



Commission of Architectural Review

11. COA-187606-2026	Conceptual Review	Meeting Date: 7/28/2026
Applicant/Petitioner	Marisa Perez	
Project Description	Construct new single-family attached buildings on vacant lot	
Project Location		
Address: 215 N 29th St		
Historic District: St. John's Church		
High-Level Details: The applicant proposes the new construction of two attached single-family dwellings on a currently vacant parcel. The proposal subdivides the existing parcel into two lots and introduces a residential design with recessed primary entrances, vertically proportioned windows, a foundation with a parged finish, and fiber cement cladding. The dwellings front North 29th Street and occupy a prominent location adjacent to Libby Terrace Park, resulting in extended visibility of the south side elevation and rear elevation from the public right-of-way and public open space.		
Staff Recommendation	Conceptual Review	
Staff Contact	Yara Iwaz, Yara.Iwaz@RVA.gov, (804)646-6031	
Previous Reviews	N/A	
Staff Recommendations	Staff recommends the following for final review: - Refining of the south elevation to better reflect historic district precedents; consider incorporating projecting elements, side entrances, porches, recessed volumes, articulated roof forms, or similar architectural features that acknowledge the elevation's public visibility and reduce the appearance of a continuous wall plane - Additional architectural refinement of the rear elevation so that it better reflects the level of design attention typical of publicly visible elevations within the district - Align all window openings vertically on the south elevation and use consistent window proportions and sizes throughout that façade	

	• Simplify the cornice design and establish a more regular and consistent corbel dimension or alternative contemporary cornice treatment that better complements the overall façade composition • Indicate the location of all exterior mechanical equipment; HVAC units should be screened where visible from the public right-of-way and comply with zoning setback requirements. Final screening details be submitted for final review • Consider a brick veneer foundation in lieu of a parged foundation; final material specifications and colors should be submitted in final review • Coordinate with zoning requirements, and provide revised site plans identifying updated proposed lot sizes, lot coverage calculations for final review.
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Staff Analysis

Surrounding Context		
The subject property occupies a rectangular lot with its narrow frontage on North 29th Street and its long southern elevation facing Libby Terrace Park. Although the immediate parcels surrounding the site are currently vacant, the surrounding neighborhood establishes a well-defined residential character composed primarily of two-story frame dwellings with front porches, brick foundations, bracketed cornices, and hipped porch roofs. The site's orientation closely resembles the detached dwellings located along the west side of North 29th Street (206-214 N. 29th Street). Across North 29th Street, properties at 204-206 N. 29th Street feature recessed primary entrances like those proposed. Nearby corner and side-facing buildings (including 2901 E. Broad Street, 2822 E. Grace Street, 2917 E. Broad Street, 3001 E. Broad Street, and 311 N. 29th Street) demonstrate secondary corner elevations within the district that are treated as architecturally important façades through the use of projecting bays, side entrances, covered porches, articulated roof forms, and varied building volumes rather than uninterrupted wall planes. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps indicate that the site was occupied in 1905 by two detached dwellings, one featuring a full-width front porch. By 1925 these buildings had been removed, leaving the parcel vacant.		
Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards for New Construction: Height, Width, Proportion & Massing, page 47	1. <i>New residential construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.</i> 2. <i>New residential construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of other residential properties in surrounding historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. For example, full-block-long row house compositions are rare in Richmond. New residential buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.</i>	Height The two-story height is compatible with surrounding development and reflects the predominant scale found throughout this portion of the district. The narrow front façade proportions also generally relate to adjacent buildings. Staff finds the proposed overall height appropriate. <u>Staff recommends approval of the proposed building height as shown.</u>

Standards for new construction: corner properties – residential,pg.48	<i>1. Secondary elevations of corner properties should reference massing similar to other corner locations in the historic district.</i> <i>5. For residential corner properties, we strongly encourage the use of architectural elements that are typical of residential corner properties in Richmond's historic districts: porches that turn from primary to secondary elevations, corner towers, projecting bay windows, side entrances (including porticos, and shed roofs, where appropriate), side porches, lighting related to that on the primary elevation, and other similar treatments that treat the secondary corner elevation as an architecturally important elevation.</i>	<i>Side / Corner elevation</i> Although the property is not technically located on a street corner, its long south elevation functions as a highly-visible, public-facing elevation due to its direct relationship with the park. The building will be experienced from an extended public frontage comparable to a corner lot. Unlike historic examples throughout the district, the proposed side elevation consists primarily of a continuous wall plane with limited architectural articulation. District precedent demonstrates that highly visible side elevations commonly incorporate projecting bays, side porches, side entrances, recessed or projecting volumes, varied roof forms, and pedestrian-scaled architectural elements that reduce perceived mass and create visual interest. Examples include 2822 E. Grace Street, 2901 E. Broad Street, 2917 E. Broad Street, 3001 E. Broad Street, and 311 N. 29th Street. <u>Staff recommends significant refinement of the south elevation to better reflect historic district precedents. Consider incorporating projecting elements, side entrances, porches, recessed volumes, articulated roof forms, or similar architectural features that acknowledge the elevation's public visibility and reduce the appearance of a continuous wall plane.</u> Because of the building's visibility from the adjacent park, the rear elevation will also be a highly visible public elevation rather than a typical rear façade. A typical example exists at 2823 E. Broad St, which features a rear full-width porch and roof. The current design provides relatively limited articulation considering its visibility. <u>Staff recommends additional architectural refinement of the rear elevation so that it better reflects the level of design attention typical of publicly visible elevations within the district.</u>
Standards for new construction: corner properties – residential, pg.48	<i>4. Windows and doors on the secondary, corner elevation should be organized following the principals of the primary elevation: windows should be proportioned appropriately, aligned vertically, and arranged as though designing a primary elevation.</i>	<i>Windows</i> The primary façade presents a restrained contemporary composition with vertically proportioned, evenly spaced windows and recessed entries that are found in the district (608 N.24th Street as an example). However, windows on the south elevation are inconsistently aligned and vary in size without a clear organizing rhythm. Historic buildings throughout the district generally maintain vertically aligned openings with consistent proportions across highly visible elevations.

		<u>Staff recommends vertically aligning all window openings on the south elevation and using consistent window proportions and sizes throughout that façade.</u>
Standards For Rehabilitation, pg. 4	<i>(for the rehabilitation of historic structures and <u>new construction</u> in historic districts)</i> <i>3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.</i>	Cornice The proposed contemporary design is defined by its recessed entry composition. The proposed cornice introduces varying corbel dimensions that appear irregular and visually compete with the otherwise simplified architectural expression, particularly the corbels at the edges of the two buildings that are narrower in width. A more restrained termination would better reinforce the contemporary character of the façade while maintaining compatibility with surrounding historic buildings. Additionally, aligning the corbels with the outer edges of the window trim (therefore resulting in an alternating pattern in the corbel intervals) might better illustrate the cornice-window relationship. <u>Staff recommends simplifying the cornice design and establishing a more regular and consistent corbel dimension or alternative contemporary cornice treatment that better complements the overall façade composition.</u>
HVAC Equipment, pg. 68	<i>1. New units should be placed in side or rear yards so as to minimize their visual impact. Side yard units should be located as far away from the front of the building as possible.</i> <i>2. Rooftop units should be located so that they are minimally visible from the public right-of-way, and screening should be considered.</i> <i>3. HVAC equipment on the ground should be appropriately screened with fencing or vegetation.</i>	Mechanical equipment The submitted plans do not indicate the location of HVAC equipment or other exterior mechanical units. Because of the building's visibility from both North 29th Street and Libby Terrace Park, equipment placement will be an important component of the final review. <u>Staff recommends indicating the location of all exterior mechanical equipment. HVAC units should be screened where visible from the public right-of-way and comply with zoning setback requirements. Final screening details be submitted for final review.</u>
Standards for New Construction: Materials & Colors, page 47	<i>2. Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.</i>	Materials The proposed exterior materials (including fiber cement lap siding, composite trim, aluminum-clad windows with simulated divided lites, wood entry doors, aluminum gutters and downspouts, and wood or synthetic porch decking) are generally compatible with the character of the District and reflects materials commonly approved for new construction. Staff also finds the proposed TPO white roofing appropriate, as it will not be visible from the public right-of-way. However, staff notes that the proposed parged foundation is less characteristic of the immediate surroundings, where brick foundations are more

		prevalent among historic buildings. A brick veneer foundation would better reinforce the material character of the block and provide a stronger visual relationship to adjacent historic resources. <u>Staff recommends that the applicant consider a brick veneer foundation in lieu of a parged foundation. Final material specifications and colors should be submitted in final review.</u>
		Zoning The proposal subdivides the existing parcel into two lots and introduces attached dwellings. Staff notes that zoning comments identify potential noncompliance with R-6 lot coverage requirements and request additional information regarding proposed lot sizes. Staff further notes that modifications required to satisfy zoning could affect the overall footprint, setbacks, and building proportions. <u>Staff recommends the applicant coordinate with zoning requirements, and provide revised site plans identifying updated proposed lot sizes, lot coverage calculations for final review.</u>

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

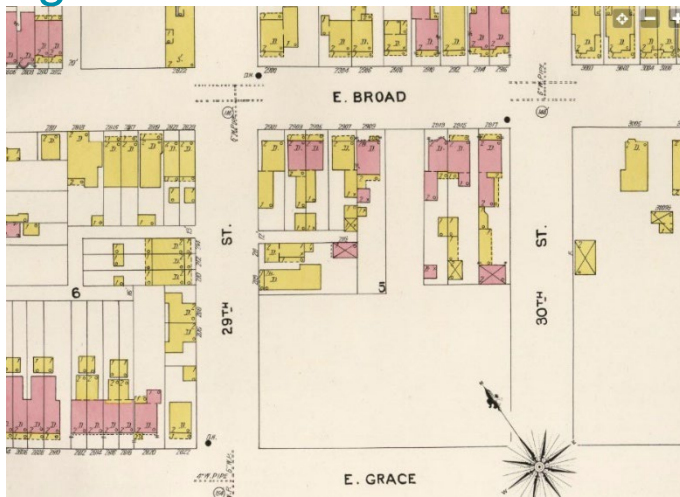


Figure 1: Sanborn Maps, 1905, showing two dwellings on subject site



Figure 2: Sanborn Maps, 1925, showing vacant site

Examples of side elevations in the district:



Figure 3: N 30th & Broad



Figure 4: 3000 E Broad



Figure 5: 2917 E Broad St



Figure 6: Corner of N 29th & Broad, adjacent to subject site



Figure 7: 2823 E Broad



Figure 8: Side elevations on N 22nd Street