

The City of Richmond has received a demolition permit application from the VCU Real Estate Foundation (Permit #D10090701) for the property at 734 West Broad Street.

The VCU Real Estate Foundation has proposed the demolition of two nineteenth-century buildings:

- ❑ An 1889 two-story Italianate commercial building, 734-736 West Broad Street (the Broad Street Building), that is typical of the Broad Street corridor.
- ❑ An 1881 one-story workshop, 301-305 Gilmer Street (the Gilmer Street Building), that is typical of industrial and workshop architecture in the Carver neighborhood.

Both of these buildings appear to be in good structural condition. The commercial space in the Broad Street Building was recently occupied. There is no reason to believe that these buildings cannot be put into active use for either a VCU function or a private sector use. The rehabilitation of large number of similar buildings in Downtown Richmond and in the vicinity of VCU clearly demonstrates viability of and market for adaptive reuse of comparable buildings.

Both buildings are clearly historic properties worthy of preservation. They are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a part of Broad Street Commercial Historic District and are considered to be contributing historic properties. In addition, they are across the alley from the State and Federally-designated Carver Residential Historic District.

The immediate environment of the Broad and Gilmer Street buildings consists of commercial buildings and student housing on Broad Street, with workshop buildings on Gilmer Street. The richness of this historic urban fabric creates architectural interest and diversity that mitigates the extensive amount of new construction in the area. Recent infill in the area, undertaken by or related to Virginia Commonwealth University, has created large monolithic block faces. The proposed demolition and the continuation of the adjoining new construction would create additional architectural monotony, instead of preserving a rich and diverse architectural environment.

The proposed demolition would not only impact the immediate architectural environment. Broad Street is the most prominent corridor in Richmond. Extensive rehabilitation has taken place in the multiple historic districts and individually-designated buildings that extend along Broad Street from the Virginia Capitol to Scott's Addition. In spite of this preservation success the corridor has been adversely affected by demolitions for both government projects and private developments. The loss of the Broad and Gilmer Street buildings would be another unfortunate and unnecessary adverse effect on Broad Street corridor.

The loss of the Broad Street and Gilmer Street buildings would have significant environmental impacts as well. The demolition of the buildings would result in considerable amount of architectural debris being sent to a landfill, something hardly consistent with the aspirations of Virginia Commonwealth University to "Go Green." The preservation of the two buildings would preserve significant embodied energy and avoid the unnecessary use of new building materials.

The Broad and Gilmer Street buildings are viable structures that contribute to the character of the Broad Street Commercial Historic District and impact the adjoining Carver Residential Historic District. The preservation of these buildings would enhance the architectural diversity of the Carver neighborhood, the VCU Monroe Park Campus, and the West Broad Street corridor. The demolition of these buildings would result in an adverse impact on historic resources, create a more monolithic urban environment, and result in the wasteful loss of two substantial and functional existing buildings.