



Staff Report
City of Richmond, Virginia



Commission of Architectural Review

3. COA-141065-2024	Final Review	Meeting Date: 1/23/2024
Applicant/Petitioner	Teri Rettman	
Project Description	Replace a non-original, wooden balustrade with a composite material.	
Project Location		
Address: 3105 W. Franklin Street		
Historic District: Monument Avenue		
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant proposes to replace a non-original, deteriorating balustrade above the front porch of a Colonial Revival Style, brick duplex circa 1929.</p> <p>The applicant is proposing to replace the wooden balustrade with a composite material. Entire replacement of the extant balustrade will require any reconstruction to meet the height required by the Virginia Building Code.</p> <p>Based on available documentation, it appears that the front porch has undergone several alterations over the years, specifically to the columns and cornice.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Partial Approval	
Staff Contact	Alex Dandridge, alex.dandridge@rva.gov, (804) 646-6569	
Previous Reviews	None	
Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff is Recommending denial of:</p> <p>Increasing the height of the balustrade</p> <p>Staff is Recommending approval of:</p> <p>Replacing the extant front porch balustrade with Intex railing with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement balusters be the same height and dimension as the existing balusters. Existing dimensions of the balustrade and final dimensioned drawings be submitted to staff for Administrative review and approval. • The newel posts be flat and not be paneled. • The newel posts be no taller than the height of the ghosting on the face of the building. • To meet the building code, a simple metal rail be installed above the new balustrade for the additional required height. Final design to be submitted to staff for Administrative review and approval. 	

Staff Analysis

Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
<p>Substitute Materials, pg. 61</p>	<p><i>There are three generally accepted circumstances under which substitute materials may be appropriate and economical replacements:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Unavailability of Historic Materials</i> 2. <i>Unavailability of Skilled Craftsman</i> 3. <i>Replacement of poor-quality materials.</i> 	<p>Most of the original material is either not present or is showing signs of significant decay. The porch balustrade is situated above the public right-of-way. The replacement Intex material will resemble the visual appearance of wood from this distance and will better resist rot in this area that is exposed to water, as there is not an overhang or covering.</p> <p>New growth wood available today does not have the same physical characteristics as old growth timber that was likely used in the porch's original construction. New growth timber available today is more susceptible to decay and pests due to its widely spaced growth rings.</p>
<p>Building Elements, Porch and Entrance Repair, pg. 71</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Elements that are damaged or loose should be repaired to match the detail of the existing original fabric.</i> 	<p>Based on images submitted by the applicant, the upper balustrade of the front porch shows significant deterioration in several areas. Historic images show that the upper balustrade did not originally feature the center newel post, which was added later.</p> <p>Ghosting on the face of the building suggests that the balustrade featured either taller newel posts, or that the newel posts had a taller cap. Staff was unable to find documentation that suggests that the balustrade has been replaced in its entirety.</p> <p>An image from 1990 indicates that the upper balustrade had a wood cap that appears to be like the one present on the existing lower balustrade.</p>
<p>Building Elements, Entrance and Porch Removal, Replacement and Reconstruction, pg. 71</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. <i>Do not remove or radically change entrances and porches important in defining the building's overall historic character. Front and side porches are architecturally more ornate than utilitarian back porches.</i> 5. <i>The entire porch should only be replaced if it is too deteriorated to repair or is completely missing; replacements should match the original as much as possible.</i> 6. <i>When restoring a railing or balustrade there may be difficulty in maintaining the original height while meeting current building code. Always consult with the building department.</i> 7. <i>When replacing a railing on a historic building which has lost its railing, the first step is to look for documentary evidence which records the appearance of that railing. If no documentary evidence survives, look for physical</i> 	<p>The existing balustrade appears to be damaged in several locations. For this reason, the applicant requests to replace the balustrade in its entirety.</p> <p>To meet the building code, the applicant proposes to raise the height of the reconstructed balustrade with taller turned balusters.</p> <p>The new balustrade will be 36" tall and the newel posts will be 40" tall. The extant newel posts are 31" tall, and the extant balustrade is 29" tall. The new balustrade will be increased by 7" and the newel posts by 9".</p> <p>The proposed design of the new balustrade is similar; however, the increased height creates a baluster design and dimension that are thinner than the existing ones.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the replacement balusters be the same height and dimension as the existing balusters to maintain the existing and historic proportions of the balustrade.</u></p> <p>In addition, the new design features paneled newel posts. Available documentation shows that the building has featured newel posts that are flat. <u>Staff recommends that the newel posts be flat and not be paneled.</u></p> <p>The <i>Guidelines</i> state that railing replacement should be based on documentary or physical evidence. Staff finds</p>

	<p>evidence (this may benefit from the help of a design professional).</p> <p>8. Do not strip entrances and porches of historic material and details that should be retained in any repair or partial replacement.</p> <p>9. Existing entrances or porches should not be removed when an historic structure has been reoriented to accommodate a new use.</p> <p>11. A primary entrance should not be altered to give an appearance that was not originally intended, such as adding a pediment to a simple vernacular entrance.</p>	<p>that the increased height of the balustrade is not in-keeping with the available documentation.</p> <p>A 1950's image from the City of Richmond's Assessor's Office demonstrates that the front porch originally had dentils and fluted Scamozzi columns. The assessor's card also lists that there was a porch repair in 1983. The scope of this repair is unknown.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the new newel posts be no taller than the height of the ghosting on the face of the building. Staff recommends final measurements be submitted for Administrative review and approval.</u></p> <p><u>Staff recommends that the balusters be the same height and dimension as the existing to maintain the existing and historic proportions of the balustrade. Final dimensioned-drawings be submitted to staff for review and approval.</u></p> <p><u>To meet the building code, staff recommends that rather than reconstructing a balustrade that is taller than the existing, that a simple metal rail be installed above the new balustrade for the additional required height. Final design to be submitted to staff for administrative review and approval.</u></p>
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It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, the application is consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation and New Construction outlined in Section 30-930.7 (b) and (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 the code.

Figures

Figure 1. Current façade of 3105 West Franklin Street.



Figure 2. Façade of 3105 West Franklin Street, 1990.



Figure 3. 3105 West Franklin Street, 1998. Balustrade above the front porch. Note, the balustrade did not feature a center newel post.



Figure 4. 3105 West Franklin Street, 1950's. Continuous balustrade above the front porch without the center newel post. While blurry, the original porch appears to have fluted Scamozzi columns and dentals.

