

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
STAFF REPORT
August 25, Meeting**

16. CAR No. 15-159 (City DPRCF)

**2221 Jefferson Avenue
Church Hill North Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

Construct a pocket park

Staff Contact:

M. Pitts

The proposed project is for the construction of a pocket park on a triangle lot bounded by Jefferson Avenue, North 23rd, and East Clay streets in the Church Hill North Old and Historic District. The property is currently an undeveloped lot with one mature tree surrounded by small shrubs near the center of the lot and a split rail wooden fence around the perimeter. The proposed project is adjacent to Jefferson Mews, a Better Housing Coalition community. The Junior Board of the Better Housing Coalition initiated a design competition for the property as they recognized the potential of the underutilized lot to better serve the community at Jefferson Mews and the neighborhood as a whole.

The proposed pocket park is to be named the Two Hill Park and acknowledges the two adjacent communities of Church Hill and Union Hill by creating two hills on the property. The proposed water feature which will create a stream between the two proposed hills references the history of Jefferson Avenue being the location of a ravine. The applicant is proposing to install brick pavers surrounding a third of the park and a decorative cobble stone feature at eastern corner. A planting schedule has not been provided, though the applicant proposes a mix of street and flowering trees and shrubs which are appropriate to the region's climate. The applicant proposes to line the park with trees to define the boundary of the park. The plaza will include benches throughout.

The Commission's *Design Review Guidelines* are oriented to modest site improvements associated with building renovations. Nonetheless, there are several sections of the guidelines that are pertinent to the final review of this project. The City Old and Historic District code includes Section 30.930.7 (e) Standards for Site Improvements. Consistent with that section, the Commission has adopted additional guidelines for site improvements as a part of the *Guidelines*, the following statements being pertinent to the proposed project:

When designing streetscape elements for locations within a City Old and Historic District, particular attention should be paid to the pedestrian scale and character of the District (page 72).

...it is particularly important that these elements support and reinforce, rather than detract from, the overall historic character of the district. (page 72)

Brick or granite pavers are the most appropriate choice in most Old and Historic Districts. (page 72, #4)

Landscape design should enhance the streetscape and contribute a strong aesthetic along street frontages. (page 72, #8)

Landscape plans should select plant materials based on their:

- a) suitability to the site and urban surroundings,*
- b) appropriateness to the local climate, soils and light conditions,*
- c) ability to provide a sense of scale and seasonal interest (page 72, #9)*

It is the assessment of staff that all of these criteria appear to be met by the proposed design. At present, the lot is undeveloped and underutilized due to its minimal landscaping and uninviting fence. The proposed landscaping improvements will enhance the neighborhood by creating an open space that fits into the existing urban fabric. Additionally, the proposed project is compatible with the landscaped traffic circles which have been constructed in the area. The proposed use of brick and granite cobbles is consistent with the Guidelines as these materials are found throughout the District. The proposed design will create distinct entrance to the Jefferson Avenue Corridor and provide a pedestrian amenity. In general, it will create a well-designed public amenity in the Church Hill neighborhood.

The proposed plans indicate a "Gateway Sign," but no details of the proposed sign have been provided. Additionally, no lighting plan has been provided. The applicant has indicated that there is no plan at this time for lighting in addition to existing cobra head lights which surround the property. Staff recommends that details of the proposed sign and any lighting plan must come back before the Commission for review and recommendation to the Planning Commission.

As the project is proposed for publicly owned land, the applicant is not seeking a Certificate of Appropriateness under the City's Zoning Code but rather a recommendation on public improvements to the Planning Commission. Staff will prepare a report with the Commission of Architectural Review's recommendation and comments. **Staff is recommending that the Commission forward a recommendation of approval for the proposed improvements to 2221 Jefferson Avenue with the condition that details of the proposed sign and any lighting plan must come back before the Commission for review and recommendation to the Planning Commission.** The Commission may wish to consider if the applicant should return to the Commission with details on the proposed sign and a planting schedule which may be needed in the Planning Commission's review of the proposed project prior to the Commission forwarding the application to the Planning Commission.