

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

20. CAR No. 14-37 (GTR Cedar LLC)

**1903 E. Marshall Street
Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

Construct new multi-family dwelling

Staff Contact:

C. Easterling

The applicant requests approval to construct a multi-family dwelling at a lot located in the Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District that is bordered by Cedar, East Marshall, and North 20th Streets. The project site is located in the Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District. Shockoe Valley has a tremendous diversity of building types and styles. The lot proposed for development is located along the hillside of Jefferson Park. Two-story, antebellum residential dwellings on raised basements line Cedar Street immediately adjacent to the site, and a new, five-story multifamily building is located on the other side of Cedar Street, just outside of the Old and Historic District. Other notable buildings in the immediate area include New Light Baptist Church (formerly Trinity Methodist) and the Central Montessori School. The district contains a number of warehouses and industrial buildings that are three to five stories in height. The substantial Cold Storage warehouses are located just outside of the district.

Background: Plans for the new development at 1903 E. Marshall Street were reviewed conceptually by the Commission of Architectural Review at their meeting on December 14, 2011. The Commission made recommendations to the applicant in an advisory capacity at this meeting. The general consensus of the Commission members present was that the proposed building needed to be more compatible in massing, height, and scale, particularly with respect to the row of historic Greek Revival residences along Cedar Street. The Commission was largely supportive of the materials selected for the development.

The applicant revised the plans for the development in response to Commission feedback to include the following changes:

- A one-story reduction in height along the Cedar Street elevation
- A one-story reduction in height at the corner of Marshall and Cedar Streets
- Additional pedestrian-scale elements along Marshall Street
- Additional definition of the pedestrian entrance to the building
- Revision to the materials for the upper story so that it is now consistently all glass and metal panels

- Information about the configuration and screening of rooftop mechanical units

The Commission reviewed the revised plans at their regular meeting on January 24, 2012. After discussing the project, the Commission voted 7-1-0 to deny the project, specifically citing standards for Siting, Form, Scale, and Height, Width, Proportion, and Massing. Several Commission members also expressed concern over building materials and the grouping of the rooftop mechanical equipment.

The applicant made the following revisions to the design of the building in response to Commission comments:

- Additional pedestrian-scale elements along the Cedar Street elevation
- Changes to the fenestration on the portion of the building closest to the historic dwellings along Cedar Street
- Addition of a substantial mid-block building setback along Marshall Street
- Elimination of the light-colored clay masonry for the building base
- Simplification of the color palette for the proposed metal panels
- Additional articulation of the cornice
- Grouping and additional screening of rooftop mechanical units

The Commission reviewed the revised plans at their regular meeting on February 28, 2012. The Commission agreed that the applicant had made a number of positive changes to the design of the building, but a number of Commission members still had concerns with the building height, mass, and lack of pedestrian-scale elements. The Commission voted 6-1-1 to defer the project in order to allow the applicant a chance to revise the design of the project based on Commission comments.

The applicant made the following revisions to the design of the building:

- Additional pedestrian-scale elements, including: balconies, door openings, and ground-level porch features
- Eight-foot corner setbacks at 20th and Marshall as well as Cedar and Marshall
- Additional masonry cladding at the south elevation
- Modifications to the cornice

The applicant submitted additional information to the Commission, and the project was ultimately approved with a number of conditions (see attached). The applicant renewed the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for one additional year, but that renewal has since expired.

The applicant returned to the Commission in May of 2014 with a revised design for the building. The biggest change to the project involved the addition of a new

central wing at the back of the building. Other changes included adjustments to the placement of brick veneer and metal panels, the location of the stair overrun tower on E. Marshall Street, an increase in the amount of the brick “plinth” of the building at the street level, adjustments to the amount of ground-level openings on the Cedar Street elevation, and changes to the materials for the windows and cornice. The Commission appeared to be generally supportive of the new central wing at the rear of the building, as the design was in keeping with existing bays and minimally visible from the public right-of-way. Members of the Commission had a number of questions and concerns about changes to the project, particularly with regard to the ground level of the building and the portion of the building closest to the historic residential dwellings on Cedar Street. The Commission ultimately deferred the project, and recommended that the applicant resubmit a revised application with the following information: updated elevation drawings that should include revisions to the windows (with a greater emphasis on verticality), modifications to the base of the building to make it more pedestrian-oriented and to ensure ground-level openings relate to the openings in the upper stories, additional information about the screening of the rooftop mechanical units, final material selections (including lighting and railing), and a revised site plan that is more compatible with the front yard setback of adjacent historic properties. The Commission also noted their support for the elimination of the notched building form at the corners of the structure.

Based on Commission feedback, the applicant has made the following revisions to the design:

- Elimination of the notched building corners
- Change of window material
- The introduction of consistent metal cladding on the upper level of the Marshall Street elevation
- The addition of openings in the base of the building on the Marshall Street elevation
- The addition of openings in the base of the building on the South (alley) elevation
- The addition of metal cladding to the upper level of the portion of the building closest to the historic Cedar Street residences
- The addition of window openings at the ground level of the building closest to the historic Cedar Street residences
- The addition of Juliet balconies on the 20th Street elevation
- Inclusion of product information for the lighting, railing, garage entry grille, and the louvered screen for the rooftop mechanical units

The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* states that buildings should respect the typical height of surrounding houses and commercial structures (pg. 45, Height, Width, Proportion, and Massing #1). Admittedly, the height, scale, and mass of the proposed development are much greater than those of the historic single-family residences

on Cedar, but there is very little small-scale housing stock left in this portion of the Shockoe Valley Old and Historic District. Many of the historic buildings in and around the area are large in scale, including the Cold Storage buildings just outside the district and the New Light Baptist Church, massive even without its steeple. The applicant has eliminated the notched corners of the building, which makes the building form more consistent with the historic, industrial architecture in the area. The updated site plan provided by the applicant does not indicate any change to the setback of the building from the sidewalk, but a detail indicates that the building will align with the porch stairs of the adjacent historic buildings.

The *Guidelines* notes that new designs that call for wide massing should be broken up with bays (pg. 45, Massing #3). The massing of the proposed building is broken up with staggered bays. A larger building setback mid-block along Marshall Street, the change in the cladding material for upper story, and the strategic use of string courses also helps to mitigate the impact of the massing.

The brick and metal materials proposed for the development are compatible with the district. The windows are now clad in aluminum, and the applicant has provided additional details for the metal panel cladding, the railing, the lighting, the rooftop mechanical screening, and the garage entry grilles. **The applicant must still supply the Commission with additional details, including:**

- Specifications for the window lites (true, SDL, or GBG – true or SDL preferred)
- Materials and colors for the rooftop HVAC equipment screening
- Color specifications for all other features
- Material samples (brick, cast stone, etc.), and clarification about the use of each material, as materials were not indicated on the main elevation drawings
- Clarification about the materials for the ground-level openings (storefront systems, open screens to parking decks vs. true windows)
- Clarification about the alignment of the window openings on the lower level of the Cedar Street elevation with the openings on the upper floors
- The estimated height of the rooftop mechanical equipment and screening

Provided that the applicant has supplied the missing information to the satisfaction of the Commission, it is the assessment of staff that the project is largely in keeping with the Commission's 2012 approval of the project and the Standards 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 the code.