

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
January 27, 2015 Meeting**

**12. CAR No. 15-003 (Valley West LLC) 1914 East Franklin Street
Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District**

Project Description: Construct new multi-family development

Staff Contact: K. Chen

The applicant requests conceptual review and Commission comments for the construction of a new, six-story multi-family apartment building that incorporates two levels of structured podium parking in the Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District. The T-plan building will extend the full length of the 100 block of North 20th Street with narrower faces on East Franklin, East Grace and North 19th streets. The application includes a site plan, elevations, and a building summary describing general design and materials. The development pattern in the area is one of four and five story tobacco warehouses, one and two story commercial buildings, and a new four story apartment building on the northwest corner of Grace and 20th streets. The Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District is unique because it contains residential, commercial, and industrial scale buildings.

Conceptual review is covered under Sec. 114-930.6(d) of the City Code: *The commission shall review and discuss the proposal with the applicant and make any necessary recommendations. Such Conceptual Review shall be advisory only.* Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the Standards for New Construction on pages 44 and 45 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

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 structure on the property is not historic and would be demolished to make way for the new structure. The new construction is intended to remediate the current siting with new construction that is more appropriate with the large-scale development found in this City Old and Historic District.

2. *New commercial infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard development 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 new building is built to the property line at the intersections, establishing a traditional street wall and respecting the prevailing setback patterns of the historic streetscape within the district.

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

The new building will have an elevation on all four street faces of the block with its primary elevation on North 20th Street. On East Franklin, East Grace and North 19th Street the building will fill gaps in the historic fabric.

4. *For large-scale commercial parking, parking within the building is strongly encouraged. If a building includes parking within it, vehicle entry doors should be located on non-primary elevations.*

The building includes two levels of interior podium parking with access points on North 19th, East Franklin and North 20th streets. Moving the vehicle entry point off of 20th Street would help to reinforce this as the primary elevation and support pedestrian traffic on the street.

FORM

1. *New commercial 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 building. Form is greatly influenced by the architectural style of a given structure.

The overall size and form of the building do a lot in the way of remedial work for the district. This block of the district has been underutilized with surface parking for at least a generation. The nearby industrial buildings have flat, unadorned or articulated wall surfaces with regularly placed window openings. The verticality of some of the buildings is reinforced with applied pilasters or the structural concrete grid is expressed. The subdivision of the elevations into differentiated masses is more reflective of the commercial development on Main Street than the surrounding industrial buildings. The revised elevations have been greatly simplified but still lack the monolithic, single material massing of the surrounding industrial buildings. The surrounding industrial buildings also have a rhythmic fenestration pattern of uniformly spaced and sized openings which the revised elevations lack. There are also points of conflict between the plans and elevations in the placement of balconies, stairs, entrances, and off-sets at the corners.

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

The current design respects the human scale.

3. *New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.*

The design incorporates canopies at three points on the 20th Street elevation and the written description submitted with the revised application suggests that there will be three lobbies on 20th Street. However, the plans and the elevations do not agree and it appears the size and placement of the lobbies has been reduced. It also appears that stairs shown on the plans are in conflict with doors and windows illustrated on the elevations. The introduction of a vehicle entrance on 20th Street creates a conflict with pedestrian activity on this major elevation.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION& MASSING

1. *New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.*

The existing building heights in the surrounding blocks vary greatly from one-story to five-stories. The proposed building shares the block with a four-story building that wraps the northwest corner of Franklin and 19th streets and one-story buildings that face on 19th and Grace streets. At its highest point the proposed building has two levels of above ground parking and four residential floors.

2. *New commercial construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial buildings in Richmond's historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. When designing new commercial buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face, the design should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.*

The verticality of the surrounding buildings is emphasized in the vertical ranking of the window openings. The vertical movement is stopped by a strong horizontal line created by a roof edge or parapet with minimal or no decoration.

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

The variations in materials which subdivide the long elevation on 20th Street and Franklin Street (19th and Grace Street elevations were not submitted) and the corbeled brick cornice line is similar in character to the commercial buildings on Main Street. The surrounding industrial buildings are monolithic blocks that terminate at the roof line with minimal or no cornice.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This guideline does not apply in this instance of new construction as no historic architecture is present on the site. The proposed new construction does not engage the single historic building on Grace Street.

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

The applicant proposes to use of two colors of brick cladding with cementitious panels on the upper floors, and metal awnings. The dominate pattern in the area is for a single construction material. Actual appropriateness is verified when more specific details are provided for final review. For instance, windows will be required to have true or simulated divided lites as shown on pages 59-60 of the *Guidelines*. Windows in Old and Historic Districts are generally required to have wood sash or aluminum-clad wood sash. Storefront façade guidelines are covered on Page 46. Awnings are discussed on page 62 and seem intended to guide placement of awnings on existing historic buildings.

3. *Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

The applicant provided renderings of two proposed color schemes. Specific colors for exterior elements can be submitted for review and approval by Commission staff.

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.*

This guideline does not apply to the proposed design.

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.*

Information on the placement of rooftop mechanical equipment was not provided at this conceptual level of review.

6. *For larger-scale projects that involve communal garbage collection (such as dumpsters or other large collection device), these garbage receptacles should be located away from the primary elevation or elevations of the building (preferably to the rear) and screened from view.*

Information on the placement of dumpsters or other large garbage collection devices was not provided at this conceptual level of review.