



**Staff Report**  
**City of Richmond, Virginia**

RICHMOND PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT REVIEW



**Commission of Architectural Review**

2.COA-163028-2025	Final Review	Meeting Date: 4/22/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	B. Tyler Sylvestro	
Project Description	Demolish an existing one- and one-half story rear portion of a building.	
Project Location		
Address: 711 North 26 <sup>th</sup> Street		
Historic District: Church Hill North		
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant requests approval to demolish the rear projection of a Greek Revival Style House circa 1855.</p> <p>The projection is one and a half stories with a gable roof, center chimney, and features a couple of doors and vertically aligned windows, the upper windows being smaller than the lower ones.</p> <p>Historic documentation suggests that this addition may have been constructed between 1889 and 1905.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, alex.dandridge@rva.gov, (804) 646-6569	
Previous Reviews	<p>The Commission reviewed this application at their March 2025 meeting. The Commission supported the demolition of the rear addition for the reasons stated in the staff report. Ultimately, the Commission deferred the demolition, agreeing that it should not be approved until the new construction component of the project was approved.</p> <p>The Commission conceptually reviewed this application at their February 2025 meeting. The Commission requested that the applicant provide additional information and documentation on the existing condition of the rear addition. The Commission also asked that the applicant provide a cost analysis comparing demolition to rehabilitation as well a report from a structural engineer. This information would be needed to decide on the feasibility of rehabilitation or demolition.</p>	
Staff Recommendations	<p><b><u>Staff Recommends approval of the demolition of the rear addition for the following reasons:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The rear addition has undergone many alterations and was built in a way that causes inherent maintenance issues.</li> <li>2. There is evidence of deterioration and many replacement materials.</li> </ol>	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. A structural engineer's reports indicates that because of the addition's condition, there may not be a feasible alternative to demolition. Rehabilitation would require further removal and alterations to the little historic material that remains.</li> <li>4. While the addition does contribute the overall historic character of the district, it lacks significant architectural value, unlike the primary massing of building, and is most visible from a secondary public right-of-way.</li> <li>5. A proposed new addition will reference the existing design and form.</li> <li>6. The addition maintains few aspects of integrity - maintaining the aspects of Location &amp; Setting; however, the aspects of Design, Materials, and Association have been diminished, and the addition no longer possess the aspects of Workmanship &amp; Feeling.</li> </ol> <p><b><u>Staff conditions:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The building permit for the demolition and the associated new construction be applied for simultaneously.</li> <li>• the primary massing on 711 North 26<sup>th</sup> Street should be protected during the demolition and new construction stages in order preserve remaining historic material and features.</li> </ul>
--	---

## Staff Analysis

Surrounding Context		
<p>The subject block retains much of its historic fabric on the east side, whereas the west side is an open parking lot except for a two-story masonry building on the southwest corner of M Street and North 26<sup>th</sup> Street. 711 North 26<sup>th</sup> Street is located mid-block on the east side North 26<sup>th</sup> Street and is the only Greek Revival Style dwelling. The east side of North 26<sup>th</sup> Street consists of two-story dwellings, mostly frame and Italianate, Queen Anne, and Second Empire in style. There is a grouping of three attached masonry dwellings at the southeast corner of M Street and North 26<sup>th</sup> Street. The streetscape includes medium sized trees, brick, and concrete sidewalks with granite curbs. The rear alley is gravel and lined by various types of wooden fences. There are a few auxiliary buildings that front the alley.</p>		
Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
<p><b>Standards for Demolition, p. 82</b></p>	<p><i>According to Sec. 114-930.7(d) and 114-930.9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance: The Commission 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.</i></p> <p><i>Under the provisions of Sec. 32-930.7., the Commission shall approve requests for demolition when:</i></p>	<p>The primary portion of 711 North 26<sup>th</sup> Street is a two-story, frame, Greek Revival building circa 1855. It is three bays wide with a hipped roof, and a one-story, covered, single bay porch with fluted Doric columns and a wide entablature. The building's character and style are defined by its prominent Greek Revival elements.</p> <p>The rear addition of the dwelling is offset slightly to the south of the primary portion of the building and is much more vernacular in style. It is one and a half stories with a gable roof, center chimney, and features a couple doors and vertically aligned windows; the upper windows being smaller than the lower ones.</p> <p>Based on historic documentation, there have been other auxiliary buildings on the site over time and the existing rear addition appears to have been constructed</p>

	<p>1) <i>There are no feasible alternatives to 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.</i></p> <p>2) <i>A building or structure is deemed not to be a contributing part of the historic character of an Old and Historic District.</i></p> <p>3) <i>The Commission deems that a building or structure has deteriorated beyond the point of feasible rehabilitation.</i></p> <p><i>In addition to the above criteria, the Commission has the authority to consider four other factors in arriving at decisions involving proposed demolitions:</i></p> <p>1) <i>The historic and architectural value of a building.</i></p> <p>2) <i>The effect that demolition will have on the surrounding neighborhood.</i></p> <p>3) <i>The type and quality of the project that will replace the demolished building.</i></p> <p>4) <i>The historic preservation goals outlined in the Master Plan and Downtown Plan.</i></p>	<p>sometime between 1889 and 1905. It is not original to primary portion of the building but has gained significance overtime and speaks to the historic evolution of the site.</p> <p>There have been alterations to the rear addition overtime. The 1905 Sanborn Map shows that there was a one story covered porch that spanned the width of the north elevation. In addition, the original windows are no longer present, and openings have likely been altered/added/and removed. Nevertheless, the overall form of the addition has likely remained the same.</p> <p>Since the conceptual review of this application, the applicant has submitted a structural report and cost estimates for both the demolition and rehabilitation for comparison. The applicant also submitted additional images of the rear addition that demonstrate that it is in fair condition. <b>It has undergone many alterations, was built in a way that causes inherent maintenance issues, especially the lack of an adequate foundation, and features replacement materials as well as some deterioration.</b> As stated in the guidelines, "A determination that a building or structure no longer presents an opportunity for feasible rehabilitation is arrived at only after an on-site visit by Commission members and a thorough structural analysis has been undertaken by a licensed structural engineer experienced in historic preservation work."</p> <p>While a site visit from the Commission was not undertaken, the site was substantially documented and presented to the Commission.</p> <p><b>The applicant provided a structural engineer's report</b> that stated that the foundation of the addition and existing floor joists would need to be completely removed and replaced to support rehabilitation and/or new construction, as the existing foundation is not constructed appropriately, wooden structural members are non-pressure treated and are too close to the ground to meet current building codes.</p> <p>The rehabilitation of this projection would require the removal of more historic fabric.</p> <p>This information can be used to determine that there <b>may not be a feasible alternative to demolition</b> given the condition of the extant addition and its numerous alterations and improper repairs.</p> <p>Many historic properties in Church Hill North have developed and changed over time; having auxiliary buildings come and go and additions constructed in various locations. It is Staff's finding that <b>this portion of the building does contribute the overall historic character of the district</b>, speaking to the more vernacular styles and later additions to buildings; however, <b>it lacks significant architectural value</b>, and does lack some of its historic integrity due to the number of alterations that appear to have taken place.</p> <p><b>The demolition would not have a negative impact on the character and streetscape of North 26<sup>th</sup> Street as it is located at the rear of the historic dwelling and is minimally visible from the right-of-way. The</b></p>
--	--	---

**demolition would have an impact on the views of the property from the rear alley.**

The applicant is proposing a new addition in place of this rear portion of the building if the demolition is approved. The **new addition would reference the existing projection** in that it would be constructed in roughly the same footprint and would feature a gable roof.

To determine the level of integrity that remains, the condition of the addition has been reviewed against the National Register's seven aspects of integrity.

- Location
- Design
- Setting
- Materials
- Workmanship
- Feeling
- Association

To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance. Determining which of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant.

**Retains** **Diminished** **Lost**

**Location:** Based on the documentation available, the addition remains in its original location and maintains its spatial relationship to the primary building and surrounding landscape.

**Design:** While the addition has undergone many alterations, it appears to maintain its original form and scale, and layout (first floor, center chimney, loft space); however, it has lost a covered porch on its north elevation and changes have occurred to the fenestration. Other than the form, scale and layout, the design has been somewhat diminished.

**Setting:** Based on available documentation, the addition remains in its original setting.

**Materials:** Based on documentation, it appears that many original materials have been removed or replaced overtime, including windows, doors, siding, and foundation material. Structural members appear to have been replaced, cut, or sistered overtime creating a conglomerate of original and new structural members and framing.

**Workmanship:** Based on available documentation, enough alterations have occurred that the original workmanship, craftsmanship, and other evidence of human skill and labor have been eroded and are not highly evident. Interior images demonstrate that original flooring, molding, and windows have been removed, and exterior materials have been replaced overtime with new wood.

**Feeling:** this refers to the intangible, sensory, and emotional qualities of the building. Because there have been so many alterations to the interior and exterior of the building, much of the original feeling of the building has been lost. While the exterior still looks and feels “old”, the original feeling of this portion of the building has been diminished.

**Association:** Based on available documentation, the subject projection does not have a significant association with a person or event in the past, other than development patterns in the district and the manner in which buildings were traditionally organized, with more utilitarian uses or servant quarters being located in less ornate portions of buildings.

**Based on this analysis, the subject projection maintains the aspects of integrity of Location & Setting; the aspects of Design, Materials, and Association have been diminished, and the projection no longer possess the aspects of Workmanship & Feeling.**

The addition is in fair condition and has undergone many alterations overtime. It appears to have inherent construction flaws that make maintenance and repair difficult. A structural engineer’s report demonstrates that rehabilitation would require disturbing and replacing more of the little historic material that is left. While the building’s scale, massing, and roof form contribute to the character of the Church Hill North City Old and Historic District, its overall integrity has been diminished. The demolition would not have a major impact on the North 26<sup>th</sup> Street streetscape but would change the view of the building from the rear alley, which is a secondary public right-of-way. Furthermore, the applicant is proposing to construction a new addition that references the design of the existing addition.

For these reasons, staff recommends approval of the demolition of the rear addition.

Staff recommends the demolition approval should be contingent on the approval of the new construction to take its place.

Staff recommends that the primary massing on 711 North 26<sup>th</sup> Street be protected during the demolition and new construction stages in order preserve remaining historic material and features.

# Figures

Figure 1. 711 North 26<sup>th</sup> Street Façade, February 2025.



Figure 2. View of existing rear addition from North 26<sup>th</sup> Street.



Figure 3. View of existing rear addition from the rear alley.



Figure 4. View of existing rear addition from the rear alley.



Figure 5. View of existing rear addition from the rear alley.



Figure 6. View of existing rear addition from the rear alley.



Figure 7. Historic Maps left to right: 1877, 1889, 1905

