



Commission of Architectural Review

6. COA-178055-2026	Final Review	Meeting Date: 2/24/2026
Applicant/Petitioner	Casey Stone	
Project Description	Construct a new two-story mixed-use building on corner lot	
Project Location		
Address: 700 N 21st Street		
Historic District: Union Hill		
<p>High-Level Details:</p> <p>The applicant proposes a two-story mixed-use building with a first-floor commercial space and a residential unit above. The building fills a narrow, constrained lot and will share a common wall with the adjacent building on N 21st St. The design includes a first-floor storefront wrapping the corner with a projecting tower roof design, painted fiber-cement lap siding on the upper floors, cantilevered metal balconies. The applicant is also pursuing a reduced side setback.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Yara Iwaz, Yara.Iwaz@RVA.gov, (804)646-6031	
Previous Reviews	<p>The Commission conceptually reviewed this application on 9/30/2025, with the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Commission discussed the proposal and commented on the overall massing, height and scale of the building in relation to the surrounding two-story block and the dense neighborhood context. Commissioners noted that as the site occupies a corner lot, it warrants a more commercial treatment rather than a residential one. Several members found the proposed height to be inappropriate and not characteristic of the district, and noted that district precedents typically feature flat roofs and cornices. The Commission also raised concerns about the building's massing and its potential to overwhelm the adjacent structure at 702 N 21st Street. <p>Some Commissioners suggested the use of brick to strengthen the building's commercial base and reduce its visual prominence. The Commission advised that the corner store façade, where the two entrances are located, should receive a unified design treatment reflective of district precedents. Members also supported staff's recommendation to revise the balcony treatment on the</p>	

	<p>Cedar Street elevation, suggesting to eliminate the gable features above the third floor balconies. Overall, the Commission advised that the building's scale and detailing should better align with the adjacent house and respect the prevailing height and rhythm of the nearby buildings."</p>
Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff finds that the design has incorporated the commission's comments, and recommends approval of the proposed project, with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approve the building height and massing as submitted• Simplify window configurations to 1-over-1 double-hung units, in lieu of the 6-over-6 proposed windows; submit final window materials for staff review and approval• Revise the North 21st Street first-floor façade to provide a clearer and more legible commercial expression that is distinct from the residential level above• Submit the orientation of the fiber-cement panel siding and the final exterior color palette for the building, for staff review and approval.

Staff Analysis

Surrounding Context		
<p>The site occupies the corner of N. 21st and Cedar Streets within Union Hill, within an area of mixed small-scale commercial corners and predominantly two-story residential blocks. The block is predominantly two-story single-family, with elevated stoops and commercial corners. Historic buildings on the block typically feature a defined base (storefront or raised stoop), a middle with a vertical window rhythm, and a modest cornice/top. Projecting bays, shallow porches or stoops, cornices, and masonry bases are common character elements found around the site. The surrounding streets include Queen Anne buildings that feature projecting towers with turrets, and pedimented projecting flat bays.</p>		
Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
Standards for New Construction: Height, Width, Proportion & Massing, page 47	<p><i>1. New residential construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.</i></p> <p><i>2. 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.</i></p>	<p>The applicant has reduced the proposed building height from three stories to two stories, significantly improving compatibility with the surrounding block, which is predominantly composed of two-story structures, and addressing comments made during the conceptual review. The revised height appears as appropriate for this site and better aligns with the established scale of North 21st Street. The proposed building references the lot coverage from the Sandborn map, noting that the historic building was one-story high at the rear of the site.</p> <p><u>Staff Recommends approving the building height and massing as submitted.</u></p>
Standards For New Construction: Doors and Windows, p.56	<p><i>2. The size, proportion and spacing patterns of door and window openings on free-standing new construction should be compatible with patterns established in the district</i></p>	<p>The proposed windows are vertically aligned and consistent with adjacent buildings, and with the guideline recommendations for corner residential lots (on both the 21st Street and Cedar Street elevations).</p> <p>On the Cedar Street elevation, revisions to the balcony fenestration pattern, including a reduced glass area on the balcony windows, are an improvement and better align with the solid-to-void ratios found in the district.</p> <p>However, as this is new construction, a simpler window could more clearly differentiate old from new.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends simplifying window configurations to 1-over-1 double-hung units, in lieu of the 6-over-6 proposed windows; submit final window materials for staff review and approval</u></p>
Standards For New Construction: Corner properties; commercial, p.54	<p><i>1. Secondary elevations of corner properties should reference massing similar to other corner locations in the historic district.</i></p> <p><i>2. The material used in the primary elevation should be continued along the second, corner elevation.</i></p>	<p>The proposed building includes a ground-floor commercial use that wraps the corner of North 21st Street and Cedar Street, with a residential unit above. The 21st Street elevation includes the primary entrances to both the residential and commercial uses.</p> <p>Staff finds that the massing strategy, in which the commercial base projects and the second-floor residential volume is set back, is appropriate for a historic corner condition and aligns with patterns seen in Union Hill.</p>

	<p><i>3. Particular attention should be paid to the height of foundations to create an appropriately scaled appearance that relates to neighboring structures and is consistent with neighboring properties. Heights should be kept to a level that will enhance, not detract from, the pedestrian experience. Foundation materials should be selected that are compatible with historic materials and consistent with properties within the district. If the foundations are parged, the parge coat must be opaque, and the coursing beneath must not telegraph through the parge coat.</i></p> <p><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></p> <p><i>5. For commercial corner properties, we strongly encourage the use of architectural elements that are typical of commercial corner properties in Richmond's historic districts: storefronts that turn the corner, secondary entrances (including porticos and shed roofs, where appropriate), sign bands that turn the corner, lighting related to that on the primary elevation, and other similar treatments that treat the secondary corner elevation as an architecturally important elevation.</i></p>	<p>However, the architectural expression of the North 21st Street façade does not clearly read as commercial. The first-floor commercial volume is prominent and projects toward the street, yet the façade treatment (including the continuous shed roof element wrapping the corner, and the scale of the openings) creates an overall residential appearance. While the shed roof may be intended to reference the porch roofs of adjacent buildings at 702 and 704 North 21st Street, its placement above a projecting commercial base weakens the distinction between commercial and residential uses and diminishes the legibility of the storefront.</p> <p>In addition, the two picture windows flanking the commercial entrance lack the scale and transparency typically associated with historic storefronts in the district. Corner commercial buildings in Union Hill often feature larger areas of glazing, and clearly defined commercial elements such as sign bands, awnings, or cornices, particularly where the storefront wraps a corner. This includes three-sided or chamfered corner storefronts that have a strong connection to the street.</p> <p>The current design also differs from the stronger commercial expression shown in the earlier iteration of the project, which more clearly articulated a commercial base. Reintroducing elements from those district precedents would help reinforce the building's base, strengthen the relationship between the North 21st Street and Cedar Street façades, and clearly distinguish the commercial use from the residential above.</p> <p>In summary, the commercial corner should reference Union Hill corner storefront precedents and may include increased storefront transparency, larger windows, elements such as a defined signage zone, awning, or a cornice treatment. Submit revised elevations for staff review and approval.</p> <p>The commercial component should have an architectural expression that is clearly identifiable and distinguishable from the residential.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends revising the North 21st Street first-floor façade to provide a clearer and more legible commercial expression that is distinct from the residential level above. Final façade design to be submitted to chair and vice-chair approval.</u></p>
<p>Standards for New Construction: Materials & Colors, page 47</p>	<p><i>2. Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.</i></p>	<p>The proposal includes fiber-cement panel siding at the commercial level and horizontal lap siding at the residential level. However, the orientation of the panel siding has not been specified, and no exterior color palette has been provided.</p>

		<u>Staff recommends submitting the orientation and profile of the fiber-cement panel siding and the final exterior color palette for the building, for staff review and approval.</u>
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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: view from 21st Street



Figure 2: View from Cedar Street



Figure 3: Historic Streetwall on 21st Street



Figure 4: While not in the Union Hill historic district, this mixed-use building is an example of a protruding corner commercial storefront



Figure 5: Mixed-use building on 800 N 21st St