

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
November 25, 2014 Meeting**

17. **CAR No. 14-141** (E. Beecroft & N. Walsh) **2912-2912 1/2 E. Leigh Street  
Church Hill North Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Construct new single-family residence**

**Staff Contact:** **W. Palmquist**

The applicant requests approval to construct a new single-family dwelling at two vacant lots located in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The applicant had received a Certificate of Appropriateness for this project in June 2014, as well as in October 2014 for a revision to the rear elevation. The applicant has made subsequent revisions which necessitate Commission review. The applicant proposes revising the rear elevation to have a transom window in place of a double-hung window to the left of the rear door. Also, because of the front yard setback, grade, and distance to the sidewalk, the applicant is revising the front porch stairway as a stoop, as the originally approved straight stairway does not work for the site. The new stoop is located on the left side of the façade, aligned with the front door, with stairs leading down towards the right of the home. The new stoop will mimic the materials and design of the previously-approved front porch.

The proposed single-family dwelling is a two-story building with a shed roof that replicates the Italianate building style found throughout the district. The building height is 28', which is comparable to other two-story buildings in the immediate area. The dwelling will have 3' side yard setbacks and a 9' front yard setback, which should align the face of the building with the setback of the adjacent building. The applicant proposes cement board siding, EPDM porch roofs, wood posts and railing for the porch, and PVC-clad windows. The cornice will have a decorative corbel made of PVC or composite. The front door will have side lites and a transom above. The structure will have a block and brick foundation, and all porches, rails, and columns will be constructed of composite or wood.

The applicant is also proposing off-street parking off the alley at the rear of the property and a wood deck.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the Standards for New Construction on pages 44 and 45 and the Standards for Site Improvements on pages 66 and 67 of the *Richmond Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* and the resulting comments follow.

## **Staff Findings based on Commission of Architectural Review Guidelines**

### **STANDARDS FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION**

*New construction should be compatible with the historic features that characterize its setting and context. To protect the significance of the historic context, the new work should reference the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportions, and massing of its setting. However, new construction should be clearly discernible from the old to protect the authenticity of the historic district.*

### **SITING**

1. *Additions should be subordinate in size to the main structure and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating them at the rear or least visible side of the structure is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

2. *New infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard setback patterns of the surrounding block. The minimal setbacks evident in most districts reinforce the traditional street wall.*

The proposed 3' side yard setbacks will reflect the typical pattern along the block. The proposed 9' front yard setback appears to be in keeping with the setbacks established by historic buildings in the immediate area.

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

The proposed dwelling will face East Leigh Street, the most prominent street bordering the site.

### **FORM**

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

The form of the building is typical of two-story Italianate buildings located in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District.

### **SCALE**

1. *New construction should maintain the existing human scale of historic residential and commercial neighborhoods. The inappropriate use of monumentally-scaled buildings that overwhelm pedestrians at the street level is discouraged.*

The proposed building maintains the existing human scale of the neighborhood.

- 2. New additions and infill structures should incorporate human-scale elements such as storefronts and porches into their design.*

The proposed design calls for a front porch that has a form that is comparable to other porches in the area.

### ***HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION, & MASSING***

- 1. New construction should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures.*

The proposed structure will 28' tall at the ridge of the roof. The context rendering supplied by the applicant indicates that the height of the proposed building is similar to the height of the adjacent historic buildings.

- 2. New construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial and residential properties in historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing of more than 30 feet should be broken up by bays.*

The design respects the typical vertical orientation of two-story residences in the district.

- 3. Typical massing patterns throughout city historic districts are simple and block-like; therefore, new structures should avoid the use of staggered setbacks, towers, or elaborate balconies.*

The proposed massing is simple and block-like.

### ***MATERIALS, COLORS, & DETAILS***

- 1. New construction should not cover or destroy original architectural elements.*

This standard is not applicable.

- 2. Missing building elements should be replaced with new elements compatible in size, scale, and material to the original elements without creating a false historical appearance.*

This standard is not applicable.

- 3. Materials used in new construction should be compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.*

The design calls for fiber cement siding, EPDM porch roofs, wood posts and railings for the porch, PVC-clad windows, a cornice with decorative corbel made of PVC or composite, block and brick foundation, and wooden porches, rails, columns and deck.

4. *Paint colors for new additions should complement those of the primary structure. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

The applicant has stated that they propose to install pre-painted cement board siding with the “Pacific Blue” color.

5. *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.*

The application calls for fiber cement siding for the dwelling. The siding should have a smooth finish (and not a faux grain), in accordance with the Commission’s guidelines for synthetic materials.

6. *Vinyl windows are strongly discouraged and rarely permitted.*

The application calls for PVC-clad windows. Staff is not opposed to the two-over-one configuration on the façade, as this helps to differentiate the infill from the historic architecture in the immediate area. The proposed windows should have true or simulated divided lites.

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**Staff recommends approval of the project with conditions.** The proposed infill project appears generally to be in keeping with the Standards for New Construction outlined in the *Guidelines*. Staff recommends that approval be conditioned with the installation of windows with true or simulated divided lites, as well as the use of smooth, untextured cement board siding.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 114.930.7(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 code.