



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Commission of Architectural Review

4. COA-121954-2022	Final Review	Meeting Date: 12/20/2022
Applicant/Petitioner	Colin Elliott	
Project Description	Install a front metal fence and gate.	
Project Location		
Address: 2915 Monument Ave		
Historic District: Monument Avenue		
High-Level Details: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The applicant proposes to install a front metal fence and gate, similar in style to their immediate neighbors at 2917 Monument. Monument Avenue homes do not historically have front yard fences. 		
Staff Recommendation	Partial Approval	
Staff Contact	Samantha Lewis, Samantha.lewis@rva.gov, 804-646-5207	
Previous Reviews	None	
Conditions for Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approval of the front handrails Denial of the front yard fence and gates that surround the front garden area. 	

Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards for Site Improvements	<i>When considering the design of new fences, remember that some districts, such as Church Hill, historically</i>	The property is located on Monument Avenue, a street that typically does not have front yard fences.

p. 77, #12	<i>featured some modest brick terraced areas in front yards, while some other districts, such as Monument Avenue and West Grace Street, historically did not. In the event of a front yard landscaped area, the design should seek simplicity, rather than elaboration.</i>	
Standards for Site Improvements p. 78, #3	<i>If not original to a site, new street-front fences, walls, and gates should be compatible with the historic structure in design, materials, and location, and should be based on physical or documentary evidence from the site.</i>	<p>A fence at this property is not original to the site. In addition, staff notes that a front yard fence is not compatible with the larger location based on physical and documentary evidence from the site which is detailed below. <u>Staff recommends denial of a front yard fence and gate that surrounds the front garden area.</u></p> <p>Applicant has expressed the fence would include handrails from the top of the property steps to the sidewalk. Staff notes that the material is similar in size, height, and color as other stair handrails in the historic district. The handrail design is simple and reflects the character of the district without being a copy of an historic element. Furthermore, this type of handrail is generally something that Staff can administratively approve.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approval of handrails that border the main property steps.</u></p> <p>The application states that the proposed fencing is for safety reasons. Staff notes that dwellings on Monument Avenue that feature steeply graded front yards and front patios often feature railings around the patios and not the entire sloped front yard. The installation of “fencing” or handrails around the front patio <i>only</i> could be an appropriate solution that would address safety concerns and historic precedent (See figures 4&5).</p>

Additional Analysis

Monument Avenue was laid out as a privately planned Grand Avenue in 1887. The Lee Statue was erected in 1890 and landowners planned to build great homes along this avenue. However, the Panic of 1893 delayed

these grand plans, and the first homes along Monument Avenue were built in 1901. Drawing information about the history of private fences from a William and Mary dissertation paper written by Lisa Brenner Bishop in 2000, one can see that the development of Monument Avenue and the history and use of the fence, or lack thereof, is closely related.

At the time Monument Avenue was beginning to take shape, traditional Victorian era landscape architecture norms were changing. The mid-nineteenth century Victorian anxiety and fears over a rapidly changing social and political world saturated much of the century. This led to the idea of using a fence as a way to keep those social changes in check, especially when it concerned the family home. At the turn of the century the fence once favored in both urban and sub-urban areas began to take a different form in the landscape. Edward P. Powell suggested in his 1901 book, *Hedges, Windbreaks, Shelters, and Live Fences for Country and Suburban Homes* that a natural material be used in place of hardscape fences. He brings back the idea of the hedgerow as a fencing material. Landscape architect Frank J. Scott, a student of AJ Downing, wrote a vision for the ideal suburban street in his 1870 book *Beautification of Suburban Home Grounds*. Scott envisions a landscape that contains a one-foot-high curbing and houses sited several feet above the sidewalk with a sloping front yard. This combination provides the physical separation of the family from the public rights of way. This landscape form is enough of a 'fence' to maintain privacy, and this philosophy was adopted by many owners, builders, and landscapers at the turn of the century.

Looking at Monument Avenue with this background information about the use or disuse of private fences, many properties meet the description of the idealized street given by Scott. 2915 Monument Ave is no exception. Monument Avenue's development follows the same timeline as the fence mostly fell out of favor with society. The first homes were constructed along the 1600 block in 1901 and do not have fences. As Monument Avenue progressed westward and the century continued, there continued to be a lack of front yard fences. This development pattern was intentional. The historic district nomination form writes about "...a remarkable pattern of high-quality residences built with great respect for the context of those that came before and those that would follow. A regular rhythm occurred over the course of sixty years...Owners followed the lead of earlier builders, repeating enough of the setback, rooflines, building materials, and undulations to create a harmonious row without monotony."

Monument Avenue's lack of fences is remarkable because of the time period in which it was developed. Fears about social and political change had eased, lessening the need for a fence. That is not to say that landscape architects did not reject fences. Some, such as Scott and Frank, felt that if the need was great, then appropriate material must be chosen. 2915 Monument Avenue has no historical evidence of any type of fence. Further, Monument Avenue as a whole did not develop with front yard fences. Given this evidence, historic and current, it would be inappropriate to place one there today.

Figures



Figure 1. Façade photo



Figure 2. 2900 Monument looking East toward Boulevard

Figure 3. 1924-1925 Sanborn map

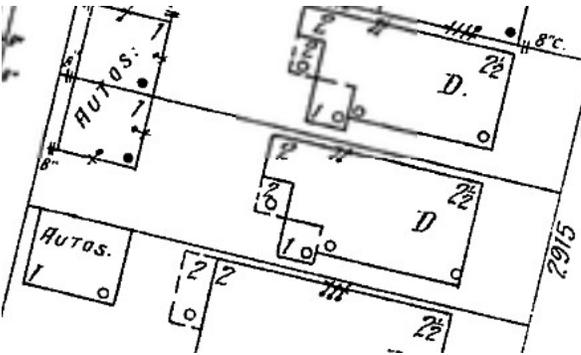


Figure 4. 2712 Monument, railings around front patio.



Figure 5. 2225 Monument, front patio with railings.