

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT  
February 24, 2015 Meeting**

20. **CAR No. 15-024** (R. Cross)

**1906 Princess Anne Ave  
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:**

**Construct four, new, attached  
Single-family houses**

**Staff Contact:**

**K. Chen**

The applicant requests conceptual review and Commission comments for the construction of four, new, attached single-family houses in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. The proposed new construction is located at the end of Princess Anne Avenue; a dead end street lined with an eclectic mix of late-nineteen and early-twentieth century single family dwellings and duplexes. Jefferson Park is to the south, a steep embankment to the west, the newly constructed Shockoe Valley View Apartments to the north, and historic houses to the east. The four attached dwellings will be oriented to take advantage of the panoramic views of downtown to the west. The new dwellings will front onto a mews, to the east, that will connect Jefferson Park with the apartments to the north and provide a buffer to the adjacent historic houses. The application includes a site plan, elevations and a building summary describing the general design and materials.

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: 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 on the least visible side of a building is preferred.*

This guideline does not apply. The existing garage on the property is not historic and would be demolished to make way for the new houses. The parcel once contained two pairs of attached dwellings and completed the streetscape from Mosby Street to the edge of the hill.

- 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 site plan included in the application suggests that the south (side) elevation of the new buildings align with the face of the historic buildings to the east that face Jefferson Park. However, no dimensions are given for the proposed and existing setbacks.

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

The new buildings are oriented to take advantage of the views of downtown so they are facing east-west and do not front on Princess Anne Avenue and the park to the south. Princess Anne is a dead end street and does not extend the full length of the lot. The applicant notes that there are locations in the larger Church Hill area where new construction has been oriented towards a mews or other feature and not the primary street. The proposed relationship is also similar to corner conditions where the façade of a building faces one street and the sidewall extends down a cross street with another grouping of buildings fronting the side street, usually across an alley.

## **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 proposed building offers a contemporary but compatible interpretation of forms found throughout the neighborhood. The historic houses to the east offer a

variety of heights, massing and roof forms and the proposed new construction follows the general form of two and three-bays and 2 ½ to 3 stories in height.

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

The proposed new construction maintains the human scale of the nearby historic residences in the fenestration patterns and porches on the east elevation.

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 south elevation facing the street and park lacks a human scale connection to the street. Many houses in the greater Church Hill area with long side elevations have side porches that connect the house to the street. The fenestration pattern, on the south elevation, appears to be drawn from nearby dwellings. The typical triple window and transom pattern found nearby features a larger center window flanked by narrower sash. The use of cornices is minimal.

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

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

The buildings on the block, facing the park, vary in height from two to three stories. The elevation drawings show the height dimensions for the new construction but they are not shown in the context of the existing buildings.

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 south elevation is fully visible from public right-of-ways and the park. The north elevation is also fully visible but faces an area outside of the historic district. It is unclear how much of the Mews (east) elevation will be visible from the street or north alley. The project presents a long elevation (south) facing the street that is broken into two, three-bay brick sections with a recessed metal-clad bay between. The Mews (east) elevation consists of four, two-bay brick sections that are wrapped top and side with recessed metal clad bays. The north (alley) elevation is a single unbroken mass clad with metal. The general massing of the south and east elevations compatible with the variety of façade widths found on

the block. The unbroken north elevation is reminiscent in massing to long side street elevations but lacks the fenestration usually found on these elevations.

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

A context drawing was not provided so it is difficult to determine if the parapet height on the south elevation is compatible with the adjacent historic buildings.

## **MATERIALS & COLORS**

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

This guideline does not apply.

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

The applicant proposes to use brick and corrugated metal as the primary building materials with painted or powder-coated metal railings and a portion of synthetic slate roofing on the south elevation. The proposed use of brick and slate are compatible historic materials. Brick is the primary building material on the block with a variety of stone and cast decorations and lintels. Several of the historic houses have mansard roofs that are covered with slate shingles. The drawings also suggest a material transition below the line of the first floor. This material is not called out on the drawings, but a material transition at the first floor is not a condition typically found in the surrounding area, especially on brick houses. A brick sample will need to be submitted for final approval.

Corrugated metal is not a material typically found in historic residential construction.

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.*

Paint colors have not been submitted.

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.*

It does not appear from the application that any synthetic siding or other materials are proposed.

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.*

The houses will have ground source heat pumps so there will be no need for external mechanical equipment. The rear roof decks, visible from the alley and a small portion from the park will be enclosed with painted or powder-coated metal railing.