



MEMORANDUM

TO: ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD
FROM: Kate Schwartz, Historic Resources Planner
DATE: April 25, 2016
SUBJECT: Review of Special Exception application and informal review of proposed demolition and new construction at 506-514 Sophia Street and 525 Caroline Street

ISSUE

In accordance with section 72-21.7 of the City Code, the ARB may review special exception applications associated with land in the Historic District. Van Perroy has submitted an application requesting special exceptions for a proposed new construction project at 506-514 Sophia Street and 525 Caroline Street in the Historic District. The exceptions include increased residential density, a reduction in required parking, and a five feet two inch height variance from the 50 foot maximum height limit for one of three new buildings. This application will be considered by the Planning Commission on May 11.

The ARB should also conduct an informal review in anticipation of a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition of one contributing building and construction of three new structures at the above referenced site, including seven townhomes in two buildings and one seven-unit apartment building.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Special Exception
Recommend to the Planning Commission the denial of the special exception for a five feet two inch variance from the 50 foot maximum building height.
2. Informal Review of Certificate of Appropriateness
Suggest to the applicant a redesign of the site planning, scale, and massing of the project as the current proposal is not architecturally compatible with the historic aspects of the Historic District. One existing structure on the property is a contributing building in the Historic District and may be considered for demolition in coordination with the evaluation of new construction. A revised design should meet the goals of the Comprehensive Plan (2015) by closely aligning with historic patterns of development in order to reinforce the traditional streetscape.

SUMMARY

The ARB should make two recommendations in the review of this project.

First, the board should make a recommendation to the Planning Commission with regards to the specific exceptions requested in the application. Two of the three special exception requests, pertaining to residential density and parking requirements, are not under the purview of the Architectural Review

Board. However, the requested exception for building height is directly related to the ARB’s consideration of architectural compatibility in the district.

The ARB should recommend to the Planning Commission that the proposed building height variance is not compatible with the surrounding context or appropriate given the historic pattern of development in the immediate vicinity.

Secondly, in anticipation of an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness, the ARB should conduct a preliminary informal review of the site planning, scale, and massing. The project includes the following elements subject to approval by the ARB:

1. Demolition of existing townhomes at 506-514 Sophia Street. One of three buildings on the site is a contributing structure in the Historic District.
With additional information, demolition of this structure may be appropriate.
2. Construction of three new residential structures at 506-514 Sophia Street and on the rear portion of the parcel at 525 Caroline Street. The three structures will be:
 - a. One grouping of three attached townhomes, three-and-one-half stories in height, oriented to Sophia Street (shown as B1 on attachment A).
 - b. One grouping of four attached townhomes, three-and-one-half stories in height, oriented to a service drive that is accessed via Sophia Street (shown as B2 on attachment A).
 - c. One five-story apartment building containing seven units, with a height of fifty-five feet two inches, measured as an average of the eave and ridge heights, located on the southwest corner of the parcel behind the townhome structures (shown as B3 on attachment A).

As submitted, the proposed arrangement of structures and uses is not consistent with the historic character of the immediate area. Proposed residential should fill in the gaps between buildings on Caroline Street and create a continuous streetscape on Sophia Street. The interior of the block should be reserved for parking and service needs.

BACKGROUND

1. Special Exception for Height Variance

The Historic District guidelines specify that new buildings should relate to the average height of existing adjacent structures and in general should not be more than ten percent taller. Structures in the 500 block of Sophia Street are one to two stories in height, with the majority at two stories. Structures in the 500 block of Caroline Street range from one-and-one-half to three-and-one-half stories, with the majority at two or two-and-one-half stories in height.

Block Face 1: Existing Building Heights on Sophia Street

500 Block Sophia Street (West Side)		500 Block Sophia Street (East Side)	
Address	Height in Stories	Address	Height in Stories
502 Sophia	1	521-523 Sophia	2
504 Sophia	2	503 Sophia	2
506-514 Sophia	2	419 Sophia	1
525 Caroline (rear property line)	---- Parking Lot ----		
100 Wolfe (side property line)	2		

Block Face 2: Existing Building Heights on Caroline Street

500 Block Caroline Street, East Side	
Address	Height in Stories
531	2.5
529	2
525	3.5
517-519	2
515-513	2
511	2
509	2
507	2.5
505	2.5
503	2
501	2

500 Block Caroline Street, West Side	
Address	Height in Stories
500-506	---- Parking Lot ---
508	3
510	2
512	2.5
514	2
516	2
518	2
520	1.5
522	2
524	2.5
526	2
528	2

At three-and-one-half stories, the proposed townhome units (B1 and B2 on attachment A) are one-and-one-half stories taller than adjacent structures on Sophia Street. The new structures are also one to one-and-one-half stories taller than the average height on the neighboring Caroline block. No height variance is needed for the townhome units, as they stand below the 50 foot maximum height. However, the height of these buildings is incompatible with the character of the surrounding context and it is recommended that the height be reduced, or the upper stories be stepped back to reduce the overall impact.

The five feet two inch height variance is requested for the five-story apartment building at the rear of the site. This proposed height is fifty percent greater or more than adjacent structures and incompatible with the character of the Historic District. Requirements for new construction in the floodplain should be considered when evaluating scale. The base flood elevation for this site, as established by the federal Flood Insurance Rate Map is 38 feet. The current elevation on site is 36 feet. The lowest floor of new residential construction must be at least 1 ½ feet above the base flood elevation (City Code section 72-34.3.G.3)—in this case, 3 ½ feet above the current elevation on site. Floodplain requirements do not outweigh architectural compatibility standards, and the request for a special exception for the height of the apartment building is not justified by the relatively minor floodplain construction requirements for this site.

2. Proposed Demolition of 506-514 Sophia Street

The ARB uses the criteria defined in City Code Section 72-23.1.D.3 to evaluate the appropriateness of any application for demolition within the Historic District. A Certificate of Appropriateness application has not been submitted to date, but the initial evaluation based on the criteria is as follows:

a. The architectural significance of the building or structure.

Three multi-family dwellings are located at 506-514 Sophia Street and are placed generally in a U-shaped configuration on the property. Only the building closest to the street, fronting Sophia Street, is identified as contributing to the Historic District. This structure was constructed c. 1940

and displays elements of the Colonial Revival style. The two-story masonry structure is constructed of rock-faced concrete block topped by a standing seam metal-clad side-gabled roof with boxed cornice. Projecting one-story gable roof porches with standing seam metal roofs, concrete decks, and metal rails delineate the individual units along the Sophia Street frontage. The property reflects typical patterns of architectural development in Fredericksburg during the World War I to World War II period. The City's 2006 architectural survey describes this period and states, "Industrial pursuits continued to draw factory workers, and a general prosperity enjoyed across the country after the First World War led to a significant building boom." While the contributing building that fronts Sophia Street aligns with the traditional streetscape, the noncontributing buildings towards the interior of the block do not.

b. The historical significance of the building or structure.

The City's 2006 architectural survey defines the building fronting Sophia Street as "contributing to the Fredericksburg Historic District under National Register Criterion C in the areas of architecture and community planning because it retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association." As of 2006, the building was considered to be in fair-to-good condition.

The side and rear dwellings are considered noncontributing because they are minimally visible from the public right-of-way and do not retain their integrity due to a number of alterations, including changes in the siding, roofing, windows, and form. These structures were not included in the 2006 architectural survey.

c. Whether a building or structure is linked, historically or architecturally, to other buildings or structures, so that their concentration or continuity possesses greater significance than the particular building or structure individually.

These dwellings are not considered individually significant, but one is considered contributing to the architectural integrity of the Historic District and is representative of patterns of architecture in Fredericksburg during the World War I to World War II period.

d. The significance of the building or structure or its proposed replacement in furthering the Comprehensive Plan's goals.

The proposed development project meets a number of goals in the City's Comprehensive Plan (2015) including promoting clustered and compact development, enhancing the quality of residential areas, encouraging homeownership, and promoting "redevelopment of downtown properties in a manner that reflects the character of the City as a vibrant and growing community" (Environmental Protection Goal 6, Residential Neighborhood Goals 2 and 9, and Historic Preservation Goal 2). In addition, the overall plan for the Sophia Street corridor is for an open riverfront on the east (river) side of Sophia Street and redevelopment of a consistent streetscape on the west side of Sophia Street. The existing structures are residential in use and contribute to the streetscape on the west side of Sophia Street; however, the deteriorated nature of the buildings and relatively modest means of original construction may limit the potential for rehabilitation. In addition, the noncontributing buildings on site do not align with the city's traditional pattern of growth.

The proposed project does not align with Business Opportunity Goal 4: Community Character, “Preserve and enhance the City’s visual appeal by pursuing patterns of development that respect the City’s historic growth pattern,” or Residential Neighborhood Goals 1 and 6, regarding historic character and visual compatibility. The proposed site planning is not consistent with historic patterns of development, does not provide for continuity of the streetscape, and limits the potential for future restoration of two significant streetscapes in the district.

e. The condition and structural integrity of the building or structure.

The City’s architectural survey indicates that the contributing structure was in “fair-to-good condition” at the time of the survey in 2006. The applicant has not provided documentation prepared by a qualified professional or licensed contractor to show the current condition or structural integrity of the buildings. Permits for interior and exterior alterations were issued in 2008, consultation with the Building Department occurred in 2010, and electrical and plumbing rough-in work was initiated in 2012. No renovation work has been completed to date.

f. Effect on surrounding properties.

No adverse effect on the surrounding properties is anticipated.

g. Inordinate hardship.

In the documents provided, the applicant has stated, “it is not economically viable to maintain and upgrade [the existing structures] in the face of new Code requirements and market realities with regard to square footage norms.” However, the applicant has not submitted evidence that rehabilitation of the buildings is impractical or that they cannot make reasonable economic use of the property. Such evidence may include proof of consideration of plans for adaptive reuse, or attempts to sell, rent, or lease the property. Substantial rehabilitation of the side and rear structures, meaning improvement costs equal to or greater than fifty percent of the fair market value, would require bringing the structure into compliance with flood resistant design and construction standards. As a designated historic structure, this standard would not apply to the building fronting Sophia Street.

3. New Construction at 506-514 Sophia Street and 525 Caroline Street

The ARB’s evaluation of new construction in the Historic District is based on principles of architectural compatibility, with review criteria defined in City Code Section 72-23.1.D.1 and additional guidelines in the Historic District Handbook. Architectural compatibility can be determined through analysis of the historic context in the vicinity of the project site. For this preliminary informal review of the proposed new construction, typical building heights and setbacks on the affected blocks were evaluated in order to determine appropriate site planning and building scale and massing.

Applicable Historic District Design Guidelines

Criteria for New Development

Site Planning (pg. 69)

Continuity of Street Edge

1. New buildings should be sited to reinforce the traditional street edge.

Spacing between Buildings

2. Spacing between new buildings in the downtown commercial district should reinforce the existing street wall.

Parking

Parking should be provided in such a way that it reinforces the existing rhythm and visual aspects of a neighborhood rather than being an obtrusive and incompatible break in the streetscape.

1. New buildings in the downtown commercial district should have their parking in the rear of the building, allowing the building to become part of the existing streetscape and to reinforce the street edge.

Building Scale (pg. 74)

1. Although the zoning ordinance defines height limitations within the various parts of the City, building height at the street front should be compatible with the prevailing height of the entire block.
2. New buildings that must be taller than the prevailing height should be stepped back so the additional height is not visible from the street.

Building Massing (pg. 75)

1. Building form should relate to the existing streetscape.
2. The orientation of new residential dwellings should be compatible with the neighboring houses in the block.

a. **Site Planning**

The applicant proposes to reconfigure the two parcels that will be used for this project, combining the rear portion of 525 Caroline Street (currently a parking lot) with the 506-514 Sophia Street property to accommodate three new structures. Because the combination of these parcels for the proposed project impacts two significant historic block faces—the 500 block of Caroline Street and the 500 block of Sophia Street—analysis of the site planning must take into account both streetscapes.

Block Face 1: Setback Evaluation of Existing Structures

500 Block Sophia Street (West Side)			
Address	Front Setback	Side Setbacks	
502	0	4	1
504	0	3	1
506-514	2.5	6	3
525 Caroline (rear property line)	----- Parking Lot -----		
100 Wolfe (corner lot; side property line on Sophia Street)	0	50	0

500 Block Sophia Street (East Side)			
Address	Front Setback	Side Setbacks	
521-523	15	17	5
503	0	120 (parking lot)	6
419	0	0	26

*all setbacks measured in feet

- The majority of properties in the 500 block of Sophia Street show a zero front setback.
- Side setbacks are irregular due to the inconsistent orientation of properties and the presence of parking lots; however, the streetscape is more consistent on the west side of Sophia and historic patterns of development are clear. The parking lot at the rear of 525 Caroline is the only significant gap in the streetscape.

On Sophia Street, one of the proposed new residential structures mimics the existing street edge of the contributing c.1940 dwelling. However, the other two follow the model of the existing non-contributing structures which are not consistent with historic patterns of development. Traditionally, service areas were located towards the interior of the block, with primary structures oriented to the street edge. Access to these service areas was typically provided through alleys, or through drives subordinate to the primary structure. Historic Sanborn Fire Insurance maps clearly show these traditional development patterns (attachments C.1 – C.3). The proposal shows an access drive between the two townhome structures, with one building oriented to this secondary drive, rather than the street.

The apartment building is located to the rear of the property, nearly in the center of the block, and is only accessible from the service drives. This is contradictory to the guidelines, which call for new buildings to be sited to reinforce the traditional street edge. An arrangement consistent with the ARB’s guidelines would be to locate the access drive to one side of the parcel, and orient a continuous row of townhomes to Sophia Street, providing access and parking in the rear (see attachments E.1 – E.3).

Block Face 2: Setback Evaluation of Existing Structures

500 Block Caroline Street (East Side)			
Address	Front Setback	Side Setbacks	
531	0	0	0
529	0	3	0
525	0	23	31
517-519	0	0	3
515-513	0	3	0
511	0	0	0
509	0	0	0
507	0	3	0
505	0	0	0
503	0	0	0
501	0	0	0

500 Block Caroline Street (West Side)			
Address	Front Setback	Side Setbacks	
500-506	----- Parking Lot -----		
508	0	0	0
510	0	0	0
512	0	0	0
514	0	0	0
516	0	0	0
518	0	3	0
520	0	10	0
522	0	5	0
524	0	0	0
526	0	0	2
528	0	5	4

*all setbacks measured in feet

- All properties show a zero front setback.
- Of 23 properties, seven are attached on one side and ten are attached on both sides.

- Of the remaining properties, most have side setbacks ranging from two to five feet. There are two outlying properties: the one-and-one-half story building housing the Agora coffee shop at 520 Caroline, with a ten-foot setback on the south side, and the Fredericksburg Square building, with a 23-foot setback on the north side and a 31-foot setback on the south side.

The 500 block of Caroline Street displays a very high level of integrity in the continuity of the street edge and consistency in the spacing, orientation, and placement of structures. All properties on this block display a zero front setback, and minimal or non-existent side setbacks, with many of the structures attached. The Fredericksburg Square building at 525 Caroline shows the most significant variation from this pattern, with 23 and 31-foot gaps to each side. The two primary areas of concern in the proposed site planning are disruption of the street edge and the location of service areas. The applicant proposes to construct buildings B2 and B3, as shown on attachment A, on the existing service and parking area for the Fredericksburg Square property, forcing those activities closer to the Caroline Street commercial corridor. By eliminating the ability to locate parking, delivery, mechanical, and other related needs on the interior of the block, the proposed project severely limits any future restoration of the Caroline Street frontage. In addition, the historic Sanborn maps show that structures once existed in these gaps (attachment C.3).

b. **Building Scale and Massing**

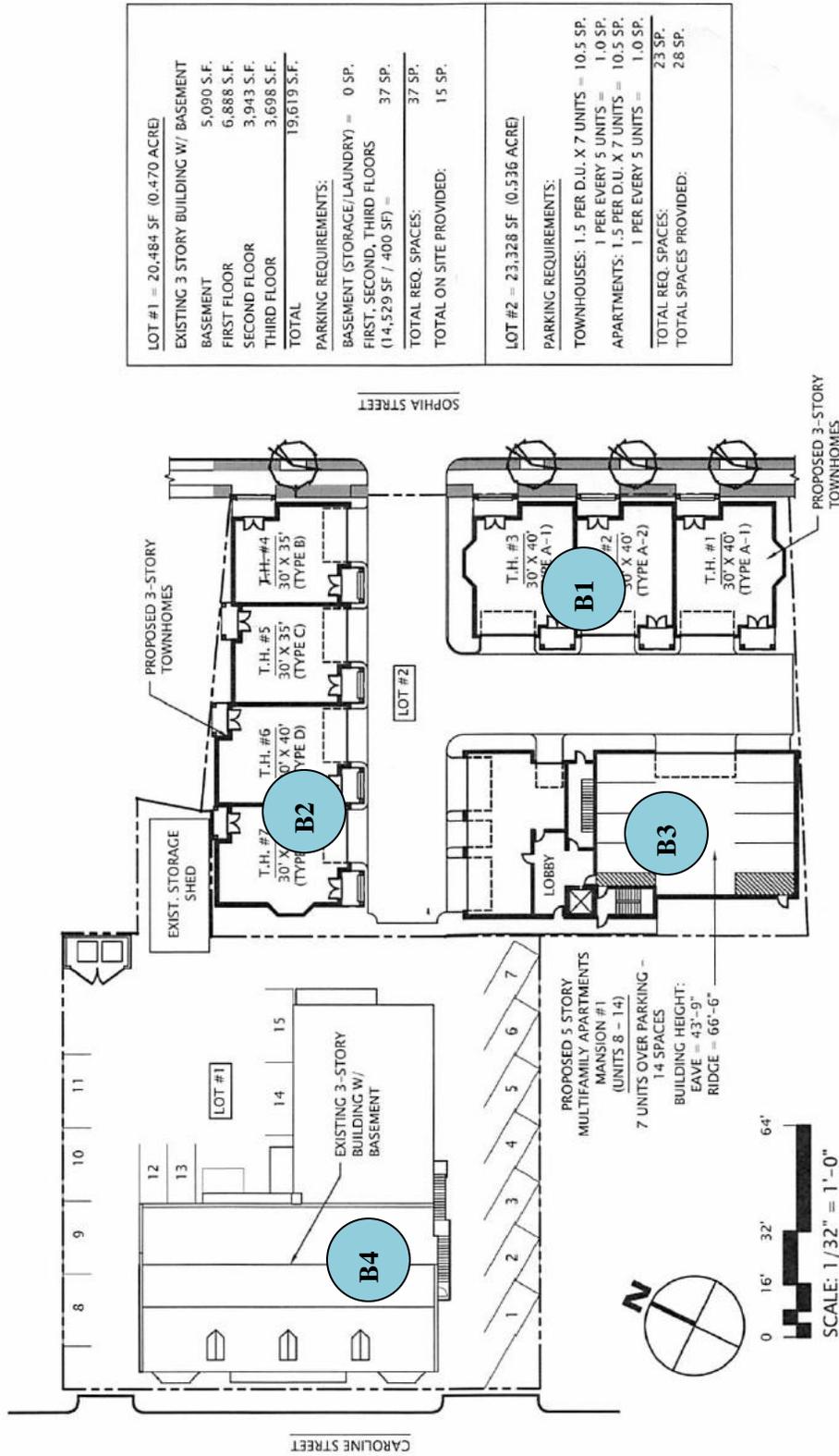
Refer to Background Item #1: Special Exception for Height Variance (above) for analysis of building heights and scale.

With regards to massing, structures in the district and in the immediate vicinity of the project site typically exhibit relatively narrow facades, with much of the mass extending towards the rear of the lot and/or the center of the block. The Caroline Street block clearly shows this pattern, with most structures ranging from 16-25 feet in width, oriented to the street, and displaying a clear and consistent streetscape. The pattern is also visible on Sophia Street, and is clearly visible when evaluating the historic Sanborn maps. Divisions in the façades of the proposed townhomes are generally consistent with adjacent structures, and the pattern of entrance and porch projections is appropriate for the district. However, the side-oriented unit (B2 on Attachment A) breaks with typical historic patterns of development. For this building, main entrances are accessed via a service drive and individual driveways are a primary feature. This arrangement creates a break in the streetscape and is incompatible with the character of the block and the Historic District.

Attachments:

- A. Proposed Site Plan: Townhomes at Riverwalk Square
- B. Existing Site Plan: 506-514 Sophia Street and 525 Caroline Street
- C. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps:
 - 1. 1886 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 3
 - 2. 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 8
 - 3. 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 14
- D. Photograph, Existing Structures at 506-514 Sophia Street
- E. Recommended Site Planning
 - 1. Existing Streetscape
 - 2. Site Plan
 - 3. Infill Recommendation
- F. Special Exception Application: Townhomes at Riverwalk Square
- G. Additional drawings received April 19, 2016

Attachment A



LOT #1 = 20,484 SF (0.470 ACRE)	
EXISTING 3 STORY BUILDING W/ BASEMENT	5,090 S.F.
FIRST FLOOR	6,888 S.F.
SECOND FLOOR	3,943 S.F.
THIRD FLOOR	3,698 S.F.
TOTAL	19,619 S.F.
PARKING REQUIREMENTS:	
BASEMENT (STORAGE/LAUNDRY) =	0 SP.
FIRST, SECOND, THIRD FLOORS	37 SP.
(14,529 SF / 400 SF) =	37 SP.
TOTAL REQ. SPACES:	37 SP.
TOTAL ON SITE PROVIDED:	15 SP.
LOT #2 = 23,328 SF (0.536 ACRE)	
PARKING REQUIREMENTS:	
TOWNHOUSES: 1.5 PER D.U. X 7 UNITS =	10.5 SP.
1 PER EVERY 5 UNITS =	1.0 SP.
APARTMENTS: 1.5 PER D.U. X 7 UNITS =	10.5 SP.
1 PER EVERY 5 UNITS =	1.0 SP.
TOTAL REQ. SPACES:	23 SP.
TOTAL SPACES PROVIDED:	28 SP.



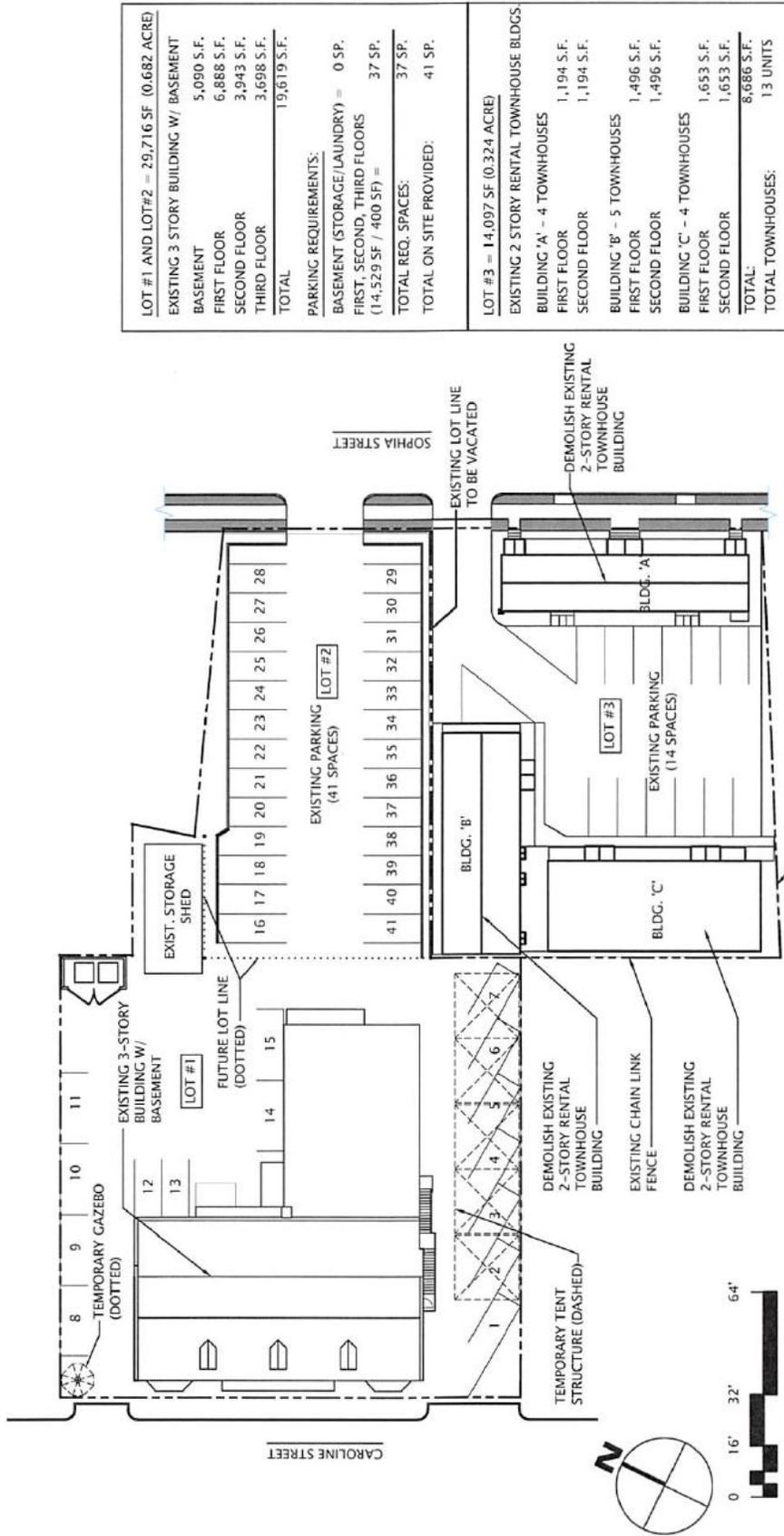
PROPOSED SITE PLAN
TOWNHOMES AT RIVERWALK SQUARE

506 - 520 SOPHIA STREET FREDERICKSBURG, VA

03/14/16

A2

Attachment B



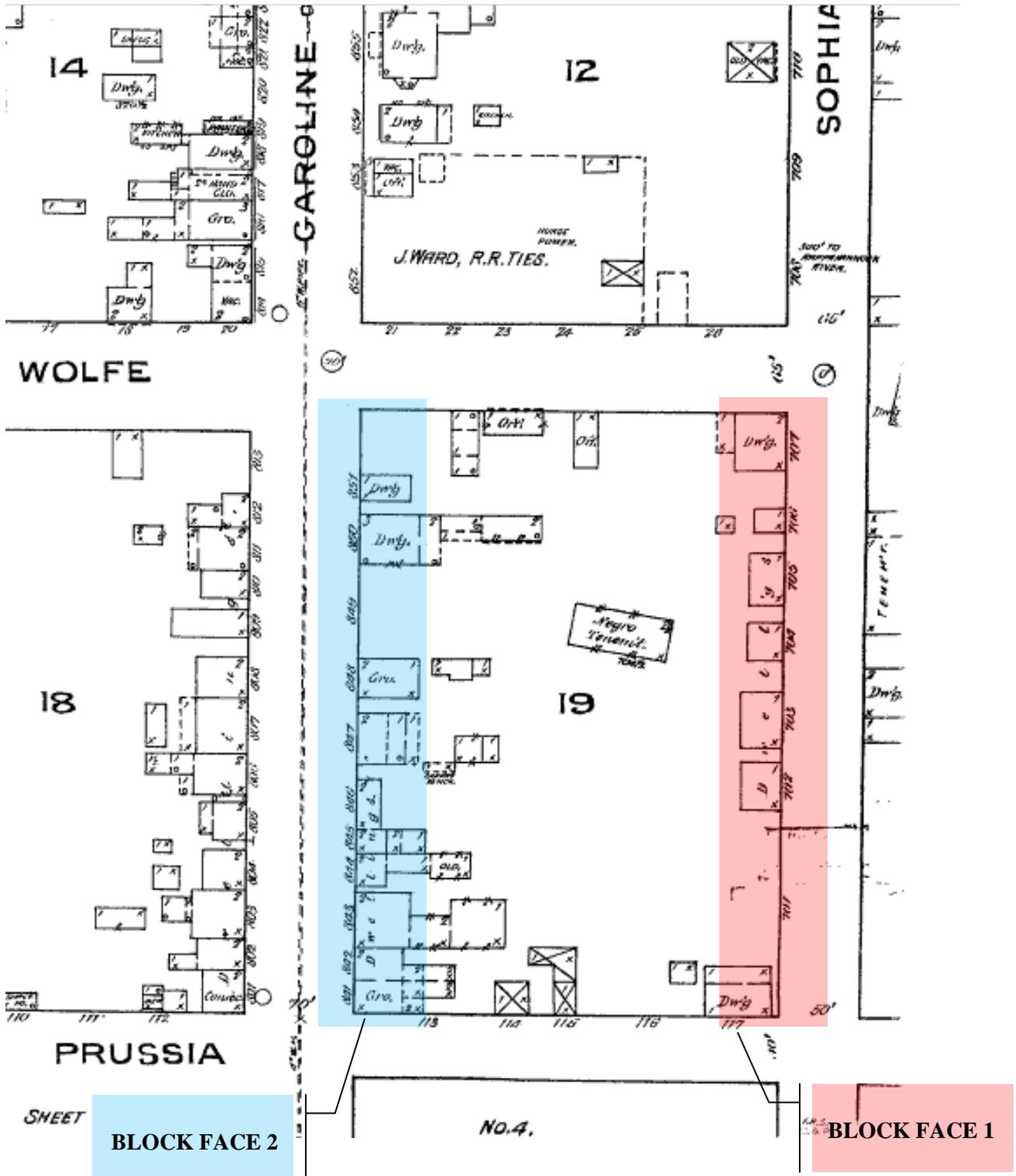
EXISTING SITE PLAN TOWNHOMES AT RIVERWALK SQUARE

506 - 520 SOPHIA STREET FREDERICKSBURG, VA

03/14/16



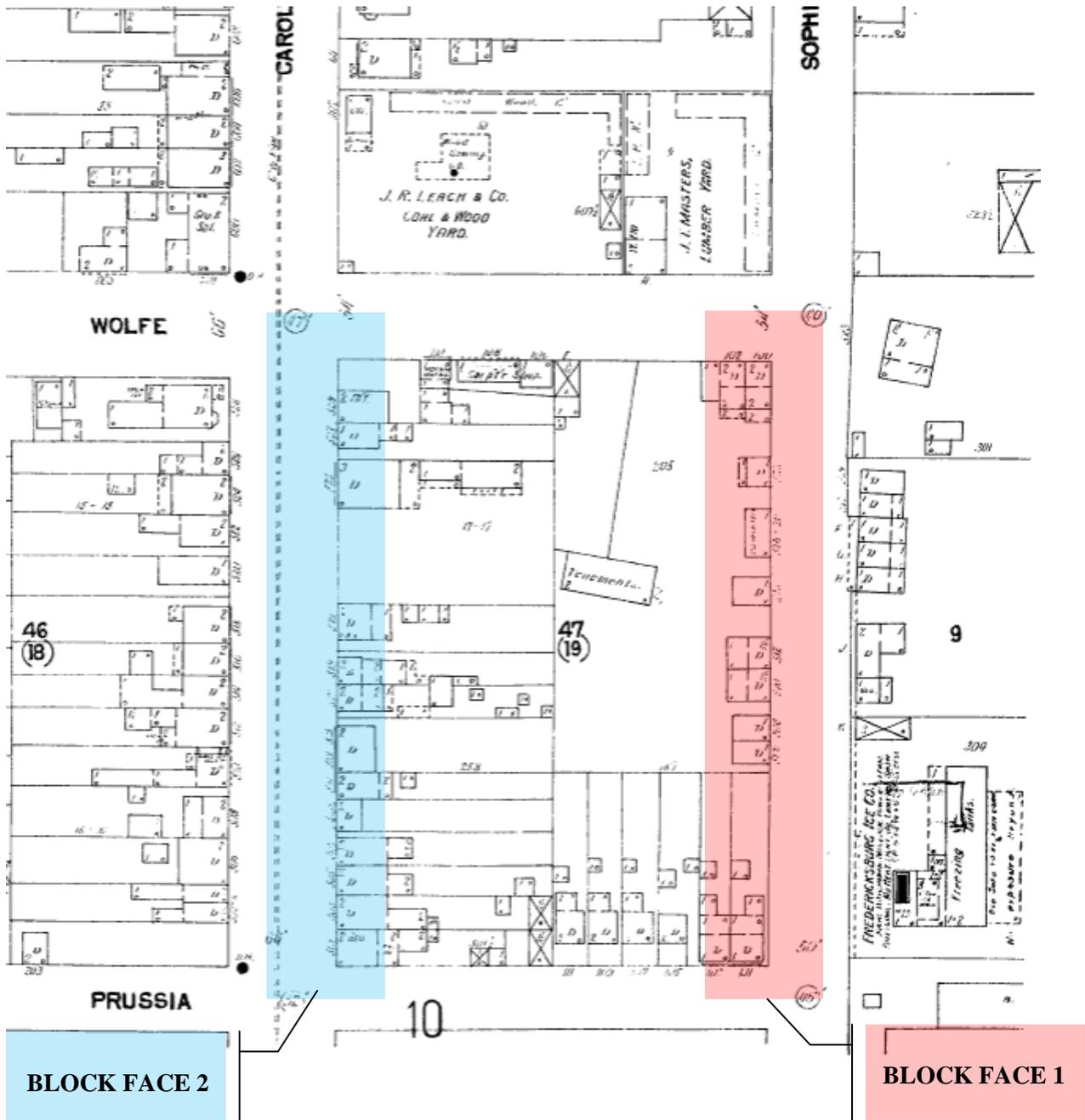
Attachment C.1



1886 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

Note structures oriented close to the street, with interior of the block reserved for service needs.

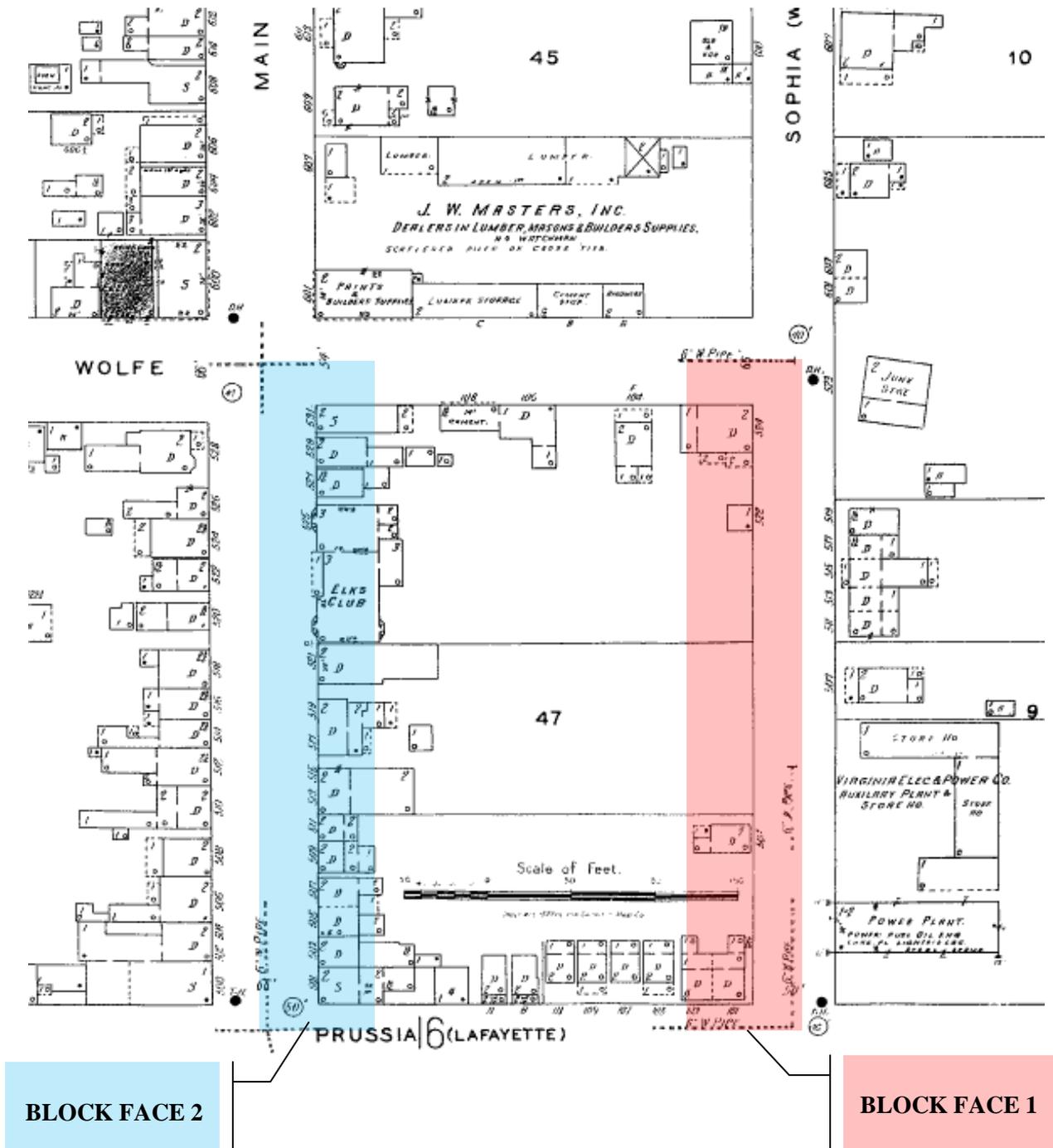
Attachment C.2



1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

Note structures oriented close to the street, with interior of the block reserved for service needs.

Attachment C.3



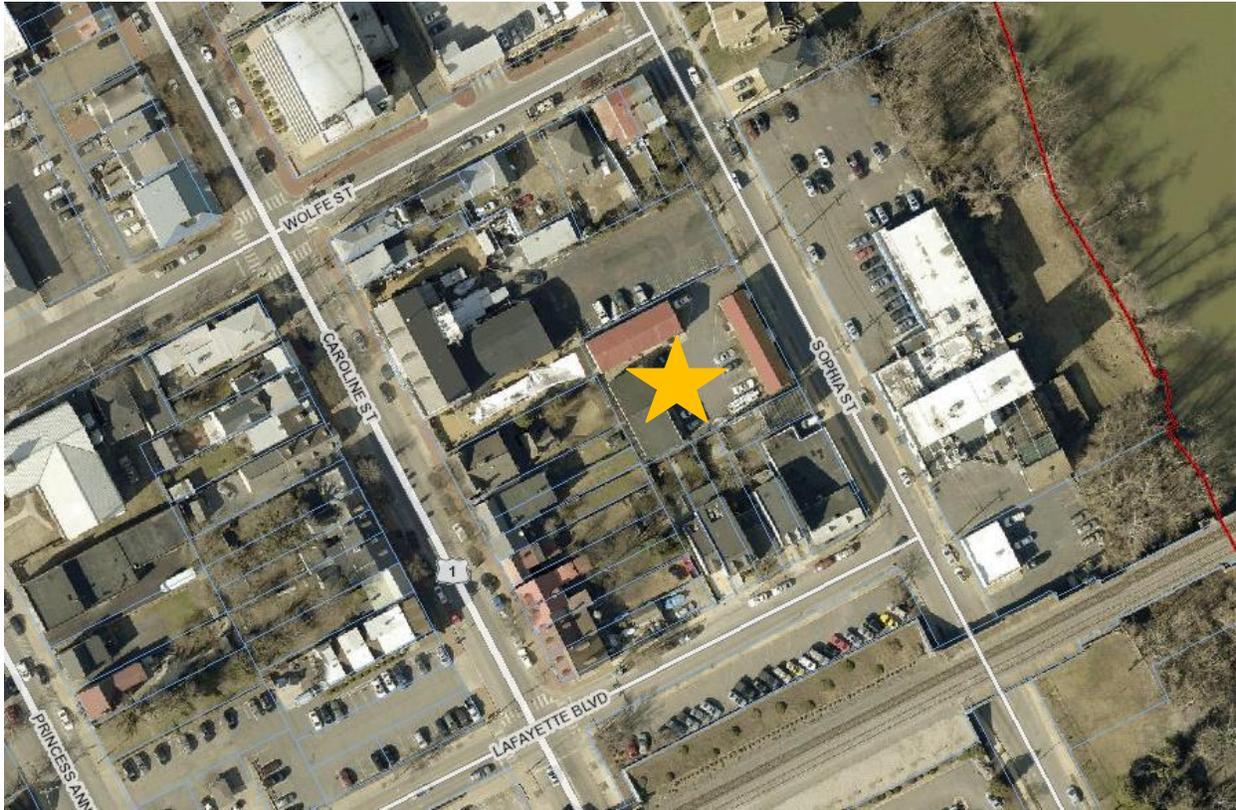
BLOCK FACE 2

BLOCK FACE 1

1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

Note the complete streetscape on Caroline (Main) Street, with dwellings on either side of the Elks Club building at 525 Caroline.

Attachment D



AERIAL



506-514 SOPHIA STREET

Attachment E.1 – EXISTING STREETScape

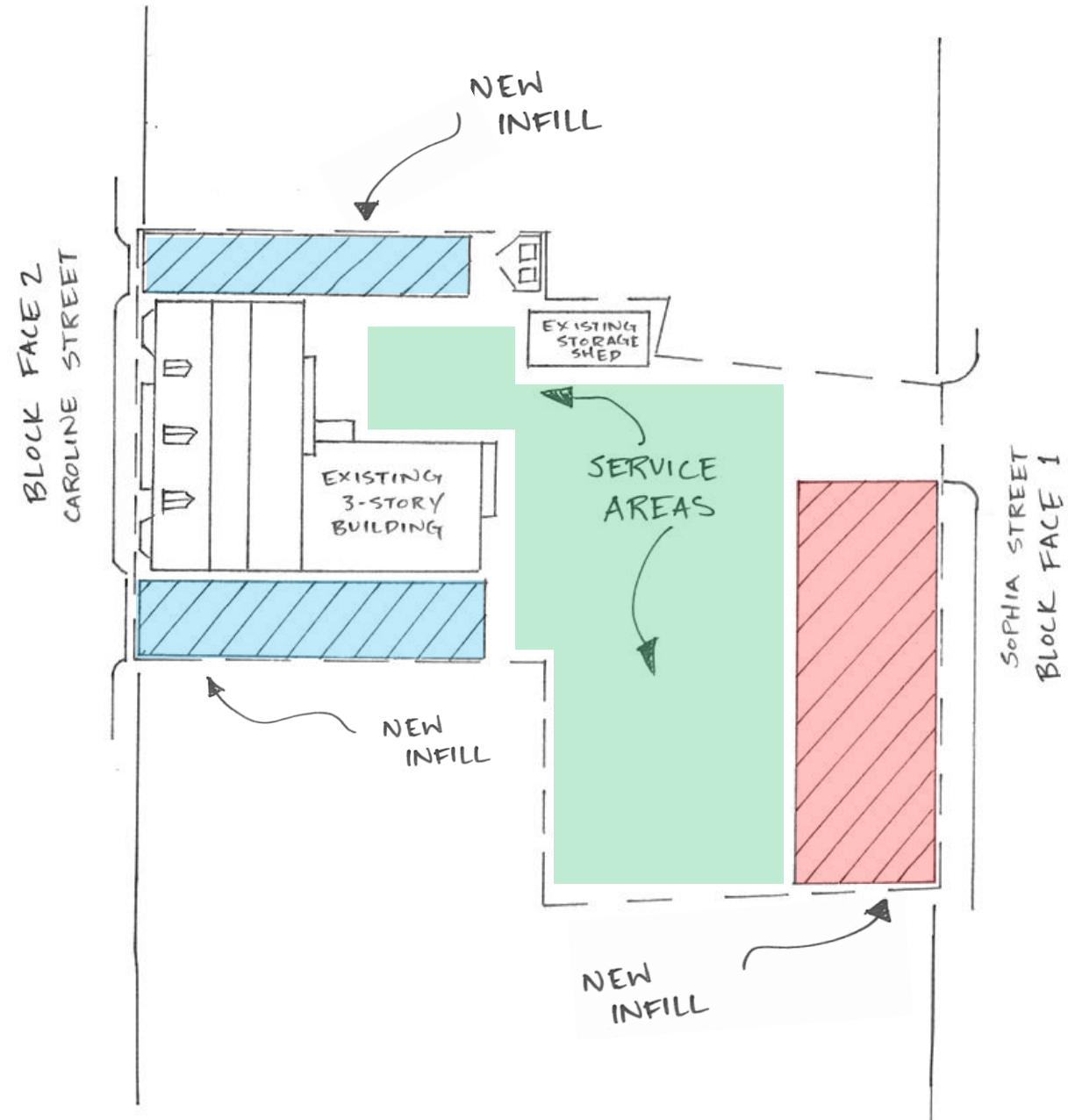


**BLOCK FACE 1
500 BLOCK SOPHIA STREET (WEST SIDE)**

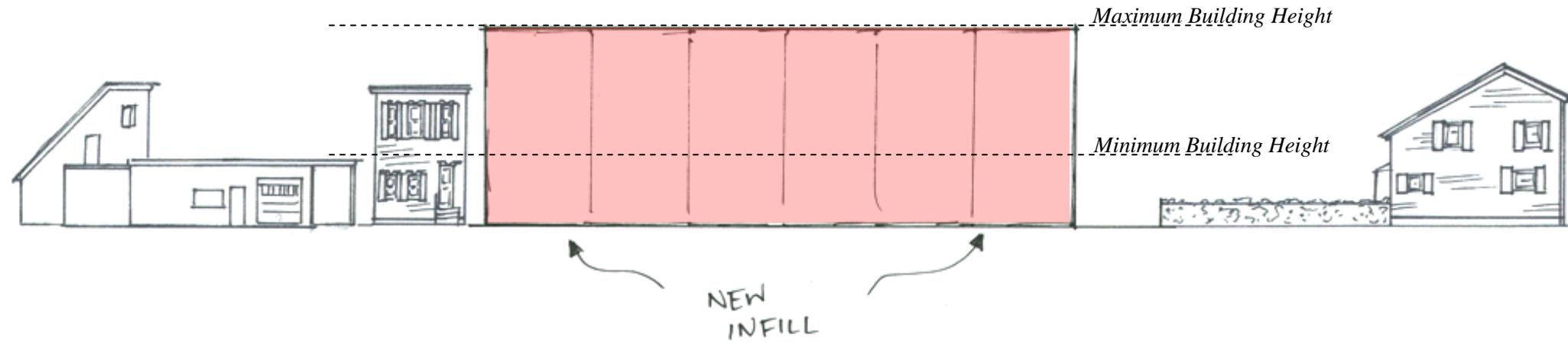


**BLOCK FACE 2
500 BLOCK CAROLINE STREET (EAST SIDE)**

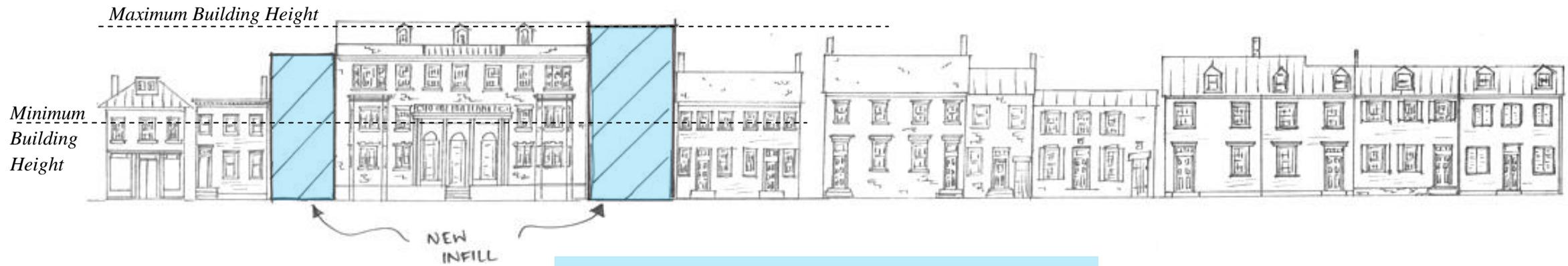
Attachment E.2 – RECOMMENDED SITE PLANNING



Attachment E.3 – INFILL RECOMMENDATION



BLOCK FACE 1
500 BLOCK SOPHIA STREET (WEST SIDE)



BLOCK FACE 2
500 BLOCK CAROLINE STREET (EAST SIDE)