

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
November 25, 2014 Meeting**

18. **CAR No. 14-132** (Valley West LLC) **1914 East Franklin Street
Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Construct new multi-family development**

Staff Contact: **K. Chen**

The applicant requests conceptual review and Commission comments for the construction of a new, five-story multi-family apartment building that incorporates two levels of structured podium parking in the Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District. The T-plan building will extend the full length of the 100 block of North 20th Street with narrower faces on East Franklin, East Grace and 19th streets. The application includes a site plan, elevations, and a building summary describing general design and materials. The development pattern in the area is one of four and five story tobacco warehouses and a new four story apartment building on the northwest corner of Grace and 20th streets. The Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District is unique because it contains residential, commercial, and industrial scale buildings.

Conceptual review is covered under Sec. 114-930.6(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 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

New construction should be compatible with the historic features that characterize its setting and context. To protect the significance of the historic context, the new work should reference the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of its setting. However, new construction should be clearly discernible from the old to protect the authenticity of the historic district.

SITING

1. Additions should be subordinate in size to the main structure and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating them at the rear or least visible side of a structure is preferred.

- This guideline does not apply. The existing structure on the property is not historic and would be demolished to make way for the new structure. The new construction is intended to remediate the current siting with new construction that is more appropriate for a City Old and Historic District.

2. New infill construction should respect the prevailing setback patterns of the surrounding block faces. The minimal setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.

- The new building is built to the property line at the intersections, establishing a traditional street wall and respecting the prevailing setback patterns of the historic streetscape within the district.

3. New structures should face the most prominent street bordering the site.

- The new construction reinforces the street wall created by the existing industrial buildings in the area. The building entrances are located at the Grace, Franklin and 20th street intersections and mid-block on 20th street. The design would be improved and the block faces enlivened if there was increased interaction and transparency on the street elevations.

4. New infill structures should be spaced within 20% of the average distance between existing houses on the block.

- This guideline is more applicable within a district with an established and intact residential character. The commercial and industrial buildings in the immediate area model a continuous block-face of compatible yet diverse buildings.

5. If setback waivers are needed, the Commission can be requested to support a Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) waiver.

- The applicant will need to consult with Land Use Administration and the Zoning Administrator on a number of issues. Parking is not permitted on the ground floor level along principal street frontage to a depth of 20'. The Zoning Administrator can determine which of the street are the principal streets and Land Use Administration can advise on the need for a Plan of Development for the project.

FORM

1. New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the immediate area. Building form refers to the specific combination of massing, size, symmetry, proportions, projections and roof shapes that lend identity to a structure. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.

- The overall size and form of the building do a lot in the way of remedial work for the district. This block of the district has been underutilized with surface parking for at least a generation. The nearby industrial buildings have flat, unadorned or articulated wall surfaces with regularly placed window openings. The verticality of some of the buildings is reinforced with applied pilasters or the structural concrete grid is expressed. The subdivision of the elevations into differentiated masses is more reflective of the commercial development on Main Street than the surrounding industrial buildings.

2. New construction should be contemporary in style yet compatible with surrounding historic structures. New construction should not mimic previous architectural styles in such a way that creates a false historical appearance.

- The new construction takes its cues from both the traditional commercial and industrial architecture but does not attempt to mimic previous architectural styles and would not be mistaken for a historic structure. The compatibility of the form is discussed above.

SCALE

1. New construction should maintain the existing human scale of historic residential and commercial neighborhoods. The inappropriate use of monumentally-scaled buildings that overwhelm pedestrians at the street level is strongly discouraged.

- The current design respects the human scale.

2. New additions and infill structures should incorporate human-scale elements such as storefronts and porches into their design.

- The incorporation of the entrances at the corners reinforces the interaction between people and the building but the long elevation on 20th street does not consistently provide that connection.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

1. New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures.

- The proposed build respects the four to five story height of the surrounding industrial buildings.

2. New structures should have the same number of stories as the majority of structures on the block.

- This guideline is addressed in the comment immediately above.

3. New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial and residential properties in historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing of more than 30 feet should be broken up by bays.

- The three bay pattern used to subdivide the long elevation on 20th Street and the stepped parapet line is similar in character to the commercial buildings on Main Street.

4. Typical massing patterns throughout City historic districts are simple and block-like; therefore, new structures should avoid the use of staggered setbacks, towers or elaborate balconies.

- The proposed massing features simple and block-like forms arranged with stepped setbacks.

MATERIALS, COLORS & DETAILS

1. New construction should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.

- This guideline does not apply in this instance of new construction as no historic architecture is present on the site. The proposed new construction does not engage the single historic building on Grace Street.

2. Missing building elements should be replaced with new elements compatible in size, scale and material to the original elements without creating a false historical appearance.

- This guideline is not applicable as the project does not involve any historic structures.

3. Materials used in new construction should be compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.

- The applicant proposes to use brick cladding with cementitious panels on the upper floors, and standing seam metal awnings. The dominate pattern in the area is for a single construction material. Actual appropriateness is verified when more specific details are provided for final review. For instance, windows will be required to have true or simulated divided lites as shown on pages 59-60 of the *Guidelines*. Windows in Old and Historic Districts are generally required to have wood sash or aluminum-clad wood sash. Storefront façade guidelines are covered on Page 46. Awnings are discussed on page 62 and seem intended to guide placement of awnings on existing historic buildings.

4. Paint colors for new additions should compliment those of the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district (see Painting Section starting on page 54).

- The colors used in the illustrations may be taken as a general indication of what the applicant intends and seem appropriate. Specific colors for exterior elements can be submitted for review and approval by Commission staff.

5. Generally, synthetic siding materials are strongly discouraged for use in City Old & Historic Districts. If used on a new rear addition, and not visible from a prominent public right-of-way, these materials may be allowed in limited cases but approval by the Commission is always required.

- This guideline does not apply to the proposed design.

PARKING

The structured interior parking is accessed through entry points on Franklin and 20th streets.