

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
May 26, 2015 Meeting**

9. **CAR No. 15-060** (Q. King)

**916 N. 25th Street
Union Hill Old & Historic District**

Project Description: **Replace front porch railings, columns, and handrails and replace windows**

Staff Contact: **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval for work performed at the property which includes replacing non-historic metal porch and stair railings with vinyl railings and handrails, replacing non-historic metal porch columns with wood columns, and replacing several historic windows with vinyl windows. This application is the result of enforcement activity.

In March 2015, the applicant was issued a Notice of Violation for the installation of vinyl porch railings and handrails without a Certificate of Appropriateness. The original railings, handrails and columns were black metal and not original to the property. The new railings and handrails are white vinyl with exterior fasteners. The new columns are square posts painted gray to match other trim on the porch. The applicant states that the prior railings and handrails were installed approximately 30 years ago, and the new vinyl railings and handrails were an attempt to replicate something similar to what was historically installed but with increased durability.

In discussing the railings and handrails with the applicant, it came to staff's attention that several historic windows were replaced on the structure as well. The applicant states that the original 6/6 wood windows were in poor condition. Many were inoperable and were missing glass panes. The new windows are Pella windows which are 6/6 grid-between-the-glass vinyl windows. In total, six windows were replaced, two each on the front, rear, and right 2nd floor. The applicant is also proposing to replace the other existing historic windows on the structure.

Staff does not recommend approval of the project. The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* states that, "When designing a new railing for a new infill building, or for an existing building which has lost its railing and for which no documentary or physical evidence survives, the balusters in the traditional Richmond rail are generally rectangular in section or square," and that, "Richmond railing is a painted wood railing with the following components: a molded handrail, a series or regularly spaced rectangular pickets that fit in a groove in the top and bottom rails, and a molded bottom rail" (p.46 #2 & Appendix: Glossary). The *Guidelines* also state that, "The use of synthetic materials that will alter the appearance, proportion, and/or details of an historic structure is strongly discouraged" (p. 56).

In regards to the replacement windows, the *Guidelines* state that, "Windows should only be replaced when they are missing or beyond repair. Any reconstruction should be based on physical evidence or photo documentation," and that, "Because the material cannot be manufactured to model effectively the appearance of historic windows, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic buildings in historic districts" (p. 65 #7 & 11).

Staff does not recommend approval of either portion of the application. Both the replacement railings and handrails and replacement windows are not supported by the *Guidelines*. Staff would typically recommend wooden railings and handrails designed in a Richmond rail style, as well as wood or aluminum-clad wood windows with true or simulated-divided lites. Staff has no issue with the square, wood columns that were installed and painted gray to match other elements of the front porch.

Staff recommends that the applicant return to the Commission with a new porch railing and handrail design that is in keeping with the *Guidelines*, as well as a more appropriate type of replacement window. In regards to the applicant's proposal to replace the remaining historic windows, staff recommends that the applicant return to the Commission with a full window survey of the remaining windows, showing photographic evidence from the interior of the structure that the windows are beyond the point of repair. In regards to windows and doors on the 1st story rear elevation, these are not visible from the public right-of-way due to the lack of an alley behind the property and the presence of a privacy fence. Therefore, the Commission does not have control over these specific elements.

It is the assessment of staff that the application is not consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation outlined in Section 114-930.7(b) of the City Code, nor 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 the code.

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