

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

19. **CAR No. 16-056** (M. Jarreau) **2908 E. Franklin Street  
St. John's Church Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Construct a single family dwelling**

**Staff Contact:** **K. Chen**

The applicant requests conceptual review and comment to construct a single-family dwelling on a vacant lot in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District.

The proposed new construction will be three-story, two-bay, brick, contemporary dwelling set on a raised foundation. The front door is approached by painted wood steps and an uncovered landing with a brick screening wall to the east. On the first story of the façade, the front door, and a pair of 2/2 metal clad windows are organized by two-light transoms and a brick soldier course. The second and third stories have two, 2/2 double hung windows united vertically by a recessed brick panel and a brick soldier course defines the third floor window heads. There is a high blank parapet above the third floor windows. The fenestration pattern on the east and west elevations do not agree with the floor plans. A drawing of the rear or north elevation was not provided but this elevation will be minimally visible.

The proposed new construction is located on the north side of Franklin Street about half way between the intersection of N. 29<sup>th</sup> Street to the west and N. 31<sup>st</sup> Street to the east. The street slopes steeply down to the east. With the exception of a free standing, Late-Victorian, frame, two-story, three-bay dwelling on the north side of Franklin Street and two, two-story concrete block apartment buildings on the south side of Franklin, the area is sparsely developed. Further to the east facing N. 31<sup>st</sup> Street are two rows of frame Late-Victorian dwellings. To the west facing 29<sup>th</sup> Street are densely developed blocks of predominately three-bay brick dwellings built in the mid to late nineteenth century that are two to four stories in height. A common denominator of the nearby historic buildings are porticoes or full façade porches and walls that terminate in cornices or mansard roofs. To the east of the proposed new construction are three new dwellings approved by the Commission at their January 2016 meeting. These new buildings are three-story, with mansard roofs and stylized cornices, and porches or porticoes at the entrances, and fiber cement lap siding.

The applicant is seeking **Conceptual Review** for this project. Conceptual review is covered under Sec. 30-930.6(d) of the City Code: *The commission shall review and discuss the proposal with the applicant and make any necessary recommendations. Such Conceptual Review shall be advisory only.* Commission

staff reviewed the project through the lens of the “Standards for New Construction: Residential” on pages 44 and 45 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* and the resulting comments follow.

### **Staff Findings based on Commission of Architectural Review Guidelines**

#### **STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION**

*All new residential and commercial construction, whether in the form of additions or entire buildings, should be compatible with the historic features that characterize their setting and context. To protect the context of the surrounding historic district, new construction should reference the materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of the existing historic building or buildings in its setting. However, compatibility does not mean duplicating the existing buildings or environment. In order to avoid creating a false sense of history, new construction should also be discernible from the old. Perhaps the best way to think about a compatible new building (or addition) is that it should be a good neighbor; one that enhances the character of the existing district and respects its historic context, rather than being an exact (and misleading) reproduction of another building.*

Staff found that the proposed new construction was not compatible with the historic features that characterizes its setting and context. While the proposed design incorporates contemporary design elements and does not try to duplicate existing buildings, there are certain elements that strongly define the setting and context. Traditionally, the verticality of a building form is broken or interrupted by horizontal elements such as porches or porticoes. Often times contrasting materials used in window lintels and sills, water tables and belt courses are used to break vertical planes. Finally, buildings have a terminus – a cornice or roof line that stops the vertical momentum. The proposed new construction lacks those horizontal elements that break the vertical nature of the form and the uninterrupted area above the third story windows is too broad. Porches and porticoes are important elements found in the district. The building as proposed exceeds the height allowed under the zoning and the context drawing indicates that the proposed new construction is substantially taller than the adjacent building while being at a lower elevation. Variations in building heights is not uncommon along block faces, especially along steeply sloped streets where buildings of similar heights step down the hill. But, there is typically an element that ties the buildings together and that unifying element is missing.

The applicant has stated that a Special Use Permit is required to adjust the side yard setbacks. The application did not state if the SUP would also include the height which currently exceeds the 35’ allowed under R-6 zoning.

General Comments:

Windows must be true divided or simulated divided light

The following items will need to be included for final review:

- 1) A site plan showing the front and side yard setbacks for the proposed new construction and those of the adjacent properties. Location of mechanical equipment and trash receptacles and how they will be screened. Location and elevations of any proposed fencing.
- 2) Floor plans that agree with the fenestration patterns seen on the elevations.
- 3) Vertical dimensions indicating the relationship of the finished grade to the height of the stoop, floor levels and the top of the parapet.
- 4) Dimensions for the placement of windows above the finished-floor elevation and door heads on all elevations.
- 5) A dimensioned context drawing illustrating the vertical relationship of the proposed new construction and the adjacent buildings.
- 6) Clarification of the materials for the front steps and landing.
- 7) Brick and window finish samples.
- 8) Windows should be simulated divided light.