COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
April 28, 2015 Meeting

10. CAR No. 15-050 (R. Cross) **1902-1908 Princess Anne Ave**
Union Hill Old and Historic District

Project Description: **Construct four, new, attached Single-family houses**

Staff Contact: **K. Chen**

Background: Plans for the new development at 1902-1908 Princess Anne Avenue were reviewed conceptually by the Commission of Architectural Review at their meeting on February 24, 2015. The Commission made recommendations to the applicant in an advisory capacity at this meeting and there were numerous comments from neighbors and residents of Union Hill. The general consensus of the Commission members present was that the proposed building needed to do more to address Princess Anne Avenue and Jefferson Park. A number of Commission members expressed concern with the use of industrial materials and forms while commending the applicants desire to design a more contemporary project.

The applicant requests final review for the construction of four, new, attached single-family houses in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed new construction is located at the end of Princess Anne Avenue; a dead end street lined with an eclectic mix of late-nineteen and early-twentieth century single family dwellings and duplexes. Jefferson Park is to the south, a steep embankment to the west, the newly constructed Shockoe Valley View Apartments to the north, and historic houses to the east. The four attached dwellings will be oriented to take advantage of the panoramic views of downtown to the west. The new dwellings will front onto a mews, to the east, that provide a buffer to the adjacent historic houses. The application includes a site plan, elevations and a detailed list of exterior materials.

<u>Staff Findings based on Commission of Architectural Review Guidelines</u>

STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION

All new residential and commercial construction, whether in the form of additions or entire buildings, should be compatible with the historic features that characterize their setting and context. To protect the context of the surrounding historic district, new construction should reference the materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of the existing historic building or buildings in its setting. However, compatibility does not mean duplicating the existing buildings or environment. In order to avoid creating a false sense of history, new

construction should also be discernible from the old. Perhaps the best way to think about a compatible new building (or addition) is that it should be a good neighbor; one that enhances the character of the existing district and respects its historic context, rather than being an exact (and misleading) reproduction of another building.

SITING

1. *Additions should be subordinate in size to their main buildings and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating additions at the rear of on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This guideline does not apply. The existing garage on the property is not historic and would be demolished to make way for the new houses. The parcel once contained two pairs of attached dwellings and completed the streetscape from Mosby Street to the edge of the hill.

2. *New residential infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block. The minimum setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall. In cases where the adjoining buildings have different setbacks, the setback for the new building should be based on the historical pattern for the block.*

The site plan included in the application suggests that the south (side) elevation of the new buildings align with the face of the historic buildings to the east that face Jefferson Park. However, no dimensions are given for the proposed and existing setbacks. A porch on this elevation is set at the property line.

3. *New buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site.*

The new buildings are oriented to take advantage of the views of downtown so they are facing east-west. A porch on the southern-most unit faces Princess Anne Avenue and the park to the south. Princess Anne is a dead end street and does not extend the full length of the lot. The applicant notes that there are locations in the larger Church Hill area where new construction has been oriented towards a mews or other feature and not the primary street. The proposed relationship is also similar to corner conditions where the façade of a building faces one street and the sidewall extends down a cross street with another grouping of buildings fronting the side street, usually across an alley.

FORM

1. *New construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the historic district. Building form refers to the specific combination of massing, size, symmetry, proportions, projections, and roof shapes that lend identity to a building. Form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.*

The proposed building offers a contemporary but compatible interpretation of forms found throughout the neighborhood. The historic houses to the east offer a variety of heights, massing and roof forms and the proposed new construction follows the general form of two and three-bays and 2-stories in height. The south elevation is organized into two three-bay masses separated by a recessed wall plane. The two masses are topped with a false mansard roof. There is a one-story, one-bay porch in the third bay of the block to the east. The three-bay massing, mansard roof and one-bay porch are reflective of the house immediately to the east.

The east (mews) elevation has a similar three-bay massing with a false mansard roof and full façade porch. A pattern found elsewhere on the block facing Jefferson Park.

2. *New residential construction should maintain the existing human scale of nearby historic residential construction in the district.*

The proposed new construction maintains the human scale of the nearby historic residences in the fenestration patterns and porches on the south and east elevations.

3. *New residential construction and additions should incorporate human-scale elements such as cornices, porches and front steps into their design. In Richmond, porches were historically an integral part of residential design and provide much of the street-level architectural character of Richmond's historic districts.*

The south elevation facing the street and park and the east elevation facing the mews incorporate fenestration patterns and porches found on the adjacent houses that reflect the human scale of the historic architecture. One-over-one windows will be used on all elevations of the new buildings and maintain the human scale fenestration pattern found on the adjacent historic houses. Porches with Roman Doric columns and turned balusters are located on the south and east elevations. A human scale pattern found on the street face.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

1. *New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding residential buildings.*

The buildings on the block, facing the park, vary in height from 2 to 2 ½ stories with mansard roofs. The proposed new houses are two-stories in height with mansard roofs. There are one-story pent houses that provide access to the roof decks located near the center of each building.

2. *New 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. For*

example, full-block-long row house compositions are rare in Richmond. New residential buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.

The south elevation is fully visible from public right-of-ways and the park. The north elevation is also fully visible but faces an area outside of the historic district. It is unclear how much of the Mews (east) elevation will be visible from the street or north alley. The project presents a long elevation (south) facing the street that is broken into two, three-bay brick sections with a recessed darker brick bay between. The Mews (east) elevation consists of four, three-bay brick sections. The north (alley) elevation is a single mass broken by four transom windows on the first story and six, single windows on the second story. The elevation is clad with smooth cementitious siding. The west elevation is not visible from the district but is broken into three brick masses separated by recessed two bay masses. The sides of the brick masses and the recessed bays are clad with smooth cementitious siding. The general massing of the south and east elevations compatible with the variety of façade widths found on the block.

3. *The cornice height should be compatible with that of adjacent historic buildings.*

The context drawing provided gives vertical dimensions for the new construction but no dimensions are given for the adjacent buildings so it is difficult to determine if the cornice height on the south elevation is compatible with the adjacent historic buildings.

MATERIALS & COLORS

1. *Additions should not obscure or destroy original architectural elements.*

This guideline does not apply.

2. *Materials used in new residential construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the district.*

Brick, much of which is painted, is the primary building material on the block with a variety of stone and cast decorations and lintels. All of the historic houses have mansard roofs the majority of which are covered with slate shingles.

The applicant proposes to use brick and cementitious siding as the primary building materials with powder-coated metal railings and a synthetic slate roofing on the mansards on the south and east elevations. There are cast stone lintels over the windows on the south and east elevations. The proposed use of brick, cast stone, and slate are compatible with the historic materials. Samples of two proposed brick colors have been provided. The use of the darker brick color is limited to the section of brick between the two blocks on the south elevation. Slate samples have also been provided.

3. *Paint colors for new additions should complement the historically appropriate colors used on the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the district.*

Paint colors have not been submitted but will be reviewed by staff when selected.

4. *Vinyl, asphalt, and aluminum siding are not permitted for use in City Old and Historic Districts. Other synthetic siding materials with a smooth, untextured finish may be allowed in limited cases, but approval by the Commission is always required.*

Smooth, untextured cementitious lap siding will be used on the north and west elevations that face away from the historic district. The porches will have "HB&G Perma Cast" cellular PVC round Doric columns and turned balusters. The windows are Anderson series 400 double-hung one-over-one aluminum clad wood windows on the south and east elevations and casements with the appearance of one-over-one windows on the north and west elevations. A synthetic slate made of recycled materials will be used. The entry doors on the east elevation are 6-panel steel doors and the patio doors on the west elevation are aluminum clad Anderson 400 series doors.

5. *Rooftop mechanical equipment should be located as discretely as possible to limit visibility. In addition, appropriate screening should be provided to conceal equipment from view. When rooftop railings are required for seating areas or for safe access to mechanical equipment, the railings should be as unobtrusive as possible, in order to minimize their appearance and visual impact on the surrounding district.*

The houses will have ground source heat pumps so there will be no need for external mechanical equipment. The rear roof decks, visible from the alley and a small portion from the park will be enclosed with painted or powder-coated metal railing. Photovoltaic solar panels, if included in the project, will be concealed behind the mansard roofs on the east elevation.

Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions. The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* state that new buildings should face the most prominent street bordering the site. While staff recognizes that Princess Anne Avenue does not extend the full length of the lot and that the slope of the property would not support the construction of four dwellings oriented towards the street, as once occupied the lot and were removed for structural instability, staff feels that the connection to the primary street and the park is lacking. Staff recommends approval with the condition that the connection to the street and the park of the southern-most unit be increased by placing the primary entrance to this unit on the south elevation.