

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
December 9, 2014 Meeting**

8. **CAR No. 14-148** (722-724 Jessamine St LLC) **610 N. 23rd Street**
Union Hill 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 residence on a vacant lot in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed building is a two-story structure with a shed roof that replicates the Italianate building style found throughout the district.

The new building will be situated between two existing houses. The proposed building will be 28 ft. in height. The dwelling will have side yard setbacks of 2 ft. and 3 ft, and a front yard setback of 8 ft. The building will have a one-story front porch and a two-story rear porch.

The applicant is seeking final approval for the design. Commission staff reviewed the project through the lens of the "Standards for New Construction: Residential" 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 or on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This standard is not applicable.

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 proposed 2 ft. and 3 ft. side yard setbacks reflect the typical pattern along the block. The 8 ft. front yard setback will align the façade with that of the structure to the north, and will be 5 ft. 6 in. closer to the street than the house to the south. However, the majority of the block has a front yard setback similar to that of the proposed building, which would result in a consistent street wall.

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

The new house will face N. 23rd Street, the most prominent street bordering the site.

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 form of the proposed building is typical of two-story Italianate buildings located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District.

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

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

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

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

The proposed building will be a total of 28 ft. high. The context rendering of the proposed and adjacent buildings provided by the applicant indicates that the proposed structure will be identical in height to the building to the south, and will be 2 ft. taller than the structure to the north.

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

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

The cornice height of the proposed building will be similar to that of the building to the south and slightly higher to that of the building to the north.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This standard is not applicable.

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

The applicant proposes fiber cement siding and fascia boards, parged CMU foundation, brick porch piers with concrete footings, black membrane porch and main roofs, tongue-and-groove front porch decking, painted Richmond rail, fiberglass doric front porch columns, pressure treated lumber on the rear porch (stained with vertical 6"x6" posts), wood lattice panel below the front porch, and white vinyl windows. Staff recommends the use of wood or aluminum-clad wood windows with true or simulated-divided lites.

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.*

The applicant has not proposed paint colors and is encouraged to either have paint colors chosen at the time of the meeting, or work with CAR staff to choose colors from the CAR paint color palette which could be approved administratively.

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.*

The proposed building design calls for fiber cement siding and fascia boards. Staff recommends the use of smooth, untextured fiber cement siding with no faux grain

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.*

This standard is not applicable.

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 use of wood or aluminum-clad wood windows with true or simulated-divided lites, as well as smooth, untextured fiber cement siding with no faux grain. Staff recommends that the applicant have CAR staff review and approve paint colors for the structure, as well as the stain color for the rear porch.

It is the assessment of staff that the application, with the conditions above, 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.