

STAFF REPORT 02-10-2021 MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: 21-7054
ADDRESS: 2263 WABASH
HISTORIC DISTRICT: CORKTOWN
APPLICANT: NICOLE RITTENOUR/PUSH DESIGN
DATE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION: 01-21-2021
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 02-03-2021

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

SCOPE: ERECT A NEW HOUSE AND GARAGE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site, located at 2263 Wabash, currently serves as a parking lot for the apartment building at 2253-2255 Wabash. The lot is 50' wide and approximately 140' deep, consistent with other adjacent lots to the south. The home to the north of 2263 Wabash was erected circa 2009, and is a two-story, gabled-roof, structure that is clad with vinyl siding and sits on a large irregular corner parcel. The buildings to the south and east of the project parcel are circa 1900, flat-roof, two-story brick apartment houses. Front-gabled, one- and two-story, single-family, wood-frame homes dating from the late 19th century and early 20th century are located with the project area's near vicinity.



View of existing conditions at 2263 Wabash, looking towards the west. Staff photo, February 3, 2021.

The applicant, in their submission packet, has provided a comprehensive history of the site with reference to a series of Sanborn maps. These maps indicate that the site for many years was occupied by a wood-framed single-family dwelling, accompanied at the rear by a 2-story brick auto garage (or variably, “shop”) which the applicant also defines as a carriage house. The only remaining structure or element on the site is the fence at the rear of the parking area. It is not clear when the original house was taken down. Per the applicant, the rear carriage house was taken down by the city prior to their acquisition of the property. Staff could not locate an HDC approval for this action.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Per the submitted drawings, narrative, and subsequent communication, the applicant is proposing to erect a new single-family home and detached garage, in a contemporary design, as such:

The rectangular-plan home will be two-stories in height and topped with a flat roof. The exterior walls will be clad with a red brick veneer which is accented with black composite horizontal siding (Hardi Artisan line). Windows are fixed and casement units (Marvin line, fiberglass material). The front elevation displays a partial-width, inset, brick and concrete porch with a wood ceiling; a solid wood primary entry door with a large side lite at the first story, and a large set of sliding glass doors (fiberglass) at the second story. The front porch steps are proposed to be concrete treads supported below by concealed stringers. The front porch floor is also proposed to be concrete with finished edges. A full-lite, single-hinged wood door which is topped by a shed canopy (plate metal with a painted finish) is located at the south elevation. The rear elevation features a full-width inset thermally-modified wood deck with a set of sliding glass doors, and a single wood door at the first story. The side entry stairs are proposed to be thermally-modified wood to match the rear deck. A set of fiberglass sliding doors at the second story, rear elevation, open on to a balcony with steel railing. The ceilings at both the front and rear porch are proposed to be the same white ash wood as the rear deck.

Per the applicant, the exterior lighting (wall sconces) depicted on the drawings have been eliminated at the front and rear porches. Instead, there are two (2) proposed ceiling lights at the front porch. There are three (3) proposed fixtures at the rear porch ceiling. These would be 6" surface-mounted fixtures with black metal finish.

The garage will be located to the rear/west of the home. This building is rectangular in plan and features a steeply-pitched, front-gabled black asphalt-shingle roof with two fixed skylights. Exterior walls are clad with black composite horizontal siding (Hardi Artisan line) and windows are single fiberglass casement units. A sliding fiberglass door is located at the east elevation while an overhead aluminum door is at the west elevation. A single, full-lite person wood door is on the north elevation.

New sections of 6'-0"-high, untreated cedar fencing will be erected at the side elevations. The site plan indicates that new foundation plantings and a new tree will be installed. There are two (2) existing flowering dogwood trees in front that are to remain. The proposed front landscaping would be a mix of evergreen, deciduous, and ornamental grasses with flower accents. A new concrete pad will be poured to the north/side of the garage.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Corktown Historic District was established in 1984.
- Staff visited the project site and vicinity on February 3rd. This site is only a few parcels north of 2221 and 2225 Wabash, the latter of which is a similar new construction home with contemporary styling, which also infilled a vacant lot. Those projects were approved by the Commission in June 2019. This present project site, being closer to the intersection with Michigan Avenue, is in a slightly more prominent location.
- Staff was able to view proposed brick samples on-site during the field visit.
- The adjacent house to the north, 2275 Wabash, is new construction that was approved by the Commission in 2009. The deliberately anachronistic style and vinyl materiality of that house would not be recommended by staff as appropriate today, given our understanding of current NPS guidance, and thus should not be referenced as guidance for other new houses.
- A designation slide of this property, 2263 Wabash, was not available in staff's files
- As a guide to new construction, the [Elements of Design](#) for this district does offer the following (excerpted) relevant points:
 - **Element 1, Height:** *Most residential buildings in the district range from one (1) story to two and one half (2½) stories tall*
 - **Element 2, Proportion of buildings' front facades:** *Proportion varies in the district, depending on the age, style and type of building*
 - **Element 3, Proportion of openings within the facades:** *Window openings are usually taller than wide, but there are also square openings and transom window openings which are wider than tall. Window openings are almost always subdivided...*
 - **Element 4, Rhythm of solids to voids in front facades:** *...post-1880s Queen Anne style buildings exhibit a greater freedom, with their bay windows and combinations of windows in gables...*
 - **Element 5, Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets:** *The original pattern of spacing of buildings on streets was that of houses placed very close together.*
 - **Element 6, Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections:** *Most houses in the district have projecting front porches, usually on one (1) side of the front façade and sometimes wrapping around to the side...some Victorian houses have a secondary porch on the side*
 - **Element 7, Relationship of materials:** *The great majority of buildings in the district are wood frame structures originally clad in clapboard with wooden skirting or brick foundations...There are some brick residential buildings in the district, the majority of these being duplexes and multi-unit dwellings*
 - **Element 8, Relationship of textures:** *...Detailed brickwork on brick buildings contributes to textural interest when it exists*
 - **Element 9, Relationship of colors:** *Paint colors in the district generally relate to style*
 - **Element 10, Relationship of architectural details:** *These generally relate to style...In general, Corktown is rich in its diversity and quality of architectural styles and detail.*
 - **Element 11, Relationship of roof shapes:** *Pitched roofs with frontal gables predominate in the district...commercial buildings generally have flat roofs.*
 - **Element 12, Walls of continuity:** *The major wall of continuity is created by the buildings...*
 - **Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments:** *The typical treatment of individual properties is a shallow flat front lawn area in grass turf, subdivided by a concrete walk leading to the front entrance and sometimes a concrete walk leading to the side entrance.*
 - **Element 14, Relationship of open space to structures:** *Open space in the form of front yards to buildings is generally very shallow*
 - **Element 15, Scale of facades and façade elements:** *The majority of buildings in the district are small in scale...Façade elements...are moderate in scale. Details within these elements are generally small in scale.*
 - **Element 16, Directional expression of front elevations:** *Two-story Italianate and Greek Revival single-family residences are vertical in directional expression...two-story Queen Anne buildings are either neutral in directional expression or have vertically expressed front*

facades...

- **Element 17, Rhythm of building setbacks:** *Setbacks vary from area to area...although they are usually consistent within blocks. In general, buildings have very shallow front yards...Buildings on the north-south streets and corners are very close to the front lot lines.*
 - **Element 18, Relationship of lot coverage:** *Lot coverage ranges...the average residential coverage being approximately forty (40) percent.*
 - **Element 19, Degree of complexity within the façade:** *Early buildings are simple and straightforward. Queen Anne buildings are more complex in massing and detail but are not overly complex.*
 - **Element 20, Orientation, vistas, overviews:** *Garages are oriented toward the alleys...the general overview is that of small-scale mixed-use neighborhood...*
 - **Element 21, Symmetric or asymmetric appearance:** *Most buildings in the district are asymmetrical in appearance, but result in balanced compositions.*
 - **Element 22, General environmental character:** *The Corktown Historic District, with its narrow lots, shallow front yards, and small-scaled buildings, has a low-density, urban, mixed use character of a pre-automobile city...*
- Staff especially appreciates the gesture made with the corner-recessed front entry porch and small side entry, which effectively translates a common historic period feature (Victorian corner/wrap-around) into a contemporary vocabulary. The relatively simple composition is also consistent with the lack of complexity (even for Queen Anne buildings) cited by the Elements as being common in the district.
 - The proposed dominant materials, including textured brick and modern facsimiles of historic siding, are grounded in the materials and expressions used on historic buildings in the district
 - Although a flat-roofed single-family residential house is not common in Corktown, staff finds that the siting of this particular house, adjacent to a (multi-family) residential building with a flat roof, is not incompatible with the vicinity's historic character and should be found appropriate.
 - The proposed house, and the garage, are reasonably scaled and sited in a manner similar to the historic structures which once occupied the now vacant site, and are sensitively designed in quality, contextual materials of our own time. The proposed project restores some of the historically appropriate density which is a major characteristic of this district, according to both the designation report and the Elements of Design.

ISSUES

- It is staff's opinion that the proposed new construction retains the historic character of the property and district, is aligned with the district's Elements of Design, and protects and preserves the integrity of the property and the surrounding district.
- Staff does find that introducing a vertical subdivision of the prominent square "bay" window at the first story (similar to the second story window above the front porch) might make the design *more* appropriate under a close reading of the Elements of Design (see #3, above), but does not find the proposed design *inappropriate* based on the cumulative effect of the proposed design, per NPS guidance in applying the Standards. The applicant states that the proportion of the front square window is a reference to the center bay window on the adjacent building, and that the proposed corner window configuration with vertical brick accent is intended to recall the bay window on the adjacent building.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-73, Certificate of Appropriateness

The proposed new construction infills the location of a former single-family dwelling and garage with a structure built for the same purpose, compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of its environment, and which does not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The design includes several features to add complexity and visual interest consistent with its historic context, and is compliant with the district's Elements of Design.

Staff therefore recommends that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Corktown Historic District's Elements of Design.