

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
June 24, 2014 Meeting**

10. **CAR No. 14-56** (Cedar Street Baptist)

**712-718 Jessamine Street
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

Landscape and pave parking lot

Staff Contact:

C. Easterling

The applicant requests permission to landscape and pave a parking lot on four vacant lots located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The parking lot was previously gravel and dirt, and it had storm water drainage problems. The property owner contracted to have the lot paved and striped, and work began without the necessary approvals from the City's zoning administration and Commission of Architectural Review. Upon receiving a Stop Work Order from the City, the property owner consulted with Commission staff and submitted an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness.

The applicant proposes to pave the lot and implement the landscaping proposed in the landscape concept plan packet included with the application. The packet, which identifies the Jessamine Street parking location by its alternate address – 714-716 N. 23rd Street – proposes approximately 268 square feet of planting beds, a block retaining wall, three new Japanese snowbell trees, and optional liriope groundcover. Staff spoke with a trustee of the property owner, and that representative noted that the church intends to implement landscaping improvements after the church's multiple parking lots are paved or re-paved. The trustee described the proposed landscaping concept plan to staff as optional, but indicated a willingness to accommodate Old and Historic District regulations.

Staff recommends deferral of the project. The Standards for Site Improvements outlined in the *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* notes that parking lots should be designed and screened in a way that minimizes the impact of the lot on surrounding buildings (pg. 67). The *Guidelines* states that fences, walls, and/or vegetation may be used to screen parking lots, and that if vegetation is chosen as the method of screening, the type and number of shrubs and trees should be selected to create a "high density screen" (pg. 67, #1). Additionally, the *Guidelines* suggests that improved lots should be broken up with interior landscaped islands.

The applicant was unable to provide staff with specific information about the proposed retaining wall or planting beds, apart from the information included in the concept plan packet. A site plan with parking space striping was not included in the packet. Based on a site visit, it appears that areas indicated for the planting beds and retaining wall have been paved. It is the assessment of staff that the application as submitted is incomplete, and therefore the project cannot

be appropriately evaluated for consistency with the *Guidelines* or the Standards for Site Improvements outlined in Section 114-930.7(e) of the City Code.

Staff recommends that the applicant resubmit a complete package for Commission review that addresses not only the Standards for Site Improvements outlined on page 67 of the *Guidelines*, but also zoning requirements for improved parking lots. Staff recommends implementation of the proposed retaining wall and planting beds, and also the addition of landscaped islands in the interior of the lot.