

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
January 23, 2018 Meeting**

12. **COA-028538-2018** (St. John's United Church) **1131 & 1137 West Grace Street
West Grace Street Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Construct a new multifamily building.**

Staff Contact: **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests approval to construct a new multifamily structure at the corner of North Lombardy and West Grace Streets in the West Grace Street Old and Historic District. The applicant is proposing a 6 story building which steps down to 5 stories on the West Grace Street elevation.

Surrounding Context: The subject parcels are currently developed with a parking lot which serves the adjacent church. To the west on West Grace Street, the lots are developed with two to three story brick row houses. The structures to the east on West Grace Street are three story brick apartment buildings and two story brick row houses. The structures at the corner of Monument Avenue and Lombardy Street have considerably more height and massing than the structures along West Grace Street. These structures include the eleven story William Bottomley designed Stuart Court Apartments at the northwest corner, a six story mixed use building at the southeast corner, and two churches on the remaining corners.

Previous Reviews: The applicant came before the Commission on September 26, 2017, requesting conceptual review and comments on the siting, form, height, width, proportion, and massing of the proposed structure. At that time, the applicant presented a massing model for a six story residential structure with an H-shape configuration, a front courtyard that did not extend to the ground plane, and a sixth story setback from the alley. The applicant did not provide details related to the materials or the articulation of the structure. Though in general the Commission did not express concerns regarding the massing and height of the structure, several members of the public shared concerns. The Commission recommended the structure step down in height towards West Grace Street and have a true entrance from West Grace Street.

In response to the Commission's concerns, the applicant returned for a second round of conceptual review on November 28, 2017, with a design that altered the massing by setting back the 6th story from West Grace Street rather than the alley while still maintaining the H-shape configuration. Additionally, the applicant provided an entrance from grade to the front courtyard which consists of a large staircase in response to the Commission's and staff's comments regarding the inaccessibility of the above grade courtyard. The Commission expressed concerns that the changes to the courtyard did not respond to the Commission's concerns.

regarding the presence of an above grade terrace. Several Commissioners expressed concerns that the structure was too tall and overwhelming, and they suggested the applicant consider lowering the building. The Commissioners also emphasized the importance of details and increasing the ornamentation including enhancing the cornice, include window heads and sills, and regulating the height of the limestone.

Changes to the Plans: In addition to providing details and renderings of the project, the applicant has modified the project as follows:

- Per the applicant's report, the building has been lowered. Though dimensions were not provided on the previous applications for comparison, the first story windows on the West Grace Street appear closer to grade. The total height of the structure is approximately 64'-4" from grade.
- The terrace level has been brought closer to grade. The courtyard will be accessible by a series of steps and landings.
- The elevations show an enhanced cornice and window heads and sills.
- The front porches have been extended to the upper story.
- The depth of 5-story portion has been reduced by 2 bays from 4 bays to 2 bays. The 6-story portion now begins approximately 21' from the front building wall.
- Storefront glazing has been removed from the entrance at the Lombardy elevation. Additionally, the panels between the 1st and 2nd story windows have been replaced with limestone.

Staff noted that the renderings provided do not accurately represent the elevations. Staff has reviewed the elevations not the structure as depicted in the renderings.

The applicant is seeking **Final Review** for this project. Commission staff reviewed the proposed construction through the lens of the "Standards for New Construction: Commercial" on pages 52-56 of the Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines utilizing the checklist below.

S=satisfies

D=does not satisfy

NA=not applicable

S **D** **NA**

New infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns in the surrounding district

The proposed front setback is approximately 18' and the side yard setbacks are 15'. Though the proposed setback is 2 feet less than the adjacent property, it is compatible with setbacks of structures on the block.

Where the adjoining buildings have different setbacks, the setback for the new building should be based on the historical pattern for the block

The property is a corner lot with one adjacent structure.

- New buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site**

As the property is a corner lot, the structure has been designed to address both West Grace and North Lombardy Streets. The applicant has revised the plans to include a courtyard which better engages with the street than previous submittals through a series of stairs and landings. The plans also include a primary entrance from North Lombardy Street and undulations and material changes to emphasize this entrance.

- Parking within the building is strongly encouraged with vehicle entry doors located on non-primary elevations**

The proposed parking will be within the building and accessible from the alley.

- New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the district. Form refers to the combination of massing, size, symmetry, proportions, projections and roof shapes that lend identity to a building.**

Staff finds the proposed H-shape is appropriate and appreciates how the design breaks up the building massing. The applicant has modified the terrace to bring this element closer to grade which is more consistent with the courtyards found in the district. The project also incorporates substantial multi-story porches on the façade which is characteristic of apartment buildings on the block.

Staff has concerns regarding the changes to the massing of the structure from the previous review. The Commission has expressed concerns that the structure is overwhelming and by bringing the 6-story mass closer to West Grace Street the larger mass is emphasized. Staff recommends the 5-story mass extend for the first 4 bays of the structure to be at the depth of the previous submittal.

- New construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level. Street level elevations should not have expanses of blank walls**

The applicant has provided pedestrian entrances and glazing on the West Grace Street and North Lombardy elevations.

- New storefronts should be compatible with historic storefronts within the district. Storefronts are traditionally defined by simple piers, large storefront windows, a cornice, a signboard and/or attached signage and awnings**

The applicant has incorporated storefront glazing on West Grace and North Lombardy Street. As this is a residential block, the applicant has revised to reduce the amount of storefront.

New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings

Though the structure is taller than the structures on West Grace Street, the West Grace Street and adjacent Monument Avenue Old and Historic Districts are characterized by a diversity in heights with taller buildings often found on prominent corners. Staff finds the proposed building height provides an appropriate transition from the taller institutional and multifamily buildings on Monument Avenue and smaller scale row houses and apartment buildings on West Grace Street. Though the applicant has responded to the Commission's concerns by setting back the 6th story from West Grace Street, this setback has been reduced from that which was previously reviewed. Staff recommends the 5-story mass extend for the first 4 bays of the structure to be at the depth of the previous submittal.

New construction should respect the typical width, organization of bays, vertical alignment and symmetry of surrounding buildings. For larger buildings, bays should be employed as an organizational device but the building should read as a single piece of architecture

Though the structure is wider than the apartment buildings on West Grace Street, the H-shape configuration breaks up the massing in a three part configuration which is consistent with numerous apartment buildings on West Grace Street. The applicant has also used variations in height and minor changes in setbacks to break up the massing on the North Lombardy Street elevation.

The size, proportion, and spacing patterns of doors and window openings should be compatible with patterns established in the district.

The applicant is proposing symmetrical, vertically aligned window placement on the primary elevations. Staff has concerns that the varied use of the large casement windows detracts from the symmetry of the structure. Staff recommends these casement windows be replaced with single or paired 2/2 windows in a manner to be administratively reviewed and approved by staff.

Porch and cornice heights should be compatible with adjacent buildings

The structure is taller than the structures on West Grace Street though compatible with the diversity of heights in the district. Staff finds the porch heights are appropriate as the first three floors of the porches align with that of the adjacent structure, and porches that extend to the upper story are characteristic of the block.

Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district. Vinyl, asphalt, and aluminum siding are not permitted.

As the district is characterized by brick construction, staff supports the use of the brick and limestone or limestone colored brick. Staff recommends the limestone

base terminate at the window sill height as is characteristic of the district rather than the proposed height. Staff also recommends the proposed soldier course details line up with window head and sill heights. Staff recommends the windows be aluminum clad wood windows with true or simulated divided lites to include interior and exterior muntins and a spacer bar. Staff recommends railing details be submitted for administrative review and approval.

Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions. Staff finds the proposed project responded to the Commission's concerns regarding the front courtyard and the ornamentation of the structure. Staff recommends the massing of the structure be reduced by setting back the 6th story at a substantial depth as previously proposed.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the acceptance of the stated conditions, the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 30.930.7(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 code.