

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
June 23, 2015 Meeting**

17. **CAR No. 15-083** (J. Rautio & R. Baratta) **2302 East Grace Street  
St. John's Church Old & Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Installation of walkways and brick walls  
at the front and rear of the property.**

**Staff Contact:** **M. Pitts**

The applicant requests approval to install new hardscaping including walls and walkways in the front, side and rear of the property located within the St. John's Church Old and Historic District. The property is developed with a gable roofed Federal-style brick home constructed in 1816 and known as the Hilary Baker House. At the Commission's meeting on January 22, 2013, the Commission approved the removal of a non-historic fence, the demolition of the alley curbing, and the removal of a tree at the rear of the property.

The applicant is proposing to install a 2' front brick wall with a limestone cap at the front of the property. Currently, there is 2' foot brick wall on the western half of the property line, and there was previously a matching wall on the eastern portion which has collapsed. The applicant has stated that she has been advised by her contractor that the remaining wall is unstable and cannot be salvaged therefore both will be replaced.

Other alterations proposed to the front yard include the construction of 6' brick wall along the property line to east adjacent to and the same height as an existing retaining wall on the neighboring property. The applicant is proposing to use Cushwa Brick in Cambridge and Flamingo mortar in Pecan to match the brick and mortar of the primary structure. The brick wall will extend to the start of the second story portion of the house and then a simple 6'-6" black metal fence will continue along the property line.

Currently, there is a brick walkway to the front lower entryway. The applicant is proposing to replace this entryway with 23" by 23" slate and amber quartzite pavers which will be placed in a black and white checkerboard pattern. The applicant will reuse the removed brick for the other walkways that are proposed. Additionally in the front yard, the applicant is planning to install hardscaping to include a rectangular brick area on the western portion of the yard and a circular brick area on the eastern side of the yard which is proposed to lead to concrete stairs and a brick walkway which will run along the eastern wall of the primary structure. The brick is proposed to have a herringbone pattern with a brick edging. Currently, on the east side of the front yard there is an existing walkway from the front walkway that follows around the side of the house. This walkway is covered by dirt and vegetation and appears to be deteriorated.

On the rear of the property the applicant is proposing alterations to facilitate the creation of a parking area. The applicant is proposing to install a 6'-6" brick wall across the property parallel to the rear property line approximately 12 feet from the rear property line. The applicant states that this wall will match the neighbors existing wall to the east in height and design. At the center of the wall, the applicant proposes to install a double black metal gate. The applicant is proposing a gravel parking area with an apron of cobblestones.

Staff has been contacted by the Director of Preservation Services with Preservation Virginia who has advised that Preservation Virginia holds covenants on the house which are very general in nature and require that Preservation Virginia review any proposed changes to the property. Preservation Virginia's Board level committee charged with reviewing matters arising from their covenants has reviewed the package submitted to the Commission and has approved the project. Though the Board approved the project, Mr. Mailon stated that they had concerns about the appropriateness of the tile colors selected for the front walkway and the proposed retaining wall planned so close to the existing wall. The Committee acknowledged that there was precedent for the tiles in the area but noted that these were on buildings of a different style than the subject home and understood the applicant's desire to install this wall.

**Staff recommends approval of the project, with conditions.** *The Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* note that fence, wall, and gate designs should reflect the scale of the historic structures they surround, as well as the character of nearby fences, walls, and gates and should relate to building materials commonly found in the neighborhood (pg. 48). The proposed brick walls at the front, side, and rear of the property are consistent with the materials of the historic structures in the District and the existing walls in the neighborhood. Additionally, black metal fences and gates are common throughout the District. Though an example of the type of metal fence and gate proposed has been submitted as a part of this application, the details of the proposed gate have not been submitted for review. Staff recommends that details of the proposed gate be submitted for review and approval by Commission staff. The Guidelines recommend that original fences and walls should be retained and maintained whenever possible (pg. 74, #1). The front walls have either collapsed or in severely deteriorated as to require replacement rather than repair. Staff recommends that these front walls should be constructed with in kind materials and that the applicant should not use a limestone cap on these walls.

The Guidelines state that sidewalks and curbs should be built of common building materials found throughout the District (pg. 72, #7). The use of brick as the primary material for the proposed hardscaping is appropriate as it is found used throughout the District. Staff has concern over the proposed introduction of the slate and amber quartzite pavers for the front walkway. Though the applicant has illustrated there are other homes in the District with a similar checkerboard pattern including 2700 East Broad Street and 2720 East Broad Street, these homes are not of the same Federal style as the subject property. The *Guidelines*

state that “changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken” (pg. 4, #3). The applicant’s proposal is to install architectural elements found in the District, but typically on Victorian homes and therefore creates a false sense of the historic appearance of the property. Staff recommends that the applicant should not use the proposed slate and amber quartzite pavers and should repair or replace in kind the historic herringbone brick front walkway.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the applicant’s acceptance of the above conditions, is consistent in part with the Standards for Site Improvements outlined 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 page cited above, adopted by the Commission for review of Certificates of Appropriateness under the same section of the code.