

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
May 24, 2016 Meeting**

15. **CAR No. 16-078** (C. Borum)

**105 North 28<sup>th</sup> Street  
St. John's Church Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Install porch railing on existing front porch and install a storm door to the front door.**

**Staff Contact:** **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests approval to install a handrail on the front porch and stairs and install a storm door on the front door of a home in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District. This application is the result of enforcement activity as the applicant installed the porch railing without obtaining a certificate of appropriateness. The applicant has installed a vinyl railing system with turned pickets around the porch and proposes handrails down the stairs. The proposed storm door is an aluminum door with a single division.

**Staff recommends partial approval of the project with conditions.**

**Railings:** The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* note that railings are important character-defining features of historic buildings and the proportions of these railings are a significant contributing feature to the appearance of both the individual structure and the character of the entire neighborhood (pg. 46, Porches and Porch Details #46). Staff cannot recommend approval of the currently installed railing system as the materials and design are not appropriate for the Old and Historic District. The proposed turned pickets are inappropriate for the porch as their proportions are not consistent with turned balustrades in the District as the proposed pickets are narrower and taller. Additionally, the use of vinyl is inappropriate as it does not effectively convey the appearance of wood as is recommended by the *Guidelines* (pg. 55, #7) due to its sheen. For these reasons, staff recommends denial of the proposed railings.

The *Guidelines* note that when replacing a railing where no documentary evidence survives, look for photographic or physical evidence (pg. 67, #7). Staff was unable to locate a photograph of the property that illustrated a porch railing, but staff did observe ghosting on the wall of a wider pier than the installed railing system. The *Guidelines* state that when designing a new railing when there is no documentary evidence of the railing balusters in traditional Richmond rail are appropriate (pg. 46, Porches and Porch Details #2). The Commission has given staff the authority to approve wooden Richmond rail and simple metal handrails where none exist administratively. Staff recommends the applicant submit an application for railings on the porch and the stairs which meet the requirements to receive administrative approval by staff.

**Storm Door:** The *Guidelines* note that storm door divisions and color should match the original door. The existing front door is a single lite door which matches the single division of the proposed storm door. Staff recommends approval of the storm door with the condition that the door be painted to match the front door.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the above noted condition, is partially consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation in Section 30-930.7(b) 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 the code.