

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
October 27, 2015 Meeting**

3. **CAR No. 15-125** (M.H. Libby, LLC) **2712 East Franklin Street
St. John's Church Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Replace porch decking and railing**

Staff Contact: **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests approval to rehabilitate the front porch of the structure by replacing the wooden deck boards with composite boards and replacing the existing metal pipe hand rail with a PVC railing. The structure is a Colonial Revival style home in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District. The applicant proposed to use AZEK deck boards which is a tongue-and-groove composite decking material that mimics the appearance of wood, but with increased longevity. The applicant is proposing porch decking which will match the width and thickness of the existing, deteriorated wooden non-tongue and groove boards. For the stair treads, the applicant proposed to install non-tongue and groove composite decking boards. For the handrails, the applicant is proposing to install an AZEK Reserve style railing system in Richmond rail design. The handrails will not have a glossy finish and will mimic the appearance of wood.

Staff recommends approval with conditions. The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* state that synthetic tongue-and-groove porch flooring may be a reasonable alternative to the use of wood tongue-and-groove decking (pg. 57). The Guidelines also notes that if in-kind materials are impractical, then substitute materials may be used (pg. 57). Staff recommends approval of the proposed composite decking, understanding that modern wood decking is much less durable than the first-growth timber that was historically used for porch flooring.

The current metal pipe handrails are not original to the structure, and there is no photographic documentation to indicate the type of railing if any that was originally present on the building. The *Guidelines* indicate that when designing a new railing for an existing building which has lost its railing and for which no documentary or physical evidence survives, the balusters in the traditional Richmond rail are appropriate (pg. 46). The *Guidelines* state that new features shall match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials (pg. 5). Though the proposed Richmond rail design is appropriate, staff recommends against approving the composite material for the handrails as the existing balustrade surrounding the porch on the home is constructed out of wood. The Commission may wish to consider if the composite handrails are an appropriate substitute for wooden handrails. The Commission

has granted staff the authority to review and approve simple metal handrails and simple wooden handrails in the manner of Richmond rail. Therefore, staff recommends the approval of the installation of handrails with the conditions that the handrails be metal or wooden, meet the requirements of the Commission's Guidelines for Administrative Approval Handrails and Porch Railings, and be reviewed and administratively approved by staff.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the conditions noted above, is consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation in Section 114-930.7(b) 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.