

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
May 26, 2015 Meeting**

13. **CAR No. 15-064** (S. Brooks)

**3 N Boulevard
Boulevard Old and Historic District**

Project Description: **Install new upper front porch railing**

Staff Contact: **W. Palmquist**

The applicant seeks approval for the installation of a balustrade on the front balcony of this structure in the Boulevard Old and Historic District. The balcony measures 8'x19' and currently has a door which leads out to it. Photographic evidence shows the existence of a balustrade on this front balcony soon after the building was constructed. A similar, if not identical, balustrade can be found on the adjacent building at 1 N. Boulevard. The property owner has 12 of what they believe to be the original balusters, but are too short to meet modern building code. The applicant proposes installing a balustrade of very similar design to the historic balusters, but with a total height of 42".

The height of the components of balustrade break out to 3-1/2" from the deck floor to the bottom support rail, 4" in the bottom support rail, 33" in the baluster, and 1-1/2" in the top support rail. The applicant is proposing constructing the balustrade out of custom millwork composite, but would consider wood if the composite material was not approved.

Staff recommend approval of the project with a condition. The *Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines* states, "When replacing a railing on a historic building which has lost its railing, the first step is to look for documentary evidence which records the appearance of that railing" (p. 67 #7). The *Guidelines* also provide for the use of substitute materials in cases of unavailability of skilled craftsmen or where newer growth wood would cause deterioration at a faster rate than first-growth timber (p. 57).

Staff feels that the new baluster design is a close approximation of the historic balusters, the installation of which would allow the property owner to safely access their front balcony as was originally intended. Staff finds that the custom composite construction of the new balustrade would be a successful substitute for wood, especially given the fact that there is no porch roof over the balustrade and it would therefore be more susceptible to deterioration by the elements.

Staff recommends that approval of the project be conditioned with the property owner retaining the historic balusters on-site.

It is the assessment of staff that, with the condition above, the application is consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation outlined in Section 114-930.7(b) 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.