

STAFF REPORT: FEBRUARY 9, 2022 MEEETING

PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

ADDRESS: 1356-1368 LABROSSE

APPLICATION NO: #22-7666

HISTORIC DISTRICT: CORKTOWN

APPLICANT: JOHN BIGGAR

OWNER: FIVE ON 8TH LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 12/22/2022

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 1/29/2022

SCOPE: INSTALL TWO NEW DORMERS, REPLACE WINDOWS, REHABILITATE DWELLING AND REMOVE TREES

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project area includes three adjacent parcels: two vacant parcels addressed at 1364 and 1368 Labrosse and 1356 Labrosse, a parcel which includes a brick, ca. 1856 single-family dwelling. The subject dwelling is rectangular in plan and rises 2 ½ stories in height. The side-gabled roof is covered with asphalt shingles and displays a distinctive high brick parapet with limestone coping. Per the below image, a small skylight (which was installed in 2006) is located at the rear portion of the roof. A deteriorated wood cornice board with dentils is located at primary elevation's roof/wall junction. Fenestration includes wood double-hung sash and 1/1 aluminum storm windows with wood trim/brickmould. Most windows have a stone sill. Prominent rusticated stone window lintels are located at the front elevation while an arched soldier course of brick serves as the lintel at most of the side and rear façade windows. The building's primary elevation features an historic-age, single wood door with wood panel sidelites and multiple-lite transom. A recently constructed temporary wood stoop/porch deck with a wood handrail leads to the primary entrance. An open, shed-roof, wood-frame structure has recently been installed at the building's rear elevation.



1356 Labrosse, current appearance

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to rehabilitate the dwelling at 1356 Labrosse. He is therefore seeking the Commission's approval to undertake the following items, per the submitted project materials:

Front/South Elevation

- Remove the existing damaged wood cornice/entablature board at the front elevation soffit area and retain existing dentils. Install a new cornice/entablature board with a new "composite lumber, Azek, or approved equal" (dimensions of existing and proposed have not been provided) and reinstall salvaged dentils
- Retain and restore existing front door and frame
- Erect a new concrete front porch deck with brick sidewalls (brick sample not provided)
- Replace existing windows and associated trim/brickmould with new double-hung, 6/6 aluminum units
- Erect a new temporary wood porch deck with wood handrail (work complete)

East/Side Elevation

- Replace existing windows and associated trim/brickmould with aluminum window units. The windows shall include two, 6/6 double-hung units and a 3-lite fixed window.

West/Side Elevation

- Replace existing windows and associated trim/brickmould with new 6/6 double-hung aluminum units
- Install new single lite fixed aluminum windows in new openings at first story. Please note that the new openings were administratively approved in November 2021 via COA #21-7597, under authority given to staff under Resolution #21-04

Rear/North Elevation

- Install a temporary, shed-roof, wood-frame shelter (work initiated)
- Replace existing windows and associated trim/brickmould with new 6/6 and 3/3 double-hung aluminum units
- Install new 6/6 and 6/3 double-hung aluminum windows in new openings. Please note that the new openings were administratively approved in November 2021 via COA #21-7597, under authority given to staff under Resolution #21-04
- Install new wood, full-lite French door in existing opening
- Erect a new full width porch with composite decking. Balustrade will be composed of wood composite clad balusters/posts and horizontal wire cables

Roof

- Replace existing asphalt shingle covering with new composite, slate style shingles
- At front/south-facing roof surface, install two new dormers. Dormer sidewalls shall be clad with Hardie/composite siding (exposure and profile not included) and rakes/trim pilaster detailing shall be of composite. Each dormer will have a 6/6 double-hung aluminum window
- At front/south and rear/north elevation, install new half-round copper gutters and round copper downspouts

- At rear/north facing roof surface, remove existing skylight and install two new skylights

Landscaping

- Remove the large Poplar tree which has entered the house foundation/crawlspace and has caused damage to the brick masonry walls
- Keep the Crab Apple tree at the southwest corner of the house.
- Cut the Rose of Sharon down to grade along the sidewalk between the house and the driveway at 1364 Labrosse to permit safe access for equipment to repair the brick, masonry façade. Leave the roots in place and allow the Rose of Sharon to grow back after masonry repairs are completed
- Keep the existing groundcover material along the sidewalk in front of the house
- Remove the dead Cherry tree in the driveway at 1364 Labrosse
- Remove the upright Yews which have encroached onto the driveway at 1364 Labrosse
- Remove the dead Ash tree at the corner of 8th and Labrosse and trim back all dead and overhanging branches interfering with the sidewalk.
- Remove the invasive “spray” or “weed” trees along 8th Street and continuing along the alley.
- The black walnut at the rear of the property is to remain.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The dwelling proposed for rehabilitation was erected prior to the Civil War, in 1856. At the time of the district’s designation, the home was one of only five brick Federal-style brick “townhouses” which remained in Detroit
- On 11/4/2021, staff issued an administrative approval for brickwork which was required to stabilize the home. The approved scope also included the addition of **new window openings** at the west and rear elevations, the enclosure of one window opening on the west elevation, first story, and the partial enclosure of a window and door opening on the rear elevation. Although staff approved the new window openings, the actual window units **were not approved**. Rather, the window units proposed for these new openings have been presented to the Commission for review with the current application
- HDC staff visited the project site to review the condition of the trees/landscaping proposed for removal and it is his opinion that the work is generally appropriate. However, he does recommend that two new trees be planted to replace the diseased Ash and Cherry trees that are proposed for removal.
- The application does not include a landscape site plan nor does it indicate the location of any new fencing or HVAC/mechanical equipment
- The recently added front and rear porch structures were not approved by HDC prior to their installation. The applicant has indicated that these structures are temporary and that the rear structure was added to enable to project’s mason to undertake the approved brick repairs. He further stated that the front porch was installed in order to enable the project’s contractors to access the home’s interior space.

ISSUES

- Please see the attached photos which present the condition of the home’s windows. Per the submitted drawings, all existing windows and associated trim (with the exception of the

window at the west elevation first story which will be removed and the openings infilled with brick) are proposed to be removed and replaced with new aluminum windows. After a review of the window condition photos, staff determined that the areas of deterioration at the windows (to include the existing sash and wood trim) can be repaired and that the units and trim do not merit wholesale replacement. Where wood sash does not exist (ie. where 1/1 aluminum storm units exist), staff recommends that the existing historic trim be retained and repaired and new wood sash which match the existing historic sash be installed.

- The application proposes to replace the existing deteriorated wood cornice board at the front elevation with a new composite cornice board while the existing wood dentils at that location will be retained and reinstalled. It is likely that the wood dentils and composite cornice will weather differently and will ultimately detract from the home's historic appearance. Staff therefore recommends that the proposed new cornice board be wood rather than composite.
- It is staff's opinion that the addition of new symmetrically-located, appropriately-scaled dormers to the front roof surface is an appropriate means to provide additional light to the home's attic space. The proposed placement and detailing of the dormers are compatible with the building's Federalist style. Also, the the use of composite materials and the installation of aluminum windows will mark them as a recent addition. However, staff did view a number of extant contemporaneous Federal style townhomes in several cities (to include New York, New York; Baltimore, Maryland; Washington DC; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Boston Massachusetts) and noted that the scale of the proposed dormers does appear to be smaller than typical when compared to the size of the window openings at the front elevation. See the below for examples. Staff recommends that the dormers height and width be increased to better align with a typical Federal Style roof dormer.

RECOMMENDATION

#1 – Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Denial

HDC recommends that the Commission deny the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the replacement of the existing wood sash and/or the replacement of the existing wood window trim/brickmould because the work does meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular Standard # 6 *Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*

#2 – Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the remaining work items (outside of the proposed wood window sash and trim replacement) because they conform to the Corktown Historic District's Elements of Design and meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation. However, staff does recommend that this COA be issued with the following conditions:

- Two new trees be planted to replace the dead trees that shall be removed. The applicant shall refer to the attached “List of Trees Recommended for the City of Detroit” and select a medium or tall species for installation within the property’s parcel. HDC staff shall be afforded the opportunity to approve the species and location of the two new trees prior to the issuance of the project permit
- The scale of the two new dormers proposed for installation at the front roof surface shall be increased to an appropriate size. The applicant shall submit a revised proposal for this work item to HDC staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of the Certificate of Appropriateness prior to the issuance of the project permit. Should staff determine that the proposed revision to the dormer size is inappropriate, staff shall forward the work item to the Commission for review at a future meeting.
- HDC staff be afforded the opportunity to review and approve any new landscape/hardscape plans for the property prior to permit issuance. Should staff determine that the proposed work does not meet the SOI Standards, staff shall forward the work items to the Commission for review at a future meeting
- The new cornice board at the front elevation shall be wood and shall include the reinstallation of the existing wood dentils. The board shall match the existing in dimension, detailing, and texture. The applicant shall provide HDC staff the dimensions of the existing vs the proposed for review and approval prior to the issuance of the project permit
- All existing wood windows (to include the existing sash and wood trim) shall be retained and repaired. Where wood sash does not exist (ie. where 1/1 aluminum storm units exist), the existing historic trim be retained and repaired and new wood sash which match the existing historic sash shall be installed.
- The existing, newly-installed front porch/railing and rear wood enclosure shall be removed on or before December 31, 2022.



1356 Labrosse, current appearance (front elevation) showing unapproved temporary front porch deck



1356 Labrosse, current appearance (side/west elevation)



1356 Labrosse, current appearance (west elevation, showing unapproved temporary shelter at rear)



1356 Labrosse, appearance ca. 1979



1356 Labrosse, appearance in 2020 prior to current brickwork



1356 Labrosse, appearance in 2020 prior to current brickwork



1368 Labrosse, showing existing rooftop skylight



New York, NY, example of contemporaneous Federal-style townhomes



New York, NY example of contemporaneous Federal-style townhomes



Baltimore, Maryland, example of contemporaneous Federal-style townhomes



Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, example of contemporaneous Federal-style townhomes