

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

3. **CAR No. 15-084** (E. Price) **2238 West Grace Street  
West Grace Street Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Replace upper and lower rear decks**

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

The applicant requests approval to demolish the existing rear decks and stairs and construct new upper balcony and lower porch in the footprint of the existing decks on the rear of a home within the West Grace Street Old and Historic District. In May of 2007, the Commission approved the construction of the rear stairs to the second floor landing which would function as secondary egress to the second floor unit. The applicant is returning this structure to its historic use as a single family dwelling and therefore does not need secondary egress to the second floor. From the photos submitted as part of the application in 2007, it appears both the second floor balcony and the first floor porch were constructed at the same time as the stairs in 2007.

The property is a corner lot, and therefore both the existing stairs and the upper balcony are visible from the public right of way on Strawberry Street. Due to the presence of a wooden privacy fence and an existing garage, the first floor porch is not visible from the public right of way.

The applicant is proposing to construct a 13' by 9'-3" upper balcony over the same size first floor porch. The applicant is proposing to construct the structures with pressure treated wood. The railing will be 36" in height with 1.5" by 1.5" posts with a 4" on center separation. The applicant proposes three steps to access the first floor porch and handrail up the stairs with pickets and railing to match the porch railing. Additionally, lattice will be installed below the south east side of the porch adjacent to the neighboring house.

**Staff recommends approval of the project, with a condition.** The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* recommends against radically changing entrances and porches important in defining a building's overall character (pg. 67, #4). The existing stairs and porches are not original to the structure and are modern additions. Additionally, the current design of the rear stairs and upper story balcony with multiple landings is not a design typically found within the District. For these reasons, these elements are not character defining features of the structure. The *Guidelines* state that new construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the historic district (pg. 44). The proposed design meets this guideline as the new balcony and porch reflect a building form which is prevalent in the historic district of two story porches which span the width of the structure. The *Guidelines* also recommend a traditional Richmond rail where the pickets are fitted into the

recess between the top and bottom rails, and discourages the use of typical deck railings where the pickets are attached to the outside of the top and bottom rail (p. 46 #2). Staff recommends that the applicant use a standard Richmond rail for a design that is more compatible with the district, or that the applicant place the proposed pickets on the inside of the handrail for a more finished appearance.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the condition 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.