

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
March 24, 2015 Meeting**

13. **CAR No. 15-037** (P. McClane)

**4217 Hermitage Road
Hermitage Road Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

**Construct new academic building
Demolish existing dwelling and garage
Site Improvements**

Staff Contact:

K. Chen

In December 2009, the applicant appeared before the Commission to seek Conceptual Review of a Master Plan for the New Community School campus. The Master Plan was presented as a document to be used to “determine and guide future development.” The 2009 application did not include a request for the implementation of any specific portion of the plan and the applicant was informed that at such time as any component of the plan is ready to be implemented, the applicant would need to return to the Commission for review at a more detailed level. The main components of the Master Plan included:

- the creation of a central quad as an organizing element of the campus;
- the demolition of 4213 Hermitage Road, a non-contributing building, and the garage behind 4215 Hermitage Road, a contributing building;
- the relocation of a cottage on the property which stood outside of the Old and Historic District;
- improvements to site circulation including the consolidation of three driveways fronting Hermitage Road and re-establishing a road on the southwest side of the property; and
- additions to the Carriage House located to the rear of Massey Hall, 4211 Hermitage Road

Commission discussion, as reflected in the minutes, expressed no concern with the demolition of a non-contributing building as long as it was replaced with a new architecturally acceptable building. There were letters and emails from community members expressing concern over the demolition of the contributing garage. The consolidation of the driveways and the creation of a quad were found to be acceptable and the applicant was cautioned that additions to the Carriage House would be challenging because of the historic character of the building. Because the application was submitted for Conceptual Review only, no formal action was taken.

The application before the Commission at this time is for the construction of a new academic building. The new academic building is a two-story, five bay edifice constructed of yellow brick and stucco with a hipped roof clad with red dimensional shingles. The placement of the new building will terminate a central green space that acts as an organizing feature within the campus. The construction of the new building will necessitate the demolition of the existing non-contributing building at 4217 Hermitage Road and a contributing garage to the rear of 4215 Hermitage Road. Site improvements under consideration include the consolidation of three circular driveways facing Hermitage Road into a single driveway and parking; the installation of a new metal fence with yellow brick piers fronting Hermitage Road; and new loop road in an abandoned road bed in the southwest quadrant of the property.

The applicant is seeking final approval. Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the “Standards for New Construction: Commercial” on pages 50 and 51 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 guideline is not applicable.

- 2. New commercial infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard development 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.*

Located at the northwest corner of the school property, the new building will maintain the approximately 83-foot front yard setback established by the adjacent school buildings. The buildings on the west side of Hermitage Road are set on uniform lots that are 100-feet in width with side yard setbacks of approximately 25-feet. The side yard setback on the north side of the new building will be approximately 28-feet to allow for a sufficient landscape buffer between the new building and the adjacent house at 4219 Hermitage Road.

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

The new building will have an entrance facing Hermitage Road. There will be a second entrance on the south elevation of the building that will open onto the central green space.

- 4. For large-scale commercial parking, parking within the building is strongly encouraged. If a building includes parking within it, vehicle entry doors should be located on non-primary elevations.*

The majority of the parking on the campus is located on the west side of the campus outside of the Old and Historic District. Ten new parking spaces will be introduced on the east side of the property as part of the consolidation of three existing driveways into a single driveway that extends from 4213 to 4217 Hermitage Road. The driveway and parking will be screened from the street by a metal fence with yellow brick piers and landscaping.

FORM

- 1. New commercial 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 building. Form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

The Hermitage Road Historic District began as an enclave of country estates built for Richmond's wealthy and prominent families and evolved into an upper and middle-class suburban neighborhood. Residential architecture accounts for the majority of the properties in the district. The district represents the full range of domestic architectural styles and building forms popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it illuminates the full range of expression of these styles. The building forms along Hermitage Road are predominantly rectangular in plan, center-passage, and double-pile dwellings of three and five bays with hipped or side-gable roofs. Ranging from one and a half to three stories high, two story dwellings are most common and account for over half of the houses on Hermitage Road.

The proposed new building is two-stories in height and composed of three masses with a centrally located entrance with a balcony on the second floor level and flanking 2/1 windows. The mass is covered by a moderately sloped hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves. The building has a grand residential scale and character that is compatible with the other buildings in the district. The new building extends nearly the full depth of the lot and is broken by a hyphen near the center to reduce the visual impact of the length of the building from Hermitage Road.

2. *New commercial construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby history commercial buildings in the district.*

The new building maintains the existing human scale of the district by incorporating materials and design elements found in the other buildings on the campus, especially Massey Hall, and in the district. The features of the building are residential in scale and character and compatible with the residential and human scale character of the district.

3. *New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.*

The new building incorporates a centrally located entrance with a balcony on the second floor level. The entrance is approached by a generous sidewalk and steps that lead from the driveway to the entrance. A human scale and transparent metal fence with brick piers shields the driveway from the public sidewalk.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

1. *New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.*

The proposed new building is two-stories in height which is compatible with the other buildings in the district and on the New Community School campus. The building to the south is 2 ½ stories in height and set on a raised earthen podium. The house to the north is also set on a raised land form and is 1 ½ stories in height.

2. *New commercial construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial buildings in Richmond's historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. When designing new commercial buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face, the design should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.*

The proposed new building reflects the vertical orientation of the buildings in the district through the use of a ranked fenestration pattern with an emphasis on the

central entrance bay. Like many buildings in the district, the proposed new building is capped by a hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves. Vertical chimneys, as seen on the proposed new building, are a prevalent feature found in the district.

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

The proposed cornice height of the new building is approximately 23'-5" above grade. The cornice height of the building to the south is approximately 20 feet and it is set on a three foot berm.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This guideline is not applicable.

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

The proposed new building will be constructed of yellow brick and stucco with off-white cast stone decorative elements. The hipped roof will be covered with a red, fiberglass, dimensional shingle. The windows are white, aluminum clad, 2/1 sash with simulated divided lights. The colors and materials are a direct reference to Massey Hall at the south end of the property. The proposed design and composition will help to unify and anchor the two ends of the campus.

3. *Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

The proposed color palate of red shingles, yellow brick and off-white accents are historically appropriate and compatible with Massey Hall, the dominate building on the campus.

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.*

This guideline does not apply.

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.

The rooftop mechanical equipment will be located at the west end of the new building and will be screened by louvers located between four chimneys.

6. *For larger-scale projects that involve communal garbage collection (such as dumpsters or other large collection device), these garbage receptacles should be located away from the primary elevation or elevations of the building (preferably to the rear) and screened from view.*

Facilities for garbage collection are accommodated elsewhere on the campus and are not part of this proposal.

Site Improvements

The application calls for the consolidation of three circular driveways in front of 4217, 4215, and 4213 into a single asphalt driveway that extends the width of the property in front of these three buildings. The new driveway will reduce the number of curb cuts on Hermitage Road from 6 to 2. There will be ten parking spaces on the west side of the driveway that will be broken into three parking areas. The driveway and parking will be screened from the public right-of-way by a metal fence with yellow brick piers. An existing single brick pier will be removed to accommodate the new fencing. The existing pier is randomly located and not linked to another landscape feature. A new loop road will be introduced on the southwest side of the campus and utilize an existing, abandoned road bed. The proposed site improvements are compatible with the Standards for Site Improvements found on pages 73-74 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*.

Demolition

The construction of the new academic building and the creation of the central green space as proposed necessitate the demolition of two buildings on the New Community School campus. Demolition is considered an option of last resort for contributing historic properties, and is only permitted under extreme circumstances. The building at 4217 is listed as non-contributing and the garage is listed as a contributing resource in the Hermitage Road National Register Historic District.

4217 Hermitage Road (127-6076-0053) c. 1952 School Building Non-contributing This is a one-story, four-bay, Ranch style rectangular building clad in six-to-one Common Bond brick. It has a side gable, asphalt shingle roof with one exterior-end chimney. The entrance is marked by a paneled off-center entry door on the principal elevation. The windows are a three-part double-hung and two 8/8 double-hung with decorative shutters on the principal elevation, and a three-

part double-hung with a 2/2 double-hung on the secondary elevation. Stylistic elements include wrought iron railings at the entry doors. It sits on a deep rectangular lot with a deep setback.

4215 Hermitage Road (127-6076-0052) c. 1920s School Building This is a two-and-a-half-story, This property includes a contributing gable roofed brick garage.

Under the provisions of Sec. 32-930.7, the Commission shall approve requests for demolition when there are no feasible alternatives to the proposed demolition; the building is deemed not to be a contributing part of the historic character of the Old and Historic District; or the building has deteriorated beyond the point of feasible rehabilitation. The Commission often considers a demolition in the context of what will be lost and what is proposed as a replacement. The garage, while contributing, is a utilitarian building with no particular style or features relating it to the architecture of the nearby historic structures. If retained, it would not relate well to the new building or the desire to establish a campus green as a strong organizing design element for the buildings repurposed from residential to institutional use.

Staff recommends approval of the project. The proposed infill project appears generally to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines*. It is the assessment of staff that the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 114.930.7(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.