

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
September 27, 2016 Meeting**

16. **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. The proposal returned to the Commission for final review on August 23, 2016 with some minor changes to the design. At the August meeting, the Commission deferred the application to provide the applicant with the opportunity to address the Commission's concerns with the compatibility of the proposed design. Specifically the Commission requested the applicant address the following concerns:

- Breaking up the massing horizontally
- The overall width of the structure
- Strengthening the cornice and foundation lines
- Minimizing the connection to the Temple Beth Ahabah
- Reviewing the bay structure

- Minimizing the prominence of the western window

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Staff believes the applicant has been responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission during previous reviews and additional concerns raised by the public. Below staff has outlined the changes to the design and how the project has responded to Commission concerns.

**Massing:**

The *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* note that building form should be compatible with that found elsewhere in the immediate area and that building form refers to the specific combination of massing, size, symmetry, proportions, projections, and roof shapes that lend identity to a building (pg. 50, Form #1). The Commission has expressed concern that the scale of the structure was too large and should be broken up in order to be more compatible with structures in the district. The applicant has broken up the massing by reconfiguring the façade into three bays. The center bay will remain in its existing location as it is dictated by the existing stairs. The western bay will be set back 8", and the east bay will be set back 4" from the center bay. The recessing of the side bays helps to break up the structure's massing.

**Width:**

The *Guidelines* note that new designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. The proposed façade will be 63'-8" in width. In the immediate blocks in the district, the width of buildings range from 22.5 feet to 141 feet. There are several apartment buildings of a similar height and width at 68 feet immediately across the street from the subject building. Staff finds the applicant has precedent in the local district for the proposed building width.

**Cornice and Foundation Lines:**

The *Guidelines* state that new construction should incorporate human-scale elements which include cornices and porches (pg. 50, Form #3). The applicant has proposed a stone cornice to cap the building. In addition, the applicant has proposed a brick base at a height to match the porch height of the adjacent Joel House. The proposed textured brick base in a running bond pattern with alternating rows of brick protruding is designed to be differentiated from the brick wall above. Staff finds the applicant has successfully incorporated the human scale elements of the cornice and foundation line as requested by the Commission.

**Connection to the Sanctuary Structure:**

The *Guidelines* note that additions should be as inconspicuous as possible (pg. 50, Siting #1) and should not cover or destroy original architectural elements (pg.

51, Materials & Colors #1). The additions that are a part of this project are the glass connectors to the Joel House and the Sanctuary. The Commission expressed concerns regarding the prominence of the connection to the Sanctuary. In response, the applicant has eliminated the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor overhang and has moved the connection back to be located behind the existing pilaster on the Sanctuary building. The proposed changes minimize the impact of the glass structure on the Sanctuary building.

**Bay Structure:**

The Commission had some concerns that the proposal did not incorporate the traditional three bay pattern that is typical of the building form of the residential structures in the district. The applicant is proposing to divide the façade into three bays with the two outer bays being recessed.

**Western Window:**

The Guidelines note that the size, proportion, and spacing pattern of door and windows openings on new construction should be compatible with patterns established within the district (pg. 53, #2). The majority of the windows on the façade are designed to include symbols important to the Jewish faith and therefore do not incorporate a traditional fenestration pattern. The applicant has included traditional details to articulate the windows include metal sills and surrounds. The Commission had concerns regarding the scale of the western window which the applicant acknowledge was not a part of the symbolism and was used to balance the curved building entrance. In response to the Commission's concerns, the applicant has reduced the scale of the window by 1/3 and has modified the design on the western elevation to be more rectilinear which is consistent with the shape of windows found in the district.

**Other Changes to the Plans:**

In addition to the changes noted above, the applicant is proposing a darker tan brick than was previously proposed to further differentiate the structure from the Sanctuary building. Additional, the applicant is proposing to incorporate vertical metal elements.

**Staff recommends approval of the project.** 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 to respond to all of the concerns raised by the Commission during its August

23, 2016 review. 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.

It is the assessment of staff that 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.