

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
August 23, 2016 Meeting**

4. **CAR No. 16-121** (L. Salzman) **1121 W. Franklin Street
West Franklin Street Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Expand the education building for the
Congregation Beth Ahabah and connect
the building to the Temple on the east
and the Joel House on the west**

Staff Contact: **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests approval to expand the education building for the Congregation Beth Ahabah and create connections from the building to the Temple on the east and the Joel House on the west. The Beth Ahabah campus consists of 5 buildings – 1109-1125 West Franklin Street – all of which are located in the West Franklin Street Old and Historic District. The Temple (1117), built in 1904, and the two, early-twentieth century row houses (1109 and 1111) contribute to the National Register listed West Franklin Street Historic District. The early-twentieth century, Joel House (1125) contributes to the National Register listed Fan Area Historic District and the Education Building (1121), built in 1957, is listed as noncontributing. The two row houses to the east of the Temple, 1109 and 1111, are not included in this project.

The purpose of the expansion and the new connections is to create one central entrance to the Congregation Beth Ahabah campus, improve the functionality of the Education building, plan for future vertical expansion, and to create accessible connections between the Temple, Education building, and the Joel House. The proposed addition re-faces the Education building, a noncontributing building, creating a new entrance at the northeast corner and extending the building to the west across an existing drive way.

This proposal was conceptually reviewed by the Commission at the June 28, 2016 meeting. At the June meeting, the Commission's comments were not consistent across Commissioners. Commissioners raised the following concerns regarding the proposed design:

- The symbols to be more easily understandable
- The proposed 3rd floor will block the view of the Temple
- The front doors of the Temple will not be open and access to the campus will be through the new entrance in the Education building
- The building reads as a stand-alone building and does not relate to the Temple or the Joel House

The following modifications have been made to the project since the project's conceptual review:

- The Proposed Site Plan (pg. 9) illustrates that access will be provided through the Temple's front doors, and through the new ADA access and entrance in the Education Building. Entry for programs will also be through the new Education Building entrance.
- The symbols have been altered to be more easily read (pg. 12).
- The long openings symbolizing the Ten Commandments have been moved to align the head of the windows with the cornice of the Joel House and the sill of the windows with the porch heights of the Joel House and the Temple (pg. 16). The sill of the menorah openings also align with the porch heights.
- The proposed roof line is a consistent height (in the previous submission, the center portion minimally stepped down).

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. The Commission's Guidelines are crafted for residential and commercial projects and do not address institutional buildings which may be more monumental and specialized in function and design. This project is also a hybrid between new construction and an addition. In reviewing this project staff looked to the National Park Service guidance for *New Additions in Densely-Built Environments*, which state "treating the addition as a separate or infill building may be the best approach when designing an addition that will have the least impact on the historic building and the district." For this reason staff reviewed the proposed construction through the lens of the "Standards for New Construction: Commercial" on pages 50 and 51 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* utilizing the checklist below.

S=satisfies

D=does not satisfy

NA=not applicable

S **D** **NA**

New infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns in the surrounding district

The proposed addition minimally alters the existing set back of the existing Educational building and maintains a similar setback of the adjacent structures.

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 structure reinforces and restores a portion of the traditional street wall that was lost through the earlier demolition of row houses and the installation of a curb cut and driveway.

New buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site

The proposed addition faces Franklin Street and creates a new, prominent entrance fronting on the street.

- Parking within the building is strongly encouraged with vehicle entry doors located on non-primary elevations**

The proposed project does not include parking. The curb cut and driveway will be removed as part of this project which will improve the pedestrian experience on West Franklin Street.

- New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the district. Form refers to the combination of massing, size, symmetry, proportions, projections and roof shapes that lend identity to a building.**

The massing, size, proportions, and projections of the structure are compatible with other structures in the District including the multifamily structures across the street from the subject property. The proposed fenestration is not symmetrical as is typical of the District. The glazed entrance and fenestration pattern are derived from symbolism that is important to the Jewish faith. The applicant has proposed the unique fenestration pattern in order to convey the importance of the congregation's faith to the broader community. The proposed parapet wall with no definition at the roof line is not a building form found in the District. Staff recommends the applicant incorporate a cap to the proposed roofline to be reviewed and administratively approved by staff.

- New construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level. Street level elevations should not have expanses of blank walls**

The applicant incorporates human scale elements including the open glass entrance at the corner. Currently, there are multiple entry points to the buildings and no ADA connections that link the Temple, the Education building, and the Joel House. The accessible entrances are currently at the rear of the property and the proposed design provides an accessible entry on the street elevation

- New storefronts should be compatible with historic storefronts within the district. Storefronts are traditionally defined by simple piers, large storefront windows, a cornice, a signboard and/or attached signage and awnings**

This is an institutional building which does not incorporate storefronts.

- New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings**

The proposed addition will increase the height of the Education building to three stories, through a false façade, which will reinforce the street face and the horizontal organization of the rooflines of the row houses and the cornice line of the Temple portico. The proposed structure restores the building height to that of the demolished row houses on the site and respects the building height of the existing residential buildings in the district.

- New construction should respect the typical width, organization of bays, vertical alignment and symmetry of surrounding buildings. For larger buildings, bays should be employed as an organizational device but the building should read as a single piece of architecture**

The proposed project does not maintain the typical three bay pattern nor the symmetrical fenestration found in the District. The addition does respect the verticality of structures in the district through the brick joinery and the tall windows and is of a similar width as the structures across the street and the institutional buildings in the area. The proposed connections to the adjacent structures are set back from the façade to minimize the width of the building and to maintain the separation of these structures. The building is of similar height and width to the two row houses that were previously demolished.

- The size, proportion, and spacing patterns of doors and window openings should be compatible with patterns established in the district.**

The proposed design uses an asymmetrical entrance and a unique fenestration pattern to incorporate the symbols important to the Jewish faith.

- Porch and cornice heights should be compatible with adjacent buildings**

The floor heights are based on the existing structure. The fenestration is related to the porch and cornice heights of the adjacent structures as the window sills and heads of the addition relate to porch and cornice heights of the adjacent structures.

- Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district. Vinyl, asphalt, and aluminum siding are not permitted.**

The addition will be constructed of brick that matches the tone and material of the Temple, and it will incorporate metal accents in the entrance and windows. The connectors between the expanded education building and the Temple to the east and the Joel House to the west are recessed clear glass hyphens.

Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions. The proposed infill project appears to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines* as the project is largely compatible with the historic features that characterizes its setting and context. The height and the street wall are characteristic of the District while being differentiated from the Neo-classical Temple to the east which is the center piece of the Beth Ahabah campus. The elements for which the project does not conform to the Guidelines include incorporating symmetry and a fenestration pattern found in the District. The proposed application does not meet these criteria as the fenestration pattern was designed to include symbols important to the Jewish faith. The applicant has modified the design of the symbols to incorporate the Commission's comments to be more readable. The project meets the *Guideline's* recommendation to be compatible but

discernable from the old and is a bridge between the adjacent, residential scale of the row houses and the monumental form of the Temple.

Staff recommends the approval be conditioned on the following:

- The applicant incorporate a cap to the proposed roofline to be reviewed and administratively approved by staff.

It is the assessment of staff that with the acceptance of the stated conditions the application is consistent with the Standards for 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 code.

Application No. 16-077 (L. Saltzman)

1121 W. Franklin Street

Ms. Chen presented the staff report and summarized the applicant requests approval to expand the education building for the Congregation Beth Ahabah and create connections to the Temple on the east and the Joel House on the west. The Beth Ahabah campus consists of 5 buildings – 1109-1125 West Franklin Street – all of which are located in the West Franklin Street Old and Historic District.

Mr. Green opened the floor for applicant and public comment.

Mr. Larry Saltzman, Vice President of the congregation Beth Ahabah and Chairman of Beth Ahabah's Architectural Review Committee. Mr. Saltzman stated that this proposal is the result of over 2 years of work and stated that this presentation was presented to the CAR staff, congregation Beth Ahabah Architectural Review Committee, the Capital Campaign Leadership, the Board of Managers, the Trustees and past Presidents and the members of the congregation. Mr. Saltzman stated that they also presented it to West Avenue and Fan District Civic Associations. Mr. Saltzman gave a brief presentation and stated that the congregation really likes the project.

Ms. Salo Levinas gave a brief presentation on the historic fabric and how the structure responds to the temple. Mr. Levinas stated that they want to respect their clients and capture the spirit through religious symbolism in this project.

Ms. Lisa Kaplan, speaking as a member of Beth Ahabah and a member of the Board of Managers for Beth Ahabah, gave a brief presentation on how they interviewed the 12 architects. Ms. Kaplan stated that they are building this entrance to have more security.

Dr. Falk, speaking as a member of Beth Ahabah, stated that their organization has taken on this enormous task of changing and expanding their synagogue. Dr. Falk stated that the design speaks to their heart and stated that the walls of the Beth Ahabah symbolizes their history of persecution and survival.

Ms. Rachel Schmidt, speaking as a member of Beth Ahabah, stated that she is a resident of Franklin Street and stated that this is a beautiful compliment to the neighborhood.

Ms. Cyanne Crump, the Director of the Historic Richmond Foundation, stated that they appreciate that the Congregation Beth Ahabah is working very hard to keep their facilities vibrant and thriving and stated that this project reaffirms Beth Ahabah commitment to the city and the community. Ms. Crump stated that Temple Beth Ahabah is one of the most important buildings in Richmond and stated that they support that maintaining the beautiful classical temple as well as their goals for connecting and securing the campus while adding handicapped accessibility. Ms. Crump stated that the education building should not be more iconic than the temple nor should it disrupt the continuity of the historic district. Ms. Crump stated that they ask the architects to give more consideration for the historic context of the neighborhood. Ms. Crump gave some suggestions to the applicant on the addition.

Ms. Nancy Belleman, speaking as a member of Beth Ahabah, stated that the congregation was 227 year old. Ms. Belleman stated that her family goes back a long way with Beth Ahabah history. Ms. Belleman stated that with all of these buildings on Beth Ahabah's campus, it is nice to have one structure that sort of gently touches both the Synagogue and the Joel House and brings one main entry into their beautiful campus. Mr. Saltzman stated that he did not receive the comments from the Historic

Richmond Foundation.

There were no additional comments from members of the public. Commission discussion began.

Mr. Cooley stated that he attending the public hearing and stated that the part that he did not grasp until he studied page 13 of the plans were the symbols and stated that without a lot of education the typical person will not understand it. He also stated that he is having trouble with compatibility.

Mr. Hendricks stated that he likes the design, that it is different, and that three dimensionally it is more deferentially to the existing building. Mr. Hendricks stated that having more views such as perspectives driving east on Franklin Street would be helpful and stated that it would be interesting to see a comparison of every 30ft down Franklin. Mr. Hendricks stated that he likes the symbolism and stated that it looks good on the façade. He stated that he is wrestling with the height and the notch at the front being gone.

Ms. Aarons-Sydnor stated that as a half Jewish girl from New Jersey she is happy when there is anything that make the Jewish community more visible in Richmond. Ms. Aarons-Sydnor stated that she thinks the building connections are done very well and stated that the incorporation of the letters from the Hebrew alphabets is a fantastic idea. Ms. Aarons-Sydnor stated that the 10 commandments are a little less easy to read and states that part of that is because the horizontal breaks between the 5 are not prominent and stated that she reads a slot instead of two groups of 5. She stated that she thinks that can be easily remedied and easier to read. Ms. Aarons-Sydnor stated that the menorah is tough for her to reconcile and stated that if they incorporate the candles or some kind of hierarchy it would be more readable. Ms. Aarons-Sydnor stated that if on either side of stairs could be pushed back slightly so that it did not read as prominent. She stated that she is very excited to see what it becomes.

Mr. Yates stated that he has some real issues with the design of this building and stated that he applauds the contemporary approach and thinks that the façade of the new building needs to be set back so that it does not block the view of Beth Ahabah coming down Franklin Street. Mr. Yates stated that he does not understand why it is so important that the top of the addition match the cornice of the Beth Ahabah and stated that it is going to block the view of this marvelous Synagogue and stated that neighborhood loves and appreciates them and want to see the temple. Mr. Yates stated that he don't want to see a monolithic wall blocking the view as he drives down the street. Mr. Yates stated that the other thing that concerns him is that except on High Holy Days the Beth Ahabah main entrance is going to be closed, everyone will enter from the new entrance, and the three original doors in this glorious portico are going to become an afterthought. Mr. Yates stated that he thinks the 3rd floor wall just becomes a 3rd floor parapet that is blocking the view of the temple.

Mr. Green stated that the thing that concerns him the most is that the addition does not read like an addition and reads like a standalone building. Mr. Green stated that it is not reading like a building that is responding to Beth Ahabah and stated that to his reading a good addition speaks to the building that is a part of and the proposed addition is not speaking to Beth Ahabah. Mr. Green stated that he is not suggesting that it be historic and stated that the existing education building now is stepped back to give Beth Ahabah some space and to preserve the views going west and east on Franklin Street. Mr. Green stated that having that setback also preserves some view of Beth Ahabah which is the most important thing there. Mr. Green stated that he does not have a problem with

the building being 3 stories but states that he does have a problem with the 3rd story parapet for which he does not think they can get a building permit. He restated his concern that it does not read as an addition to Beth Ahabah but reads like an independent building.

Mr. Saltzman stated that when they are talking about the recess and stated that if they look at the site plan the existing structure is exactly the same level and stated that they are trying to fill the gap and continue with the fabric of Franklin. Mr. Saltzman stated that in reference to the symbolism this is not the Synagogue that is why the symbolism is much more subtle and stated that they will take all the comments into consideration.

The meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Marianne G. Pitts
Secretary to the Commission of Architectural Review