or structures built more recently than 50 years ago exhibit significant architectural detailing or are associated with a building style, prominent architect or historical event sufficient to suggest that their demolition would have an adverse effect on the historic character of the district. The Commission has the discretionary power to decide, on a case-by-case basis, if a building not deemed</i></p>	<p>In addition to the analysis provided above on the historical significance of the existing dwelling located at 207 N. 31st Street, it is also not associated with a building style, prominent architect, or historic event sufficient to suggest that its demolition would have an adverse effect on the historic character of the district. The building design is of minor significance, and staff finds that the dwelling may be classified as noncontributing to the St. John's Church Old and Historic District.</p>

	<p><i>“historic” according to The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards is an appropriate candidate for demolition.</i></p> <p><i>There may instances when a property owner applies to the Commission for demolition of a building that is considered “historic” by virtue of the 50-year threshold, but the building design may be of such minor significance that the building is classified as noncontributing to the historic character of the District. If the building also meets one or more of the other criteria listed (i.e. if it is severely deteriorated, a source or blight or the demolition request will make way for new infill construction more appropriate to the District, etc.), the Commission may vote to approve the demolition. As with all potential demolitions, however, each case is approved or rejected on its own merits.</i></p>	
<p>Standards for Demolition, #2, p. 83</p>	<p><i>The effect that demolition will have on the surrounding neighborhood:</i> <i>Individual buildings are significant contributing elements to the immediate area in which they are located. Removal of that building may have a positive effect on the neighborhood, but quite often demolitions have the opposite effect, producing a negative and irreversible impact to the streetscape. Since the Commission is charged with the preservation of entire Districts, and not just individual buildings and structures, adherence to these criteria is appropriate and justified.</i></p>	<p>Demolition of the existing dwelling is unlikely to have a negative and irreversible impact to the streetscape on the surrounding block. In fact, demolition of the existing structure may allow for a new infill building that is more in keeping with the overall character of the block in terms of massing, form, and setback.</p>
<p>Standards for Demolition, #3, p. 83</p>	<p><i>The type and quality of the project that will replace the demolished building:</i> <i>When demolition requests are made in conjunction with designs for a replacement structure, the overall quality of the new design is an appropriate factor in determining the merits of demolition. The Commission may vote to approve demolition of a non-contributing building when provided detailed plans for appropriate, compatible infill construction. Conversely, a demolition request to accommodate the installation of an open parking lot with little or no screening would almost certainly be rejected. In most cases, a demolition permit will not be issued until the Commission has approved the design of a replacement structure.</i></p>	<p>If the demolition is approved, the applicant plans to construct two attached, single-family dwellings. An analysis of the proposed design is included in the following section of this report.</p>

Standards for Demolition, #4, p. 83	<i>The historic preservation goals outlined in the Master Plan and Downtown Plan: The overriding goal of both documents is to facilitate the preservation, rehabilitation and adaptive re-use of the City's valuable architectural history. To the degree that proposed demolitions do not run counter to this goal, reasonable and objective consideration may be given to such requests.</i>	The City's Master Plan, Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth, outlines several historic preservation goals, which includes a goal to reduce the demolition of historic buildings (Objective 3.2). Demolition of the existing dwelling at 207 N. 31 st Street would not further this goal outlined in the Master Plan. However, the plan also acknowledges that not all buildings that have past the standards 50-year threshold are well-built or of historical value. The existing dwelling at 207 N 31 st Street exhibits structural issues and is not architecturally significant.
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New Construction

The following analysis relates to the construction of the proposed attached, single-family dwellings. The Commission will need to approve of the proposed demolition before the final design of the proposed dwelling can be approved.

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Siting, #2, p. 46	<i>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.</i>	The proposed setback is 14' which is consistent with dwellings in this area. Conversely, the setback of the exiting dwelling is approximately 25', which does not align with the setback pattern on the rest of the block.
Siting, #3, p. 46	<i>New buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site.</i>	The proposed dwelling will face 31 st street, which is the most prominent street bordering the site.
Form, #1, p. 46	<i>New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the historic district.</i>	Each attached dwelling is three bays wide, which is generally compatible with other dwellings found in district. However, the depth of the proposed structure is significantly larger than structures found in the surrounding area. The front façade features a faux mansard roof and a raised front porch entrance. This forms is a modern interpretation of a building form that is often found in this district. Since conceptual review, the plans have been modified so that the building increases in height in three stepped intervals as it extends toward the back of the property. The roof form of this portion of the building has been modified so that it now features a flat roof with a parapet (note: the previous plans featured three different roof forms). This new form gives the impression of a house that has been added onto with an addition, which is a common form found in the district and on the surrounding block. To further resemble the form of a rear addition, the applicant is proposing to use a different color palette and material composition for the rear portion of the building. Several options have been provided

		on page 10 of the plans. Staff recommends that the rear portion of the building use materials in “Pearl Grey” and that offset paneling be used on the inset portions only.
Form, #2 and #3, p. 46	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>New residential construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic residential construction in the district.</i> <i>New residential construction and additions should incorporate human-scale elements such as cornices, porches and front steps into their design.</i> 	<p>The most significant human-scale detail found on residential buildings in vicinity is the inclusion of a front porch. In keeping with the district, the applicant proposes a full width, elevated front porch for each of the dwellings.</p> <p>The applicant has modified the plans to include an elevated front porch in order to address the topography of the site. Elevated porches are not the most common type of porch found in the district, but they do occur frequently enough to make this an acceptable design choice. The applicant is also proposing to paint the foundation brick a dark grey color. Painted masonry is generally considered to be inappropriate in historic districts. Rather than achieving this look through paint, staff recommends that the applicant modify the plans to use a dark colored brick and corresponding dark mortar on the foundation.</p>
Height, Width, Proportion, & Massing, #1, p. 47	<i>New residential construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.</i>	The proposed building is below the districts 35’ maximum. The top of the parapet wall on the front elevation is 24’ in height. The rear three-story portion of the building reaches a maximum height of 31’.
Height, Width, Proportion, & Massing, #2, p. 47	<i>New residential construction should respect the vertical orientation of other residential properties in surrounding historic districts.</i>	<p>The proposed dwelling is two stories in height along the front façade with a set-back third story. This form is found on several dwellings on the surrounding block.</p> <p>Windows and doors on the proposed dwelling are generally vertically aligned, which matches the vertical orientation of existing properties in the district. One exception is the alignment of the windows shown on the rear façade. Staff recommends that the second-story windows on the rear façade be modified to be vertically aligned with the third-story windows.</p>
Height, Width, Proportion, & Massing, #3, p. 47	<i>The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.</i>	A context drawing has been provided by the applicant, but the only neighboring property is a small garage. However, front cornice appears to be compatible with other residential dwellings found in the district.
Materials and Colors, #2-4, p. 47	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.</i> <i>Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the district.</i> <i>Vinyl, asphalt, and aluminum siding are not permitted for use in City Old and Historic Districts. Other synthetic siding materials with a smooth,</i> 	The applicant proposes horizontal cementitious smooth face lap siding, offset cementitious panels, black aluminum clad windows, a standing seam metal roof and a district approved accent color for the front door. Paint colors have been selected from the CAR approved paint palette. Staff finds that this is in keeping with materials used in new construction and found elsewhere in the district.

	<i>untextured finish may be allowed in limited cases, but approval by the Commission is always required.</i>	
Mechanical Equipment, p. 68	<i>The visual impact of new mechanical equipment should be minimized to protect the historic character of the district.</i>	The applicant has included the location of the HVAC units in the drawings submitted with this application. Each dwelling unit will have one HVAC unit, both of which will be located along the side facades near the rear of the dwelling.

Figures



Figure 1. Existing Dwelling at 807 N 31st Street



Figure 2. View of subject property, looking southwest.



Figure 3. View of subject property from intersection at 31st and Broad.

