

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
January 26, 2016 Meeting**

18. **CAR No. 16-017** (GTR Cedar LLC)

**1903 E. Marshall Street
Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

**Modify previously approved plans
for a new multi-family dwelling to increase
the setback from Cedar Street by 7.5 feet.**

Staff Contact:

M. Pitts

The applicant requests approval to modify previously approved plans for the construction a multi-family dwelling at a lot located in the Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District that is bordered by Cedar, East Marshall, and North 20th Streets. Shockoe Valley has a tremendous diversity of building types and styles. The lot proposed for development is located along the hillside of Jefferson Park. Two-story, antebellum residential dwellings on raised basements line Cedar Street immediately adjacent to the site, and a new, five-story multifamily building is located on the other side of Cedar Street, just outside of the Old and Historic District. Other notable buildings in the immediate area include New Light Baptist Church (formerly Trinity Methodist) and the Central Montessori School. The district contains a number of warehouses and industrial buildings that are three to five stories in height. The substantial Cold Storage warehouses are located just outside of the district.

Background:

The proposed development has been before the Commission multiple times since 2011. Below is a brief timeline of the Commission's review of this project:

- December 14, 2011: Plans for the new development at 1903 E. Marshall Street were reviewed conceptually by the Commission. The general consensus of the Commission members present was that the proposed building needed to be more compatible in massing, height, and scale, particularly with respect to the row of historic Greek Revival residences along Cedar Street. The Commission was largely supportive of the materials selected for the development.
- January 24, 2012: The Commission reviewed revised plans and voted 7-1-0 to deny the project, specifically citing standards for Siting, Form, Scale, and Height, Width, Proportion, and Massing. Several Commission members also expressed concern over building materials and the grouping of the rooftop mechanical equipment.

- February 28, 2012: The Commission reviewed revised plans and voted 6-1-1 to defer the project in order to allow the applicant a chance to revise the design of the project based on Commission comments.
- March 27, 2012: The Commission reviewed revised plans and voted 5-1-0 to approve the project with conditions. The approved project included a setback of approximately 8 feet from the Cedar Street property line.
- March 27, 2014: The Certificate of Appropriateness was renewed for a year and then expired on this date.
- May 24, 2014: The applicant returned to the Commission with a revised design for the building. The biggest change to the project involved the addition of a new central wing at the back of the building. Additionally, the project was proposed to be minimally setback on the Cedar Street elevation to align with the leading edge of the porch of adjacent row houses. As of the Commission had a number of questions and concerns about changes to the project, particularly with regard to the ground level of the building and the portion of the building closest to the historic residential dwellings on Cedar Street, the Commission voted to defer the project and requested more information including a revised site plan that is more compatible with the front yard setback of adjacent historic properties.
- June 24, 2014: The Commission reviewed revised plans and approved the application 6-1-0, with conditions. The approved plans included a 15" setback from Cedar Street. Though one Commissioner expressed concern regarding the fact the building was no longer aligned with the existing rowhouses, the majority of the Commission were comfortable with the lack of greater setback based on the reasoning that the larger scale warehouse buildings in the area tend to be built up to the sidewalk.
- June 10, 2015: The Certificate of Appropriateness was renewed for one year to expire June 24, 2016.

In addition to the Commission's review of this project, the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) reviewed the project as the project requested a special exception from the front yard setback and the maximum height requirements. Specifically, the front yard setback required along Cedar Street is 8'9" +/- to align with the face of the adjacent buildings, and the maximum height of the building is restricted to four stories. On May 6, 2015, the Board of Zoning Appeals granted the special exception from the front yard setback and maximum height requirements. The Board of Zoning of Appeals' decision was challenged, and it is staff's understanding that the court upheld the BZA's decision regarding the height and remanded the decision regarding the setback back to the BZA.

Current Application

In lieu of returning to the Board of Zoning Appeals to again request a special exception for the reduced front yard setback, the applicant has returned to the CAR to with modified plans which meet the front yard setback requirements. The applicant is proposing to increase the previous 15" setback from Cedar Street by

7.5 feet to align the front of the proposed building with the face of the adjacent row houses. The proposed changes will minimally affect the appearance of the previously approved Marshall Street elevation as the applicant has chosen to compress the building in inches over the 276' elevation rather than removing a bay. The applicant is proposing to continue the 5 ½ foot brick sidewalk down Cedar Street and fill the setback area with planters, though details of the plan for the setback area have not been submitted.

In addition to the changes to the setback along Cedar Street, the applicant is proposing to modify the alley adjacent south elevation. The applicant is proposing to flatten out the ends of each wing which were previously recessed. Additionally, the applicant is proposing to reduce the width of the two courtyards each by 3'-9" and infill a portion of the courtyard which will not be visible from the public right of way.

Staff recommends approval of the modification to the previously approved project with a condition. The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* states new residential infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block (pg. 44, Siting #2). The proposed setback reflects the setback of the primary face of the adjacent row houses, therefore staff recommends approval of the proposed change in front yard setback. Staff recommends the applicant submit a detailed plan which is to be consistent with any requirements of the Plan of Development for the setback area to be reviewed and administratively approved by staff.

The Guidelines note that new construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the historic district (pg. 44, Form #1). As Commission has determined in previous approvals, the proposed building scale and massing are compatible with the district as many of the historic buildings in and around the area are large in scale. Staff feels the proposed changes to the alley are in substantial conformance with the previously approved building and do not alter the building's massing or scale.

It is the assessment of staff that the project, with the condition noted above, is largely in keeping with the Commission's 2012 and 2014 approvals of the project and the Standards New Construction outlined in Section 30-930.7(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 the code.