

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
July 28, 2015 Meeting**

7. **CAR No. 15-092** (D. Kleyman) **511-511 ½ N. 26th Street**
Church Hill North Old and Historic District

Project Description: **Construct new 4 unit multi-family house**

Staff Contact: **K. Chen**

The applicant requests approval to construct a 4-unit multi-family house on two vacant lots in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The proposed building is a Transitional structure with a front porch, an inset entrance on the left (north) elevation, and a 2-story, rear porch.

The proposed building will be situated between two new infill houses that front N. 26th Street and appear to have been constructed prior to the designation of the district in 2007. The structure will be a total of 32'-3 ½" in height. It will have side yard setbacks of 5' 0" on the south and 6'-1" on the north, and front yard setback of 15'-0".

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. 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.

SITING

1. *Additions should be subordinate in size to their main buildings and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating additions at the rear of on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

2. *New residential infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block. The minimum setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall. In cases 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 front yard setback of 15' appears to be in keeping with the front yard setbacks of the historic houses on the block. The house to the south, built in 2007, is setback 20'-10" and the house to the north, built in 2005, is setback 29'-8" – considerably further back than the historic setback.

3. *New buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site.*

The primary façade of the new house will face 26th Street, the most prominent street bordering the site. The entrances to the rear units will be located on the north side of the building.

FORM

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

The form of the new construction is a two-story, four-bay traditional form with a full-façade front porch with Tuscan columns. The building is set on a low foundation and has a steeply pitched 12/6 front gable roof. The entry doors are in adjacent bays. The predominate pattern found on the block is one of three-bay, two-story construction with a variety of roof forms – shed, shallow gable, and a mansard roof with front gables. All of the houses have front porches, most of which are approached by steps.

The placement of the entry doors is an atypical pattern. There are two double houses on the block and both have the entry doors at opposite ends of the façade with windows in the center bays. The steeply pitched roof line is also atypical for the block where the majority of the existing houses either have shed roofs or shallow gables.

2. *New residential construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic residential construction in the district.*

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of the neighborhood.

3. *New residential construction and additions should incorporate human-scale elements such as cornices, porches and front steps into their design. In Richmond, porches were historically an integral part of residential design and provide much of the street-level architectural character of Richmond's historic districts.*

The proposed building's design calls for a front porch which lends human-scale elements to the building's design.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

1. *New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.*

The proposed building will be a total of 32'-3 ½" in height. The ca. 2007 house to the south (509 ½) is approximately 28'-8" in height and is taller than its historic neighbors. The ca. 2005 house to the north (513) is approximately 24'-11" in height and more closely aligned with its historic neighbors. Consideration should be given to reducing the pitch of the front gable roof to reduce the overall height of the building.

2. *New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in surrounding historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. For example, full-block-long row house compositions are rare in Richmond. New residential buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.*

The proposed building design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district.

3. *The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.*

The cornice height of the proposed structure is approximately 23' compared to 21' at 509 ½ and 19'-6" at 513, neither of which relates to the adjacent historic houses.

MATERIALS & COLORS

1. *Additions should not obscure or destroy original architectural elements.*

This standard is not applicable.

- 2. Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.*

The applicant proposes smooth fiber cement siding with a 7" reveal, parged CMU foundation, brick porch piers with wood lattice panels, tongue-and-groove porch flooring, painted Richmond rail, fiber cement fascia boards with Fypon corbels, black EPDM porch roof, a slate shingle main roof facing the street with a shingle clad gable roof to the rear, round front porch columns with "Tuscan" base and cap, 4-panel fiberglass front door with two-lights in the top and a 2-light transom above, rear fiberglass patio doors, and 2-over-2 MW Jefferson 300-series double-hung windows with simulated-divided-lights. The two-story rear porch will have brick piers, square posts and Richmond rail.

There are transom windows on the north and south elevations that are not traditional forms found in historic districts. The four-panel door with 2 upper lights is also an atypical feature.

- 3. Paint colors for new additions should complement the historically appropriate colors used on the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the district.*

The applicant has proposed *HardiePlank* finished in "Harris Cream," which is similar to "Classic Yellow" found on the CAR paint color palette. The applicant is proposing white for all trim, doors and windows.

- 4. Vinyl, asphalt, and aluminum siding are not permitted for use in City Old and Historic Districts. Other synthetic siding materials with a smooth, untextured finish may be allowed in limited cases, but approval by the Commission is always required.*

The proposed building design calls for smooth fiber cement siding, fiberglass doors, cellular PVC windows, and asphalt shingles at the rear.

- 5. Rooftop mechanical equipment should be located as discretely as possible to limit visibility. In addition, appropriate screening should be provided to conceal equipment from view. When rooftop railings are required for seating areas or for safe access to mechanical equipment, the railings should be as unobtrusive as possible, in order to minimize their appearance and visual impact on the surrounding district.*

This standard is not applicable.

Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions. The proposed infill project appears generally to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines*. While the form of the proposed structure is similar to designs approved numerous times for infill construction in the

broader Church Hill North District, it is not compatible with the historic context of the immediate block. Staff takes issue with the proposed transom windows located on the sides of the structure which are not an historic design. Staff feels that the lack of full windows on the side elevations represents a missed opportunity and is an unusual feature compared to similar but historic houses. Staff also finds that pitch and height of the roof on the façade is not compatible with the closest historic properties.

Staff recommends that approval of the project be conditioned on the following:

- That the transom windows on the sides of the structure be replaced with windows that match the proposed 2/2 sash windows,
- That all windows be true-divided light or simulated-divided light,
- That the four-panel door with two upper lights be replaced with a solid, six-panel door, and
- That the doors on the façade be placed in the outside bays with windows in the center to match the pattern of double-houses on the block, and
- That the front roof pitch be reduced from 12/6 to a shallower roof pitch that is compatible with the historic roof pitches.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, if the owner accepts the conditions above, is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 114.930.7(c) of the City Code, and 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.