

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
August 26, 2014 Meeting**

8. **CAR No. 13-111** (J.A. Homes LLC) **2813 M Street
Church Hill North Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Construct new quadraplex**

Staff Contact: **J. Hill**

The applicant requests approval to construct a new residence on a deep vacant lot located in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The 2800-block of M Street includes few surviving historic buildings but a number of infill residences have been constructed in recent years, some reviewed by the Commission and some dating from just before the designation of the area as a City Old and Historic District. The house is proposed on a lot between the single historic house on the block face and a house constructed in 2005, prior to OHD designation. The third house on the block face dates from 2012 and was reviewed by the Commission in 2010.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Commission staff's review of the project is based on 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.

Staff Findings based on Commission of Architectural Review Guidelines

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

New construction should be compatible with the historic features that characterize its setting and context. To protect the significance of the historic context, the new work should reference the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of its setting. However, new construction should be clearly discernible from the old to protect the authenticity of the historic district.

SITING

1. *Additions should be subordinate in size to the main structure and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating them at the rear or least visible side of the structure is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

2. *New infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block. The minimal setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.*

The proposed addition continues the slightly uneven setback pattern established by the adjacent dwellings. The plat plan indicates the front of the 8' deep porch is 4.83' from the sidewalk right-of-way. This appears to place the porch roughly in alignment with the other porches on the street and the face of the main building at 13' from the sidewalk. This assessment is somewhat at odds with the drawing provided for the Context Plan Study that shows the porch edge set behind the façades of the adjacent buildings that are shown without their porches.

3. *New structures should face the most prominent street bordering the site.*

The proposed addition faces M Street, the only street bordering the site.

FORM

1. *New 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 structure. Building form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

The four-bay design of the new quadraplex is one bay wider than the typical three-bay, Italianate residences in the area. The one-story front porch with a hipped roof is typical for the district. The design adheres closely to the traditional Italianate building form present throughout the district with the windows on the first floor of the façade slightly taller than those on the second floor. Staff are not clear on the detail between the two entrance doors on the façade and recommend that the design be simplified by continuing the siding between the two doors, with an appropriate light fixture (submitted for staff review and approval), if proposed at this location. There is more space between the top of the upper windows and the cornice, but it appears that this is becoming a signature of newer infill construction in the district.

SCALE

1. *New construction should maintain the existing human scale of historic residential and commercial neighborhoods. The inappropriate use of monumentally-scaled buildings that overwhelm pedestrians at the street level is discouraged.*

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of the neighborhood.

2. *New additions and infill structures should incorporate human-scale elements such as storefronts and porches into their design.*

The proposed design calls for a front porch that is consistent with residential porch forms found throughout the district.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION, & MASSING

1. *New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures.*

The proposed street elevation height of 30'-2" appears to be compatible with the heights of the other two-story houses in the block. The applicant has supplied an elevation drawing depicting the proposed dwelling within the context of the adjacent houses. One expects to see both one- and two-story houses in historic districts that developed over a long period of time.

2. *New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial and residential properties in historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing of more than 30 feet should be broken up by bays.*

The design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district.

3. *Typical massing patterns throughout city historic districts are simple and block-like; therefore, new structures should avoid the use of staggered setbacks, towers, or elaborate balconies.*

The applicant has proposed a solid, block-like design that is compatible with the massing of residential properties in the neighborhood.

MATERIALS, COLORS, & DETAILS

1. *New construction should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.*

This standard is not applicable.

2. *Missing building elements should be replaced with new elements compatible in size, scale, and material to the original elements without creating a false historical appearance.*

This standard is not applicable.

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

The applicant has not indicated any material specifications. The applicant should confirm that the drawings indicate a brick foundation, smooth lap fiber cement siding or lapped wood siding, wood porch posts and tongue-and-groove flooring, and metal roofing for the porches and EPDM or similar for the main roof of the building.

4. *Paint colors for new additions should complement those of the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

The applicant has not indicated final color selections. Staff recommend that the applicant submit colors drawn from the approved palette to CAR staff for administrative review and approval.

5. *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.*

The applicant has not indicated any material specifications. Staff recommend wood lap siding or cementitious siding with a smooth, untextured finish.

6. *Vinyl windows are strongly discouraged and rarely permitted.*

The applicant has not indicated any material specifications. Staff recommend the use of 2/2 double-hung wood sash or aluminum-clad wood sash.

The overall building form, scale, siting, massing, and materials appear to be compatible with the Church Hill North Old and Historic District, and staff recommends approval of the application provided that the applicant can confirm the requested information (setback and construction materials, detail between the front entrance doors) for the Commission's approval with the remainder of the requested items (exterior paint colors and light fixtures) for delegation to staff for administrative review and approval.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions noted above, the project is consistent with Richmond City Code Section 114-930.7 (c) Standards for New Construction, as well as the *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*, specifically the pages cited above, adopted by the Commission in accordance with Section 114-930.7 (g) of the Code.