

**COMMISSION OF ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW  
STAFF REPORT**

**December 15, 2015 Meeting**

**18. CAR No. 15-155** (Z. Kennedy)

**3008-3012 E. Franklin Street  
St. John's Church Old and Historic District**

**Project Description:** **Construct 3 new single family dwellings**

**Staff Contact:** **K. Chen**

The applicant requests conceptual review of one free standing and two attached single family dwellings to be constructed on vacant lots located in the St. John's Church Old and Historic District. The lots are located at the eastern end of Franklin Street nears its intersection with N. 31<sup>st</sup> Street. The area is sparsely developed. There is a high embankment on the south side of Franklin Street and two ca. 1965 concrete block apartment buildings across the street from the proposed site. There is one ca. 1900 house on the north side of Franklin Street between 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> (a paper street) streets. The houses at the western end face 29<sup>th</sup> Street. Staff has not confirmed that the proposed work is consistent with zoning or building code requirements.

The proposed buildings consist of a free standing, three-story, two bay frame dwelling and a pair of attached, three-story, three-bay houses. The paired houses have mansard roofs over two bays and a recessed, two bay connector between the mansard roof sections. The three houses have little decoration.

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: 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 is not applicable.

- 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 new houses will have a 15 foot front yard setback and 3 foot side yard setbacks. There is one house on the same side of Franklin Street that is set back on its lot but no dimension was given.

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

The new buildings are oriented towards Franklin 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 in the surrounding area is two to four stories in height and three bays wide. There are examples of shed roof with decorative cornices and mansard roof lines. The proposed new houses are three stories in height and two-bays wide. The attached houses also read as two-bay masses because of the recessed bay between the mansard roofed sections. The proposed houses have symmetrically placed, vertically ranked window and door openings. The use of paired windows is not commonly found in the area.

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

The proposed new dwellings maintain the existing human scale found in the surrounding area through the incorporation of porches, cornices and roof lines.

- 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 proposed new dwellings incorporate porches and cornices which provide street-level character.

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

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

The new houses are approximately 33' in height. They are isolated at the end of a sparsely developed street with two, non-historic, two-story concrete block apartment buildings across Franklin Street. There is a two-story house set closer to the top of the hill on the same side of Franklin Street. The houses at the top of the hill facing Libby Park are two to four storied in height.

- 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 new dwellings respect the vertical orientation of the residential properties in the surrounding blocks through the use of ranked openings that are interrupted by horizontal porches and cornices.

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

No data was given for the cornice height of the other building on the north side of Franklin Street but is set higher up on the hill and the cornices would not naturally align.

### **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 houses facing 29<sup>th</sup> Street are brick. The apartment buildings on the south side of Franklin Street are concrete block and the one house on the north side of Franklin is frame. The proposed new houses are of frame construction with 7" exposure, Hardie smooth lap siding.

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.*

The Hardie lap siding will be Monterey Taupe and the recessed two bay portion on the attached houses will be Timber Bark. The smooth Hardie trim will be Navajo Beige and the vinyl clad double hung windows will be dark brown. These are all colors that are compatible with those found on the approved color palette on pages 60 and 61 of the Guidelines.

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 new construction will incorporate Hardie smooth lap siding and smooth trim. The porch decks and steps will be concrete and the posts and cornices will be smooth composite material. The windows will be double-hung vinyl clad sash. The porch and mansard roofs will be standing seam metal.

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.*

No information was provided for the placement of mechanical units.