

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

17. **CAR No. 15-143** (S. Krumbein)

**2308 Jefferson Avenue
Union Hill Old and Historic District**

Project Description:

Construct new mixed use building

Staff Contact:

K. Chen

The applicant requests conceptual review of a new mixed use building to be constructed on an irregularly shaped lot located in the Union Hill Old and Historic District. Staff has not confirmed that the proposed work is consistent with zoning or building code requirements.

The proposed building is of frame construction with a commercial space on the first story, and three, two-story residential units on the second and third stories. The first story is organized by five, equal storefront panels that are either operable doors or fixed in-place. A stylized cornice separates the first and second stories and crowns the top of the building. The second and third stories of the building are organized into two bays of ranked, paired windows. The side elevations have a saw-toothed pattern to provide outdoor space for the units on the roof of the first story.

Conceptual review is covered under Sec. 30-930.6(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: Commercial” on pages 50 and 51 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 standard is not applicable.

- 2. New commercial infill construction should respect the prevailing front and side yard development 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 block where the new building will be constructed is bound by 23rd, 24th, M and Leigh streets and Jefferson Avenue that cuts across the block at an angle along the southeast corner. To the east of the proposed building is a community garden plot, and a former, one-story, corner gas station that is set back in the lot. To the west of the proposed building are two, traditional brick commercial buildings that are set to the edge of the sidewalk facing Leigh Street. The remainder of the block face along Leigh Street is composed of the side and rear yard of a dwelling facing 23rd Street.

The proposed new construction will be located on a lot that is approximately 28' wide and 165' deep, at its longest point, with a diagonal front property line that follows the face of Jefferson Avenue. The southeast corner of the façade will be set at the property line; at the southwest corner, the face of the building will be set approximately 19' back creating an open triangular space at the front of the building facing Jefferson Avenue. A site plan was not provided that illustrates the side yard setbacks but the building is approximately 20' wide and the lot is approximately 28' wide. The adjacent commercial buildings appear to be constructed lot line to lot line and no side yards are required under UB zoning.

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

The new building is sited mid-block and faces Jefferson Avenue, the most prominent street bordering the site.

- 4. For large-scale commercial parking, parking within the building is strongly encouraged. If a building includes parking within it, vehicle entry doors should be located on non-primary elevations.*

This standard is not applicable.

FORM

1. *New commercial construction should use a building form compatible with that found elsewhere in the immediate area. 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 traditional building form, residential and commercial, in the surrounding neighborhood is a rectangular form that is generally two stories in height and three bays wide with symmetrically placed openings. The vertical form is often broken by a porch in residential buildings and storefront cornices in commercial buildings; and in most instances, the façade terminates in a cornice with a shed roof behind.

The proposed new building incorporates many of these characteristics. The vertical mass is broken by a cornice above the storefront and façade terminates in a cornice with a shed roof behind. The use of vertically oriented storefront panels on the first story is unusual. In traditional storefront design, there is a large, undivided expanse of glass with vertical door elements. The use of paired windows on the second and third stories is also an unusual feature in the area. The stepped, saw-toothed design of the side elevations, which will be visible from 24th Street, is also unusual but it is utilized in this instance to provide light and outdoor space for the residential units.

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

The adjacent commercial buildings engaged with the pedestrian through large storefront windows and cornices above that created a human scale for the building. These storefronts have been bricked-in with small window and door openings replacing expanses of glass. The cornices are still intact. The new building incorporates glass panels and doors, and a cornice above the storefront that maintain the existing human scale of the district.

3. *New commercial construction should incorporate human-scale elements at the pedestrian level.*

The fixed and operable storefront panels at the pedestrian level and the cornice between the first and second story add human-scale elements to the façade of the building.

HEIGHT, WIDTH, PROPORTION & MASSING

1. *New commercial construction should respect the typical height of surrounding buildings, both residential and commercial.*

The typical building, residential and commercial, in the surrounding area is two stories in height. The proposed new building is three stories tall. The overall height of the new building appears to be compatible with the adjacent buildings because the new building incorporates smaller floor to floor heights. This results in the windows not aligning with the adjacent buildings.

- 2. New commercial construction should respect the vertical orientation typical of commercial buildings in Richmond's historic districts. New designs that call for wide massing should look to the project's local district for precedent. When designing new commercial buildings that occupy more than one third of a block face, the design should still employ bays as an organizational device, but the new building should read as a single piece of architecture.*

The proposed new construction respects the typical pattern of commercial buildings in the area that are defined by strong horizontal divisions between the first and second stories and cornices that terminate the buildings at the roof line.

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

The cornice above the storefront of the new building does not align with the cornice above the storefront on the adjacent commercial building but the new building will be set approximately 19' behind the façade of the existing building. The top of the roof cornice on the new building is set at 32'. A cornice height was not provided for the adjacent building, but the rendering would suggest that the new building is approximately 3' to 4' taller.

MATERIALS & COLORS

- 1. Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.*

The commercial buildings in the surrounding neighborhood are predominately of masonry construction while residential buildings are of frame construction. The use of frame construction is compatible with the dominated material used in the neighborhood.

- 2. Paint colors used should be similar to the historically appropriate colors already found in the immediate neighborhood and throughout the larger district.*

Light Mist has been selected for the color of the Hardie lap siding and white for the Hardie trim used for the cornices, corner boards, and window and door trim. A color was not specified for the windows or the storefront but the rendering would suggest that they are also white. The steel cable and wood guardrails on the east side of the building will be stainless steel and white. The asphalt

shingles on the rear roof slopes will be a medium grey color – Estate Grey. The sloped roofs will be minimally visible from 24th Street on the east. The colors selected are compatible with colors found on the Commission approved paint palette.

3. *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 application calls for the use of smooth, untextured Hardie lap siding and trim. Asphalt shingles will be used on the rear roof slopes and the flat roofed areas, which are not visible from the public right-of-way, will be TPO membrane. The windows and storefront will be aluminum.

4. *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 mechanical units will be located on the west side of the building on the roof over the second floor corridor. The mechanical units will be screened from view on Jefferson Avenue by the third story and the building to the west. They will be visible at a distance from 24th Street to the east.

5. *For larger-scale projects that involve communal garbage collection (such as dumpsters or other large collection device), these garbage receptacles should be located away from the primary elevation or elevations of the building (preferably to the rear) and screened from view.*

The building does not have alley access from the rear so trash receptacles will need to be placed on Jefferson Avenue for collection. A room is designated for trash on the first floor plan and accessed by a door opening onto Jefferson Avenue.