

DOWNTOWN DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

Staff Report for March 14, 2022

OLD BUSINESS

Agenda Item 1: DRC Application No. 21.27

Property Address: 71-73 Richmond Street & 81-85 Richmond Street

Applicant/Owner: Seventy One Richmond, LLC

Architect: Truth Box Architects

Type of Review: Conceptual Design

Building Descriptions:

71-73 Richmond Street - Commercial Building (ca. 1924-1926): A square, three-story, five-bay, flat roofed, brick building with a decorative concrete beltcourse that visually divides the first floor from the second. The large storefront windows on the first floor have been boarded over with a small section exposed at the top, over which hang cloth awnings. The second and third floors have groups of four windows in each bay. Above the first floor entrance is a single window with a decorative concrete lintel. A concrete cornice, integrated with the third floor lintels, underlines four, evenly-spaced, decorative concrete medallions on the parapet. CONTRIBUTING

81-85 Richmond Street - Commercial Building (ca. 1889-1899): A small, rectangular, three-story, two-by-three bay, flat-roofed, brick building. The third story of the building is set back from the plane of the first and second story exterior walls. Fenestration of the building consists of aluminum sash, Chicago windows with cast, concrete sills, and keystone-ornamented lintels. There are three entrances to the building: one on the Friendship Street elevation and two on the Richmond Street elevation. All entrances consist of modern doors: either glass with an aluminum frame, or patterned steel. A band of soldier-coursed brick and a decorative concrete beltcourse just above visually divide the first floor from the second. CONTRIBUTING

Proposal: To construct a new, 6-story residential addition behind the two buildings, which partially extends onto the roof of 71-73 Richmond Street.

Issues: The DDRC held a pre-application review on July 12, 2021, where the Committee reviewed a conceptual massing rendering of the proposed addition. In concept, the Committee was receptive to the height and massing of the addition. However, they noted the importance of selecting suitable exterior glazing and wall surface materials for the addition, which were not shown at the meeting. The DDRC also emphasized that the details of the addition, and its relationship with the surrounding historic buildings, were extremely important. At the DDRC meeting on September 13, 2021, the Committee reviewed the initial conceptual design. At that meeting, the DDRC expressed concern regarding the proposed design of the new addition and exterior materials in relation to the adjacent existing structures. The consensus among the members was that the architect should revisit the building form and exterior materials. The application was continued. At another DDRC meeting on November 8, 2022, the DDRC reviewed a second conceptual design, which was not well received. The DDRC voted to continue application. The applicant has switched architecture firms since the last DDRC review and has submitted new plans and renderings.

The proposed addition will now contain 10 apartment units (formerly 11) ranging in size from a studio (6 units) 1-bedroom (3) and 2-bedroom (1) units. The addition will contain a new elevator lobby, new egress stair, and modified egress stair. The 6-story addition steps onto the roof of the 3-story building at 71-71 Richmond Street. This will require reinforcement of this structure and fire protection. The

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addition has a 5-story massing adjacent to the corner building at 81-85 Richmond Street, fronting Pine Street, which will not structurally impact this building. The party wall at the rear of the building does not have fenestration due to its proximity to the lot line. There are other instances of Downtown buildings with walls of this type.

The proposed addition is over 5,000-sf, which triggers Providence Zoning Ordinance Section 606, *Design Standards for New Construction*. Section 606 states that “the purpose of these standards is to preserve the urban fabric of Downtown Providence and ensure that new construction complements the historic character and architectural integrity of existing structures. The following is analysis of the project and its compliance with Article 6 of the Zoning Ordinance. No Development Incentives will be sought for this project, and no on-site parking is proposed.

Section 601 - Uses

The use of the proposed addition for residential and commercial use conforms to this section.

Section 602 - Dimensional Standards

The property is located in D-1-120 zone (120' maximum height zone), and is located on the corner of Richmond Street (A Street), and Friendship Street (B Street).

- The proposed addition is greater than 3 stories and is at an approximate height of 72' which is within the allowable height.

Section 606 - Design Standards for New Construction (staff comments are italicized)

A. Building Height and Massing

1. Buildings shall be at least three stories in height. *At 6 stories, the proposed addition complies with this standard.*
2. Building height and massing shall relate to adjacent structures. *The proposed height and massing of the addition does relate to the adjacent structures.*
3. Ground floors shall be a minimum of 12 feet from floor to ceiling to enhance the pedestrian streetscape. *Floor to ceiling height for the massing on Pine Street is not indicated on the plan, but the first story along Richmond Street is shown at 12'-8"*
4. On both A and B Street facades, buildings over six stories shall have a recess line of at least ten feet above the third story and below the seventh story. *The addition is at 6 stories, no recess line is required.*

B. Building Materials

1. The primary exterior finish materials on the facade shall be brick, limestone, sandstone, granite, terra cotta, cast stone, glass, metal, painted wood, cement-based composites, phenolic resin-based composites, or other similar material. *The scope of work list materials for the new construction as brick veneer and fiber-cement panels on primary facades, CMU and other fire-rated materials on party walls, aluminum storefront systems, EPDM flooring, and roof decks with steel handrails and composite decking.*

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C. Entrance Design

1. Buildings shall have their main entrance from a sidewalk on an A Street, or if the building has no A Street frontage, on a B Street. *With the main residential entrances on Friendship Streets (B Street), the building complies with this standard.*
2. Buildings shall be designed to have multiple entrances, with no more than 35 feet between entrances. *This building does not require multiple entrances.*

D. Façade Design

1. Building facades shall be built within a build-to zone of between zero and eight feet from the street line. Such facades shall occupy this build-to zone for at least 80% of each lot frontage of the property. *This does not apply as the only building frontage of the addition is on a B Street, which does not require a front setback.*
2. A building facade shall have a transition line. Transition lines shall be designed in proportion to the overall height and mass of the proposed building to create a distinction between upper and lower stories. Transition lines shall relate to existing adjoining buildings. *There is a slight transition line above the ground floor on the Pine Street elevation of the addition. The set back on the roof addition provides a transition line.*

E. Fenestration Design

1. All building facades shall provide areas of transparency equal to at least 70% of the wall area, between the height of one and 12 feet from the ground, of each building facade. *The architect will need to verify if the Pine Street elevation meets this standard.*
2. Blank walls shall be separated by areas of transparency of at least three feet in width. *The architect will need to verify this. No information is shown on the plan.*
3. Upper story façade shall provide areas of transparency equal to at least 35% of the wall area of the story. *Based on the plans submitted, it appears that the project meets this standard.*
4. Windows shall only be composed of clear or lightly tinted glass. Highly reflective window coatings are prohibited. *No information has been provided.*

Recommendation: Staff recommends that the DRC make the following findings of fact:

- a) 71-73 Richmond Street and 81-85 Richmond Street are structures of architectural and historic significance and contribute to the architectural and historic significance of the Downtown District.
- b) The work proposed consists of the construction of a new addition.
- c) The application for new construction is complete on a conceptual level.
- d) In concept, the new construction in accord with DRC Standard 9 and 10 in the following ways: The new addition shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the integrity of the property and its environment; and the new addition shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the property and its environment would be unimpaired.

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Staff recommends conceptual approval, citing DRC Standards 9 and 10. The project is to return to the DDRC for final review and approval.