

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
June 28, 2016 Meeting**

19. **CAR No. 16-077** (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:**

**K. Chen**

The applicant requests approval to expand the education building for the Congregation Beth Ahabah and create connections of 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 applicant is seeking **Conceptual Review** for this project. Conceptual review is covered under Sec. 30-930.6(d) of the City Code: *The commission shall review and discuss the proposal with the applicant and make any necessary recommendations. Such Conceptual Review shall be advisory only.* Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the Standards for New Construction on pages 44 and 45 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* and the resulting comments follow.

The Commission's Guidelines are crafted for residential and commercial projects and do not address institutional buildings which may be more monumental and specialized in function and design. This project is also a hybrid between new construction and an addition. In reviewing this project staff looked to the National

Park Service guidance for *New Additions in Densely-Built Environments*, which state:

In built-up urban areas, locating a new addition on a less visible side or rear elevation may not be possible simply because there is no available space. In this instance, there may be alternative ways to help preserve the historic character. One approach when connecting a new addition to a historic building on a primary elevation is to use a hyphen to separate them. A subtle variation in material, detailing and color may also provide the degree of differentiation necessary to avoid changing the essential proportions and character of the historic building.

A densely-built neighborhood such as a downtown commercial core offers a particular opportunity to design an addition that will have a minimal impact on the historic building. Often the site for such an addition is a vacant lot where another building formerly stood. Treating the addition as a separate or infill building may be the best approach when designing an addition that will have the least impact on the historic building and the district. In these instances there may be no need for a direct visual link to the historic building. Height and setback from the street should generally be consistent with those of the historic building and other surrounding buildings in the district. Thus, in most urban commercial areas the addition should not be set back from the façade of the historic building. A tight urban setting may sometimes even accommodate a larger addition if the primary elevation is designed to give the appearance of being several buildings by breaking up the façade into elements that are consistent with the scale of the historic building and adjacent buildings.

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. The proposed addition reinforces and restores a portion of the traditional street wall that was lost through the earlier demolition of row houses and the installation of a curb cut and driveway. The curb cut and driveway will be removed as part of this project. The proposed addition faces Franklin Street and creates a new, prominent entrance fronting on the street. Currently, there are multiple entry points to buildings and no accessible connections that link the Temple, the Education building, and the Joel House. The accessible entrances are currently at the rear of the property.

The Education building is currently a two-story, modernist, red, brick box that breaks the horizontal continuity of the street face. The proposed addition will increase the height of the Education building to three stories, through a false façade, which will reinforce the street face and the horizontal organization of the rooflines of the row houses and the cornice line of the Temple portico. The massing of the addition is a block like form that is organized into vertical elements through the brick joinery and broken by a unique fenestration pattern. The glazed entrance and fenestration pattern are derived from symbolism that is important to the Jewish faith. The addition will be constructed of brick

that matches the tone and material of the Temple, and it will incorporate metal accents in the entrance and windows. The connectors between the expanded education building and the Temple to the east and the Joel House to the west are recessed clear glass hyphens. The massing is a bridge between the adjacent, residential scale of the row houses and the monumental form of the Temple. The addition reads as a separate or infill building with a distinct architectural character of its own. The addition is differentiated from the Neo-classical Temple to the east which is the center piece of the Beth Ahabah campus.