

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
October 25, 2016 Meeting**

9. **CAR No. 16-151** (A. Nasser)

**2432-2438 Venable Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Demolish small retaining wall, grade lot, construct block wall, and paint over mural with red brick colored paint.**

Staff Contact: **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests approval for several items on a vacant lot and adjacent commercial structure at the corner of Venable and North 25th streets in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. This application is the result of enforcement activity as work was performed to the property without obtaining a Certificate of Appropriateness. Specifically, the applicant is requesting the retention of the existing condition in regards to the demolition of a brick retaining wall at 2432 Venable Street, the development of a vacant lot as a parking lot, and the construction of a concrete block wall adjacent to the commercial structure. The applicant was also cited for the painting of a mural on the side of the commercial structure on previously unpainted brick. The applicant is requesting permission to paint over this mural with paint in a brick color.

The applicant came before the Commission on July 22, 2014. The Commission deferred the application to provide the applicant the opportunity to discuss with the Department of Public Works the possibility of a curb cut at the parking lot location. The deferral noted that the applicant should return to the Commission by September 2014. The Department of Public Works did not approve a curb cut at this location, and the applicant has returned as staff has followed up with him regarding the outstanding violations.

Staff recommends approval of the project. The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* state that existing brick walls should not be removed (pg. 74, #2). If staff had the opportunity to review the demolition of the retaining wall prior to its demolition, staff would have recommended this vestige of the historic home on the property remain. The *Guidelines* for parking lots note that the parking lots should be screened from the public right-of-way and adjacent properties with landscaping, walls, fences, or berms (pg. 73, #1). Staff recommends a low brick wall should be constructed along the entire frontage of 2432 Venable Street to both illustrate the historic presence of the demolished retaining walls and to screen the parking lot. Staff recommends the applicant provide a complete landscaping plan to illustrate how the parking lot will be further screened from public view.

The *Guidelines* note that new walls should be constructed using materials and designs appropriate for the district (pg. 74, #4). Staff has concerns that a

concrete block wall which has since been painted white is not compatible with walls in the district. Staff recommends the wall be removed or parged as to not allow the concrete blocks to telegraph through to be more compatible with concrete foundations found in the district.

The *Guidelines* note that unpainted brick should not be painted (pg. 59, #1), and unfortunately the unpainted brick on the side of the commercial structure was painted without Commission review. Staff supports the application to paint over the unauthorized mural with brick color paint with the condition that the paint color be submitted to staff for review and approval and that all portions of the structure which were not painted prior to the establishment of the Old and Historic District as illustrated by the photograph below be painted the natural brick color.



2428 Venable Street in July 2011 (Source Google Street View)

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the noted conditions, is consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation and Site Improvements in Section 30-930.7(b) and (e) 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.