

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
December 15, 2015 Meeting**

15. CAR No. 15-150 (A. Ogburn)

**613 North 28th Street
Church Hill North Old and Historic District**

Project Description: Construct two attached single family houses

Staff Contact: K. Chen

The applicant requests approval to construct two attached single family houses on a vacant lot in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The project came before the Commission for conceptual review at the August 2015 meeting. Those minutes are attached for your review. The proposal is to construct two attached single family dwellings. The dwellings will be two-stories in height and three-bays in width with a full façade porch and a mansard roof with symmetrically placed front gables. The dwellings will be of frame construction with smooth, un-beaded Hardie lap siding, wood 1/1 windows, and the mansard will have slate shingles. There will be treated wood decks on the backs of both dwellings. There will be a 6' privacy fence beginning at the rear edge of the dwelling and enclosing the rear yard. There is no alley access to the rear of the property and they will be marginally visible from M Street to the north.

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

This standard does not apply.

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 historic houses on the block have minimal front and side yard setbacks. The proposal is for the steps of the new houses to begin at the edge of the sidewalk and the front face of the house to be 8' from the property line. The side yard setbacks for the proposed new houses will be 4'. No dimensions were given for the front and side yard setbacks on the adjacent houses. Based on the survey provided, the historic property to the south is set at the property line with no side or front yard setbacks and the new house to the north has a side yard setback of approximately 8' and a front yard setback of approximately 6'.

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

The new dwellings will face 28th Street the 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 dominate form on the 600 block of N. 28th Street is a two-story, three-bay frame dwelling with a decorative cornice and a shed or shallow gable roof. There are a variety of porch forms. The majority of the houses in the 2800 block of E. Leigh Street are also two-story, three-bay dwellings with mansard roofs and full façade porches. There is a great deal of new construction on 29th and M streets with a variety of forms, and roof and porch configurations.

The proposed new construction will be two-stories in height, and each dwelling will be three-bays in width. They will each have a full façade porch and a mansard roof with a center gable. The center gable, especially a decorative dormer in a mansard roof, is feature seen in the area to the east along Chimborazo Boulevard but not in the immediate surroundings.

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

The proposed construction maintains the human scale of the nearby historic residential construction.

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 new construction incorporates human-scale elements in the porch and mansard roof. The porch incorporates steps that extend across the entire façade which is an unusual feature.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

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

The total height of the proposed new construction is 28'-1 ½". The height of the new construction to the north is approximately 26' and the historic houses to the south are approximately 23' in height. The porch deck on the proposed dwellings will be set at 1'-6 ½" which aligns with the porch deck on the new houses 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 vertical orientation of the adjacent houses, new and historic, is organized by a ranked fenestration pattern that is broken by horizontal porches and capped with cornices at the edge of shed roofs. The proposed new construction has ranked windows and a strong horizontal break in the form of a full façade porch, but the verticality is accentuated by the centered front gables set in the mansard roof.

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

The lower edge of the mansard roof on the new construction does not relate to the cornice lines on the adjacent houses.

MATERIALS & COLORS

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

This standard does not apply.

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

The existing houses, historic and new, on the block are of frame construction. The proposed dwellings will be of frame construction with smooth, un-beaded Hardie lap siding. The mansard roof will be clad with slate shingles, and the shed roof to the rear will be a modified roof with an aluminum coating. The porch will have ¾" T&G decking, continuous wood steps with closed risers, no balustrade, 8" round fiberglass columns, a box beam with dentils and 3 5/8" crown, and a standing seam metal roof. Windows will be 1/1, wood of the sizes specified on the drawings, and it appears the heads align from the façade to the sides of the building.

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.*

No colors were specified.

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 proposal is to use smooth, un-beaded Hardie lap siding. Treated material will be used for the front steps, rear deck and fence.

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.*

Mechanical equipment will be located on the north and south sides of the dwellings approximately 20' from the façade. No information was provided regarding screening.

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:

- Front doors details/specifications be submitted for staff approval;
- The mechanical units be screened with plantings;
- A column be added in the center of the porch between the two doors, for a total of 5 columns;
- The porch steps be reduced in width and the steps and deck be painted or opaquely stained;
- The section of fence visible from 28th Street be painted or opaquely stained; and
- Colors be submitted to staff for approval

It is the assessment of staff that with the applicant's acceptance of the above conditions the application is consistent with the Standards for New Construction outlined in Section 30.930.7(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.