

STAFF REPORT: 09-10-25 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00545

ADDRESS: 630 VIRGINIA PARK

HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW CENTER AREA

APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: TIMOTHY FLINTOFF JR./4545 ARCHITECTURE

PROPERTY OWNER: JOSEPH QUADAGNINO II

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 08-18-2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 08-28-2025

SCOPE: ERECT CARRIAGE HOUSE



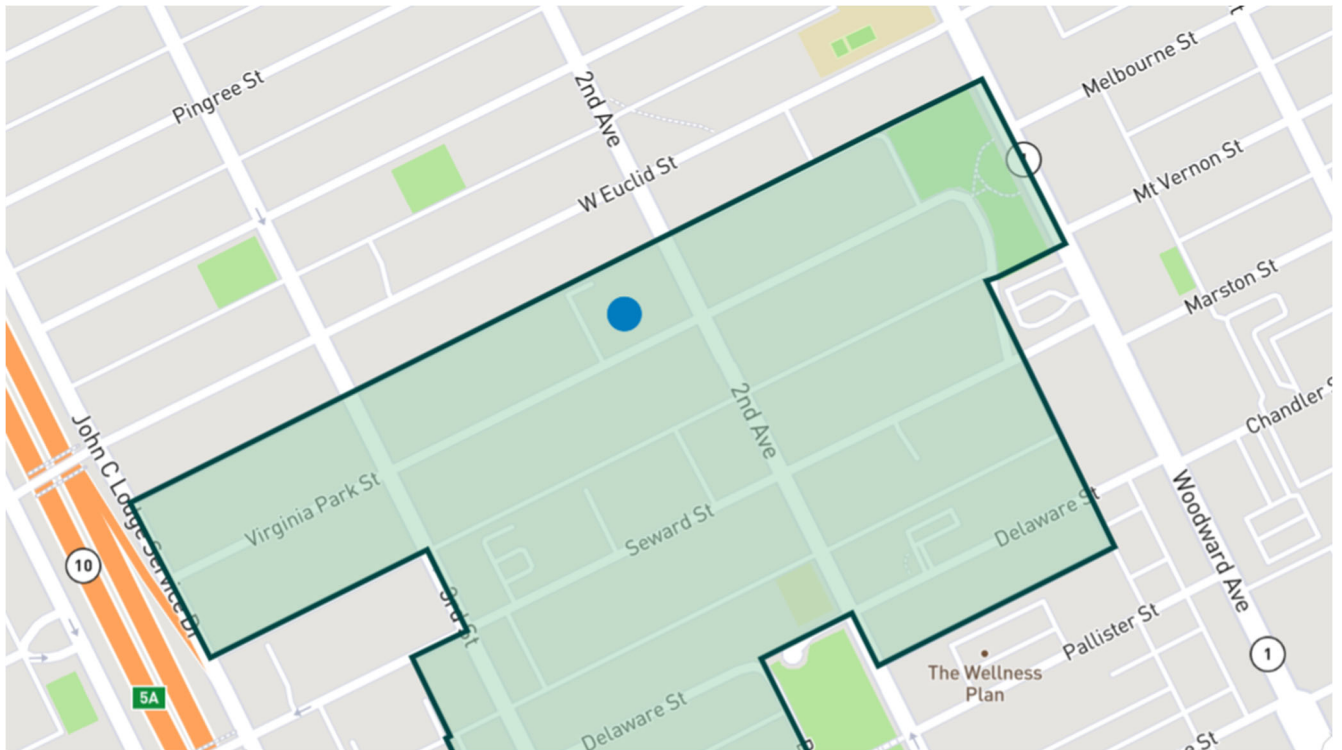
View of 630 Virginia Park, to the northwest. Staff photo, August 28, 2025.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The subject property is located just west of 2nd Avenue. The existing resource is a large single-family dwelling of simplified Tudor design, featuring brick and stone at the first two stories, and more ornate half-timbering at the gables, with prominent gables facing the street and to the east/west. Existing windows are multi-lite windows in 12/1 and 9/1 combinations. Wide vergeboards and areas of wood trim complete the architectural expression. Current site conditions include front foundation landscaping, a lawn, and a concrete driveway extending along the east side of the house to the backyard. The property at the rear is enclosed by a wooden fence but has no extant garage.

The block context is typical of Virginia Park, with large, well-ornamented single-family houses set off in landscaping. The only exception, immediately adjacent to the west of the resource, is a non-contributing 12-unit apartment building. Both carriage houses (i.e., garages with upstairs units) and garages exist in multiple forms and sizes, dating to the Period of Significance.

The property has benefited from extensive rehabilitation work performed in recent years.



View of backyard to the southeast. Staff photo, August 28, 2025.



View of alley looking west. Subject property is behind wooden fence halfway down alley to left. Staff photo, August 28, 2025.



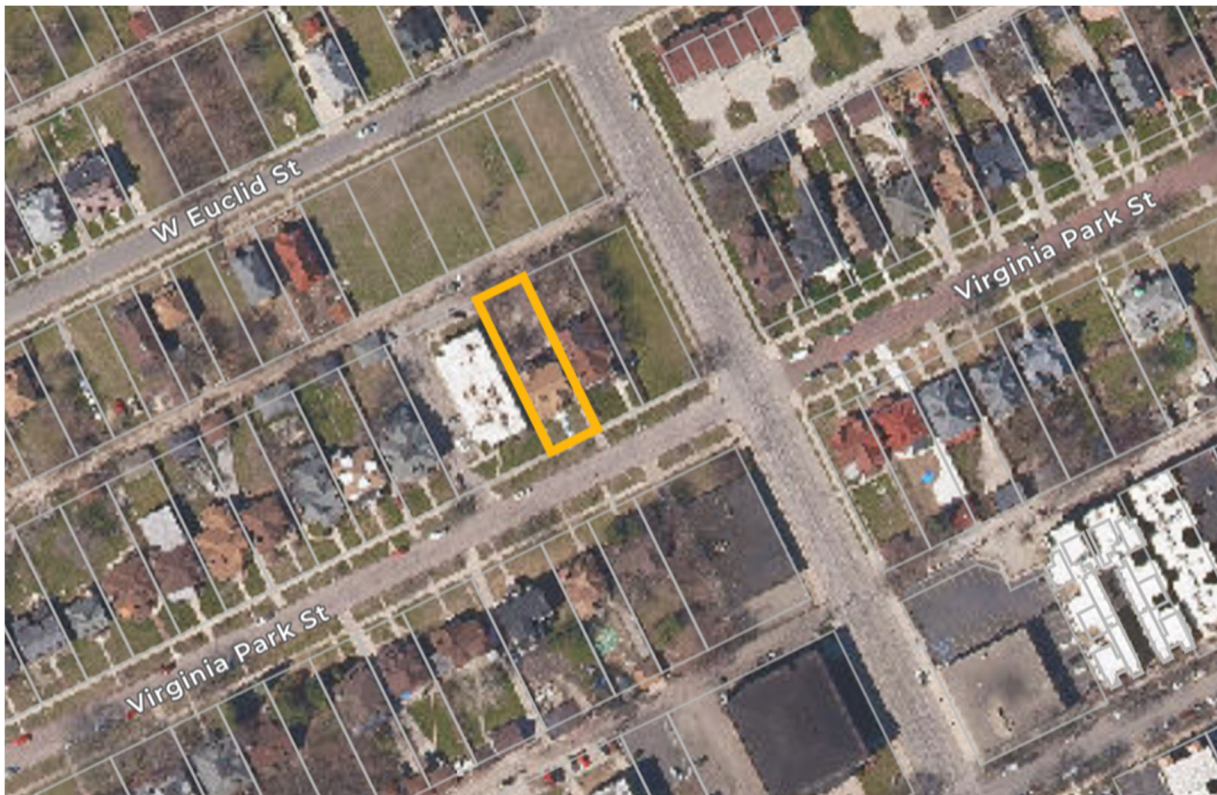
View of wider context of subject property (center). Staff photo, August 28, 2025.



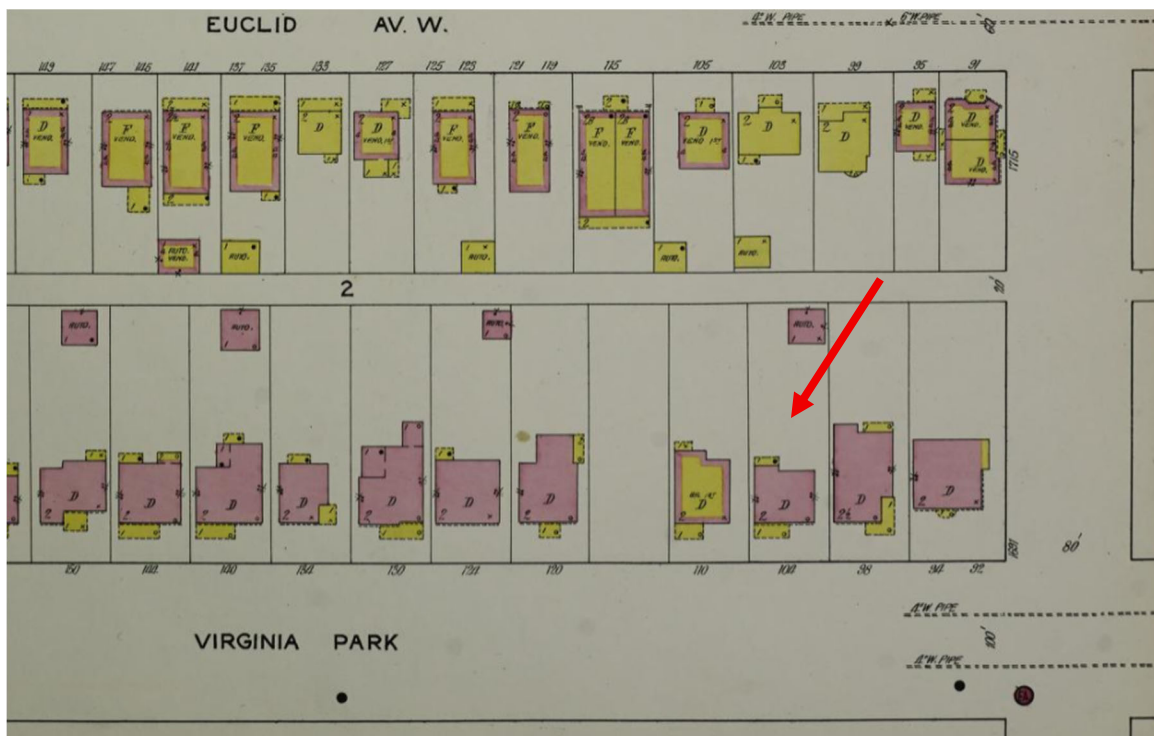
View directly behind subject property. Note non-contributing apartment building to right. Staff photo, August 28, 2025.



View to the west along sidewalk, subject property at center of image. Staff photo, August 28, 2025.



Subject site outlined in yellow. North is up. Detroit Parcel Viewer.



1915 Sanborn map of vicinity. Subject property indicated with red arrow. Note garage, no longer extant. The brick-veneer frame house to the left was apparently demolished to build the apartment building. The house at the corner of 2nd is also no longer extant.



Google Street View of the property during its tenure as the Sigma Pi fraternity house, circa 2011.

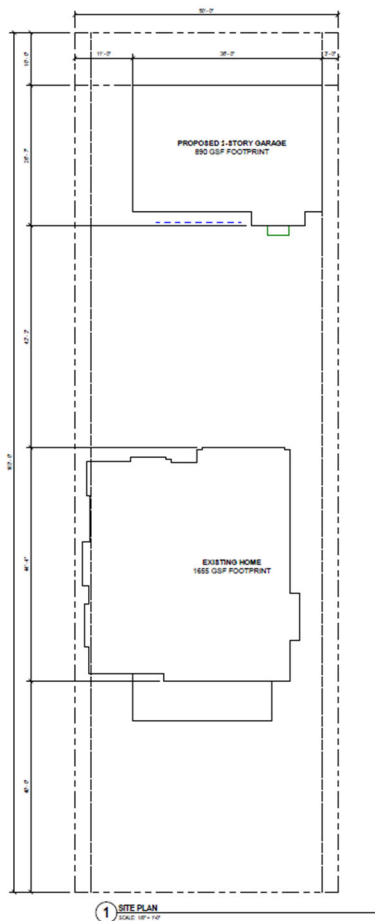


View of 630 Virginia Park (center) and its non-contributing neighbor (to the left). Staff photo, August 28, 2025.

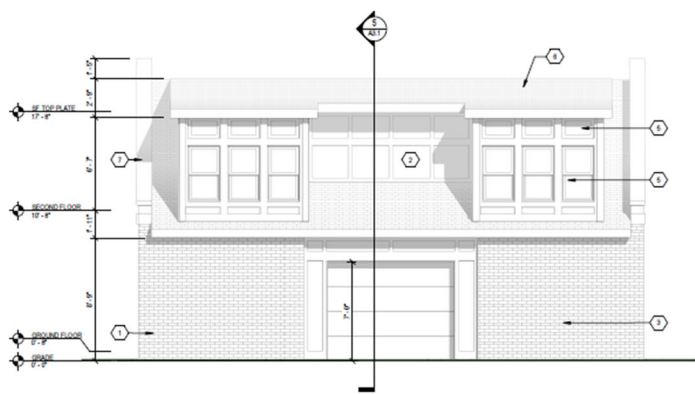
PROPOSAL

The applicant proposed to erect a 1½-story 3-car garage/carriage house, with a loft workspace in the upper story. Per the drawings, scope of work, and other documents submitted by the applicant, the exterior materials are proposed to be brick and half-timber detailing to reference the architectural character of the existing historic house. A side-gabled roof with dormers is punctuated by dormers. Overhead (vehicle-sized) door openings are proposed for the north (alley) side and the west side. At the south side, facing the rear of the main house, the proposed design features a man-door entrance and a large folding door that “allows the space to open into the yard.” The height to the ridge line is 21’-6”, while the code “building height” to midpoint of roofline is 15’-0”.

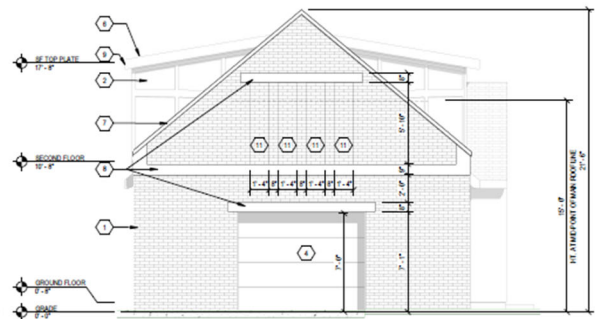
The half-timbering is proposed to be expressed by Hardie Board cladding, with board/batten panels to match the house (C:4 yellowish white/A:8 blackish green). Roofing is proposed to be asphalt. Precast stone copings and headers crown openings and the gabled parapets. Windows will be double-hung Andersen 100 series with fixed transoms. The two overhead garage doors will be prefinished steel. The stacking bi-fold door will be Andersen aluminum-clad wood, while the entry door will be a fiberglass “Craftsman” style product. Gutters and downspouts will be black aluminum in a K-style. No light fixtures or other elements are depicted on drawings.



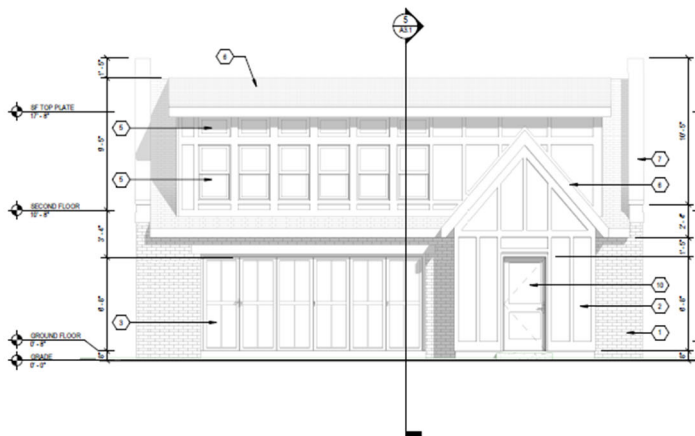
From applicant's submission: Proposed site plan at left (not to scale). At right, renderings of front (yard-facing) view, top, and rear (alley-facing) view, bottom.



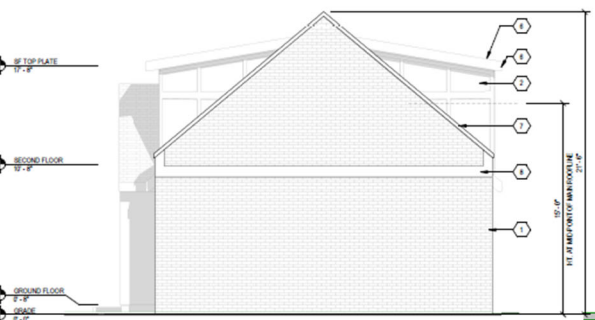
3 NORTH (ALLEY) ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



4 WEST (SIDE) ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



1 SOUTH (YARD) ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



2 EAST (SIDE) ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

From applicant's submission: Elevations (not to scale). Refer to submitted drawings for full architectural drawings under review.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- The New Center Area Historic District was established by City Council in November 1982.
- The architect for this proposal reached out to HDC staff early in their process, seeking to understand whether a carriage house proposal would be found compatible with the district's historic character. In March 2025, senior historic staff reviewed the district's designation report, historic Sanborn maps, the Elements of Design, and walked the alleys/driveways of Virginia Park in a targeted field survey for this purpose. We found several instances of 1½-story carriage houses (i.e., garages with overhead occupiable space), and at least one 2-story example on the south side of Virginia Park. These buildings were erected during the district's Period of Significance and several are still extant, examples pictured below.





- After completing our research and field work, we informed the architect that a carriage house typology at this address would likely receive staff recommendation as a compatible new structure, but the final recommendation would be dependent upon the particulars of the proposed design. Staff recommendations are not binding on the Commission.
- Staff reviewed the New Center Area's codified Elements of Design (Section 21-2-129) for compatibility. As discussed in other recent reports for Virginia Park, the Elements for the district as a whole, which contains a wide mix of typologies on streets other than Virginia Park, must be considered with respect to the distinct and consistent single-family dwelling historic character of Virginia Park within that multi-varied context (i.e., a massing, form, or height appropriate for Seward or Delaware would not necessarily be appropriate here). The analysis of an accessory building/garage for Virginia Park is an additional focus. The Elements of Design for this district does offer the following (excerpted) relevant points to the proposed project; missing Elements did not appear to have relevant information:
 - **Element 1, Height:** *All houses that were originally single- or two-family have two full stories plus an attic or finished third floor within the roof; these are generally called "two-and-a half-story" houses... Any new building must have a height of the main roof of at least 80 percent of the resulting average; in no case shall a new building be taller than the tallest roof height included in the computation. In determining the height of existing structures and proposed structures, the highest point of the main roof shall be used, even where towers, or other minor elements may be higher..... The proposed new structure shall have a height at the eaves, or cornice, of not less than 90 percent of the average determined from existing structures, and in no case shall eaves or cornice of the proposed structure be lower than the lowest eave or cornice height used in the computation, or higher than the highest.*
Staff response: This Element goes into considerable detail regarding proposed eave and roof height for new (main) houses but does not mention garages or accessory structures. Staff assesses that the proposed height of the building is compatible with other historic garages/carriage houses, and compatible with (deferent to) the height of the main house on the property.
 - **Element 2, Proportion of buildings' front facades:** *Proportion varies in the district, depending on use, style, and size of buildings...*
Staff response: The proposed building is proportionate with its use, size, and style.
 - **Element 3, Proportion of openings within the facades:** *Areas of voids generally constitute between 15 percent and 35 percent of the front façade, excluding the roof. Most window openings are taller than wide, but are frequently grouped into combinations wider than tall. Where there are transom windows above doors, they are wider than tall; a few round windows exist on upper stories or attics. A great variety of sizes, shapes, and groupings of openings exist in the district.*

Staff response: While the proportion of openings within the yard-facing side of the carriage house is high, it is not out-of-character for a garage, the above guidance being based on houses.

- **Element 4, Rhythm of solids to voids in front facades:** *Queen Anne and Arts-and-Crafts style buildings display freedom in the arrangement of openings within the façades, but usually result in a balanced composition. In buildings derived from classical precedents, voids are usually arranged in a symmetrical and evenly spaced manner within the façade.*

Staff response: Openings display freedom of arrangement and a balanced composition appropriate to the contemporary reinterpretation of a Tudor style.

- **Element 7, Relationship of materials:** *The district exhibits a wide variety of building materials characteristic of single- and multiple-unit residential buildings dating from the last decade of the 19th Century and first quarter of the 20th Century. The majority of buildings are faced with brick; a brick veneer first story and a stucco, clapboard, or wood shingle second story is not unusual... Stone sills and wood trim are common. Roofing includes slate, tile, and asphalt shingles...*

Staff response: The material palette is compatibly composed of brick and half-timbering panels. The house uses additional materials, including wood trim, to play off of the half-timbering.

- **Element 8, Relationship of textures:** *...Half-timbering adds textural interest to the stucco where it exists on Neo-Tudor houses. ...*

Staff response: The proposal displays textural interest compatible with its context and its contemporary design, but uses half-timbering as a primary cladding instead of an accent, like the house.

- **Element 9, Relationship of colors:** *Paint colors generally relate to style. Natural brick colors (red, brown, yellow, orange, buff) predominate in wall surfaces. Natural stone colors also exist. Stucco and concrete are usually left in their natural state or are painted in a shade of cream; half-timbering is frequently stained or painted brown or brownish-red... Buildings of Medieval and/or Arts-and-Crafts inspiration generally have painted wood trim of dark brown; black and red is also present.*

Staff response: The proposed color palette appears compatible with the historic context and the main house.

- **Element 10, Relationship of architectural details:** *Architectural details generally relate to style. Porches, window frames, cornices, dormers and gables are frequently treated. ... buildings influenced by the Arts-and-Crafts movement have wood details, such as half-timbering, heavy vergeboards, and other wood elements...In general, the houses on Virginia Park are more ornate than those in the rest of the district.*

Staff response: The state of being “ornate,” if applicable at all to a new accessory building, prioritizes intricate shapes and complex patterns. Despite its contemporary design, the carriage house achieves a modern “ornateness” that staff finds too “busy” with respect to the main house on this property. Referencing the main house, half-timbering is limited to the front of gables, both at the porch and at the roof. The proposed carriage house uses a much higher proportion of half-timbering, cladding all parts of the dormers and even some 1st-story areas. Staff recommends that the yard-facing gabled entry should eliminate the half-timbering to grade in favor of brick, keeping the detailing at the gable above only. The same is true for the 1st-story half-timbered “frame” at the alley overhead door. At the upper level, staff recommends elimination of the half-timbering panels on the sides and between dormers, in favor of a less complex panel expression painted in a darker color.

- **Element 11, Relationship of roof shapes:** *A multiplicity of roof types exist, and frequently*

within the same building. Predominant forms are hip and gabled, frequently punctured with dormers. A few buildings have engaged towers or bays with conical roofs. Other buildings have less complex roofs, appropriate to their architectural style.

Staff response: The roof shape is compatible with this Element and the contemporary reinterpretation of Tudor in which this property is styled.

- **Element 15, Scale of facades and façade elements:** *Houses on Virginia Park are large in scale compared with the rest of the district. The elements within the façades of Queen Anne and some Colonial Revival buildings emphasize their size by dividing the façades into large segments, such as towers, projecting gables, and bays. ...Buildings influenced by the Arts-and-Crafts movement contain heavy elements, such as vergeboards and large brackets..*

Staff response: The proposed carriage house is compatible with the large-scale of the existing historic houses in the vicinity, and other large carriage houses/garages dating to the historic era.

- **Element 18, Relationship of lot coverage:** *Lot coverage of single-family dwellings ranges from approximately 20 percent to 45 percent, most being in the 25 percent to 35 percent range of lot coverage.*

Staff response: While increasing the rear lot coverage, the footprint of the 3-car garage is compatible with this Element.

- **Element 19, Degree of complexity within the façade:** *The degree of complexity has been determined by what is appropriate for a given style. The Late Victorian buildings exhibit complex massing and multiplicity of forms, colors, and textures. Other styles in the district are less complex. ...*

Staff response: For the chosen style, a contemporary Tudor, the complex massing achieved is compatible.

- **Element 20, Orientation, vistas, overviews:** *...The majority of the garages are oriented towards the alleys; where driveways exist, garages are frequently oriented towards both the street and the alley. All garages are detached and at the rear of the lot...*

Staff response: This appears to be the only codified Element specifically mentioning garages, which is achieved by the proposed design.

- **Element 21, Symmetric or asymmetric appearance:** *...Other styles, including Queen Anne and Arts-and-Crafts inspired, are generally asymmetrical but result in balanced compositions...*

Staff response: As a modern reinterpretation of a non-classical style, the proposal's asymmetric but balanced composition satisfies this Element.

- Per the above analysis, staff finds that the contemporary design of the building, in a modern reinterpretation of Tudor, conforms to the Elements and is compatible with the historic character of the existing resource, excepting the use of half-timbering as a dominant cladding material, rather than an accent.

ISSUES

- The design should be revised to eliminate half-timbering panels to remain deferent to, and less complex than, the main historic house at the property. All half-timbered areas should be replaced with brick at the 1st story, and dormer returns and other recessed areas should be replaced with simpler panels at the upper level, painted a darker/recessive color.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 21-2-78, Determinations of Historic District Commission

Staff recommends that the proposal for a new garage/carriage house building at 630 Virginia Park should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the New Center Area's Historic District's Elements of Design, with the condition that the design be revised to reduce its complexity/competition with the main house, by:

- Eliminating half-timbering panels at the first story, in favor of additional brick p
- Reducing the extent of half-timbering panels at the upper level, while introducing panels/cladding with less complexity rendered in a darker color.