

**STAFF REPORT: FEBRUARY 8, 2023 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: A. DYE**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8204**

**ADDRESS: 7908 – 7912 ST. PAUL**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: WEST VILLAGE**

**APPLICANT: RENATA POLK, SUSTAINABLE VILLAGE GROUP**

**PROPERTY OWNER: RENATA POLK**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JANUARY 17, 2023**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JANUARY 24, 2023 and FEBRUARY 21, 2023**

**SCOPE: REMOVE WOOD SIDING\*, INSTALL SYNTHETIC SIDING, REPLACE WINDOWS AND DOORS, REBUILD PORCH**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The two-family dwelling at 7908 – 7912 St. Paul was erected after 1897 and before 1910. It is a 2 ½ story structure on a raised foundation. The symmetrical façade is centered with a two-story bay that displays a typical window pattern for this era: central fixed windows with leaded glass transoms above, and double-hung windows, matching the height of the central openings, in place on the angled walls. The bay culminates with a recessed gable within which is a small centrally placed fixed or awning window. Covered entry porches fill the remaining first floor of the front elevation and small double-hung windows are centrally located within the remaining wall surface at the second level. The historic wood siding was recently removed without HDC approval, so the underlying wood sheathing is the current exterior wall surface. Historic wood windows (some with leaded glass, some with wood muntins) are still in place in most openings, and the majority of visible window sash appear to be wood framed one-over-one double-hung units. Metal storm windows are in place on all non-boarded openings. Wood scrollwork applied trim remains at the underside corners of the front gable.



*Staff photo, January 24, 2023*

The porches are in a state of reconstruction. HDC staff issued a COA in July 2018 for the removal of non-original wood porch railings and posts, and the installation of straight spindle cedar railings and square posts, new corner posts (to match remaining historic/original interior corner posts), new tongue and groove decking and ceiling (Douglas fir), new porch fascia, and painting of all porch elements C4 yellowish-white.

## PROPOSAL

### Front Porches

- Repair and replace components as needed.

### Siding, Trim, Soffit, Fascia

- Remove wood lap siding on the front and sides; install Hardie Plank smooth lap siding.
- Replace trim, soffit, and fascia.

### Windows/Doors

- Replace front doors.
- Replace all windows (with exception of leaded glass sash). Install Andersen 100 series windows. Color: Black

### Exterior Painting

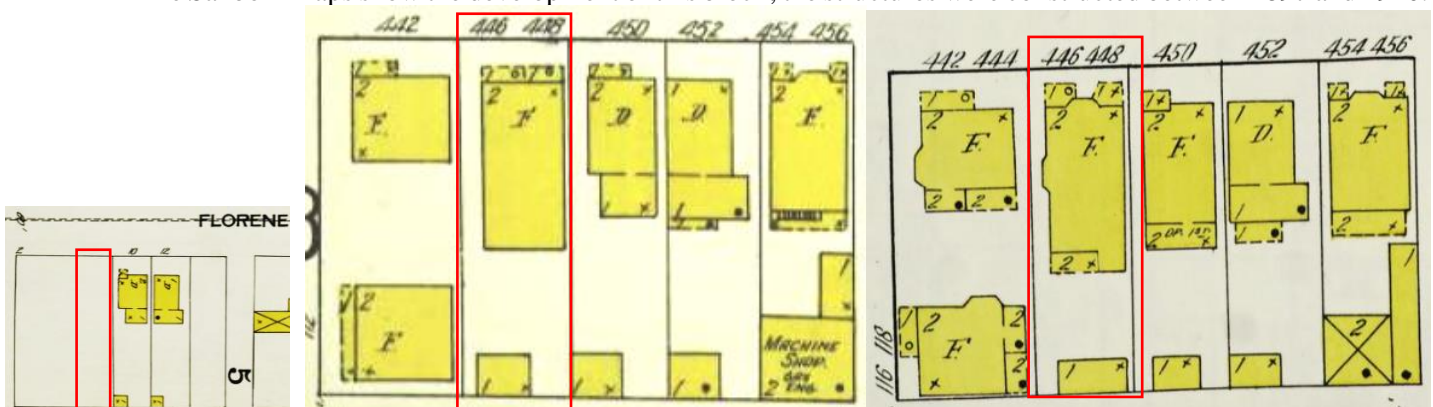
Body – B4: Moderate Yellow

Trim – C4: Yellowish White

Porch – C4: Yellowish White

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The West Village Historic District was established in 1983.
- The first name of this stretch of street between Van Dyke and Shipherd was Florene; it was renamed St. Paul by 1910. The lot at 7908 – 7912 had original street numbers of 446 – 448.
- The Sanborn maps show the development of this block; the structures were constructed between 1897 and 1910.



Vol 6, 1897 Vol. 8, 1910, Image 70 Vol. 8, 1915, Image 80

- Between 1910 and 1915, a number of the houses underwent renovation, at which time houses were enlarged, porch footprints were added or altered, and bay windows added. It is possible that the ornamental detail at the front elevations was added at this time.
- By 1950, all of the garages on this block were demolished, as were three of the structures (two facing St. Paul and one facing Shipherd). The block remains like this today.



*Detroit Parcel Viewer*





Staff photo, January 24, 2023 – Addresses from left to right: 7926- 7930 St. Paul, 7916 - 7918 St. Paul, and 7908 – 7912 St. Paul

- The three houses, as they were constructed and/or renovated within a similar timeframe, have a commonality of design through massing (long and lean), raised foundations, steeply pitched roofs (with matching ridge height), front-facing gables with centered window openings, pent roofs (two of the houses), projecting front elevation walls, applied decorative ornament and wood clapboard siding.
- Staff believes these houses fall under the city’s identified architectural style of “Composite Victorian” (style #12). *“The architecture of the Victorian period was known for its eclecticism. The combination of styles including....Colonial, Stick, Queen Anne...and others resulted in buildings which are difficult to characterize...Most examples tend to have more restraint...where various Queen Anne and Colonial elements were added in an unusual way to a basic hip roof box.”* As the structures on St. Paul are two-family dwellings, the elongated footprint is another adaptation of the “hip roof box”.
- One highly visible detail that was present on all three buildings is the dual-sized wood siding - narrow boards on the front elevation with wider, more standard-sized boards on the side and rear walls. This combination is seen throughout West Village and is a defining feature of many clapboard homes in Detroit. Narrow siding, like narrow flooring, is more expensive to install, and intended to imbue the front elevation with a richer character (quite literally).
- Staff analyzed a number of blocks within the district along St. Paul and Van Dyke, and roughly calculated about 75% of the two-family houses built by 1910 were renovated before 1915 to add bay windows at the front elevation (sometimes also a side elevation) and highly defined separate front entrances. This large scale renovation work coincided with the development of Indian Village (which began in earnest between 1910 and 1915) and possibly was a way to modernize and embellish the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century housing stock.



7926- 7930 St. Paul

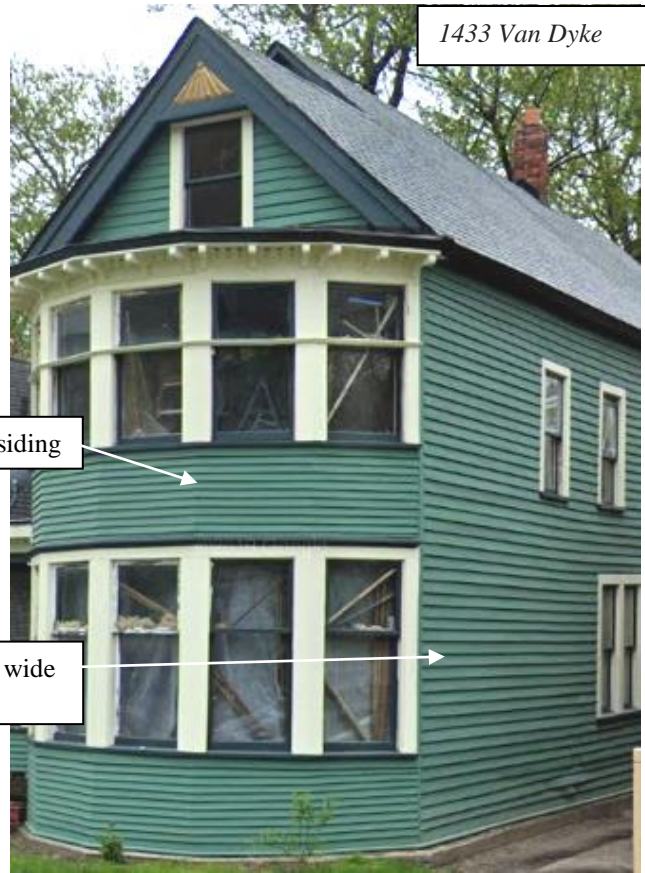


7916 - 7918 St. Paul

Narrow siding

Standard wide siding





All of the houses on this page are two family dwellings. While most of the houses in this area, like those on St. Paul, were renovated between the 1910 and 1915 Sanborn map dates, these four houses still reflected their original footprints on the 1915 map, yet appear with renovated footprints on the 1915-1951 map.







7908 – 7912 St. Paul – Google street view, May 2019.

- The West Village Final Report states that many of the middle class and two-family dwellings were constructed by builders, carpenters, and contractors. It is staff's opinion the use of narrow siding on the front elevations was a vernacular styling for "Composite Victorians" and could be considered a hybrid of Queen Anne and Colonial Revival details: clapboard siding (Colonial Revival) and differently patterned/dimensioned siding (Queen Anne).
- As mentioned under "Existing Conditions", in July 2018 staff issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for the repair and partial rebuilding of the front porches. The COA also included the following scope of work:
  - Repair, and replace when needed, the original lap siding (new siding will match the historic siding in dimension and profile).
  - Paint exterior: Body - B4 Moderate Yellow, Porch/Trim – C4 Yellowish White
- On November 18, 2022 a See Click Fix notice was submitted alerting staff that the wood siding had been removed from the front and sides of the house, and that both front porches were gone.



**ISSUES**  
**Siding/Trim**



*West side elevation - Applicant photo*

- The applicant's photos give evidence of occasional missing boards and flaking paint; however, the majority of the siding was intact and very likely repairable. This house was constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of old growth lumber which was exceptionally dense and highly durable.



*Staff photo, January 2023*

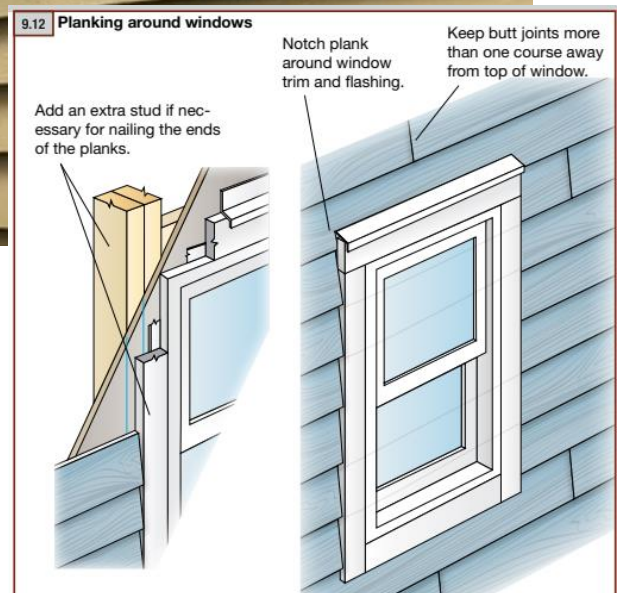


- As discussed under staff observations, the dimensional difference of the front and side elevation siding is a distinctive character-defining feature of this house and immediately identifies its era of construction. The applicant confirmed the siding on the sides and rear of the house had a 5" reveal; the siding on the front elevation had a 3" reveal.
- The applicant stated the proposed Hardie lap siding can offer a 4" reveal for the front elevation and a 5" reveal for the side and rear elevations. While this offers some dimensional change, the 2" difference in dimensions for the historic siding is distinctly noticeable; a detail that would be lost (or significantly minimized) with the Hardie siding.
- Staff is also concerned about the possible loss of detail at each window opening with the installation of the Hardie Product. The below photo, which is of a portion of the west elevation before the historic siding was removed, shows window casings with narrow protruding headers and sills at each opening.



*Applicant photo, west-side elevation*

- The diagram at right is from a HardiePlank product brochure. It shows a uniformity of width for each side of the window opening and flat surface.







*Rear elevation - Staff photo above, applicant photo at right*

- The applicant noted in the reply to staff that the rear porches will be replaced. However, this scope of work is not included with this application.







*East elevation - Applicant photo*





*Staff photo, January 2023*



- The existing loss of detail and character is substantial, and the likely removal of additional detail (window casings, thin windowsills, recessed window openings, reveal and profile of the two differently dimensioned historic wood siding) that would occur with the installation of cementitious siding will further destroy the historic and architectural appearance of this house, its identifiable time of construction, and its historic relationship to the other buildings in the district.

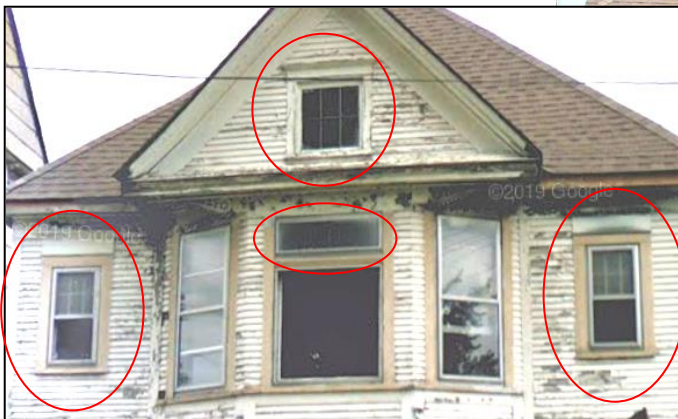


*Staff photos, January 2023*

- These pictures show ornament that remains in place and is unique to 7908-7912 St. Paul. These are distinctive character-defining features. One bracket is missing from the left side, but three remain intact and can be used to fabricate the missing bracket.



### **Windows**



*July 2013*

*Google street view*

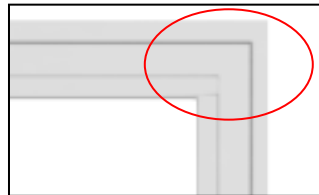
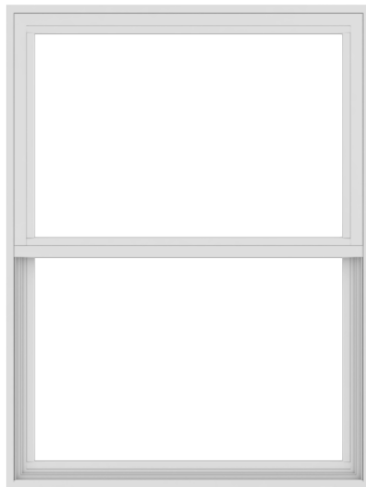


*July 2019*

- The applicant proposes to replace all of the windows on the house, with the exception of the leaded glass transoms in the front elevation bay windows. Most of the openings are one-over-one wood double-hung sash, but there are a few openings on the front and side elevations that retained six-over-one double-hung units and awning windows with a unique muntin pattern. The images above show the windows that have divided and leaded sash, however, the six-over-one windows and the upper awning window are currently not in their respective openings (visible in photos on page one and six, respectively).



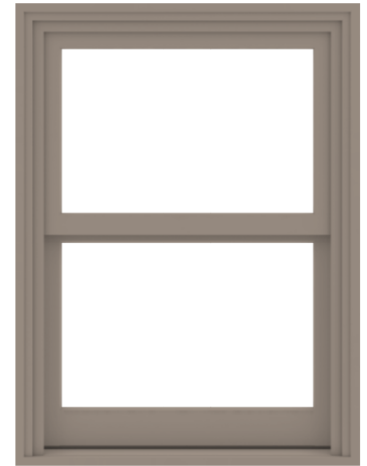
- The applicant has selected Anderson 100 series windows. This is a Fibrex product and is advertised by the company as “the smart alternative to vinyl”.
- This window is offered as a single-hung operation, not double-hung. It is important to note that a single-hung unit offers a different appearance than a double-hung unit as the upper sash is fixed and welded to the window frame, creating a flat surface at the upper sash. Example is at below left exterior view. Staff used another Anderson double-hung as a comparison of dimensionality and difference of planes. *Please note:* each window manufacturer offers different window frame profiles and dimensions for their double-hung window lines.



The upper sash is outlined, yet is fabricated in the same plane as the outer frame. This makes the upper sash appear to be a component of the frame.



The star identifies the operable upper sash. It is recessed from the window frame and adds a dimensional relationship similar to historic window units.



*Anderson 100 series single-hung unit*

*Anderson A series double-hung unit*

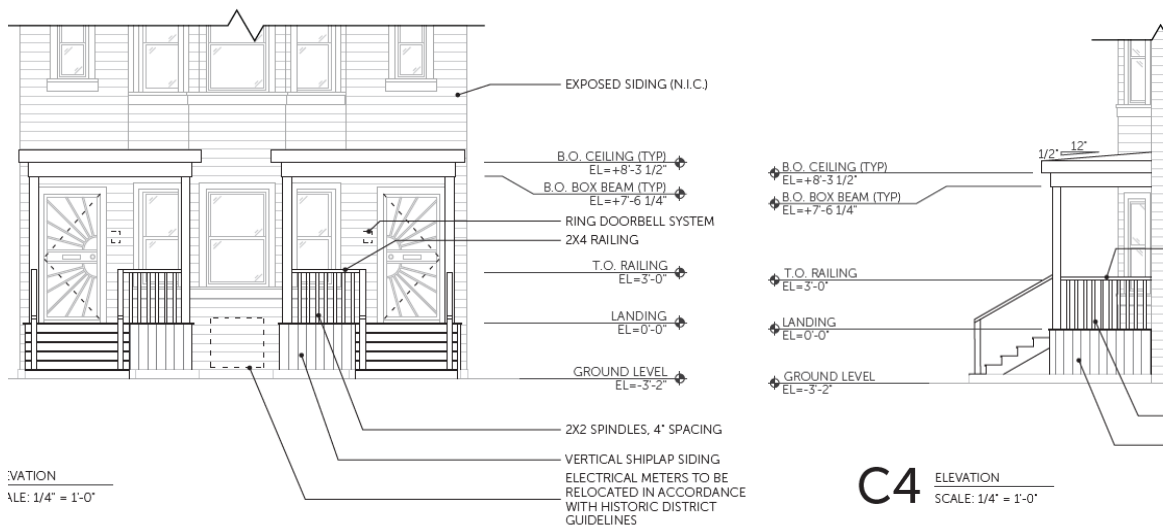
- The owner submitted dimensions of an existing wood double-hung unit, and submitted only a few close-up photos of the conditions of some sash units that had already been removed from their respective openings. It is still staff’s opinion the existing sash are not deteriorated beyond repair, and that the selected window line, through limits of its fabrication and materiality, cannot match the operation and dimensionality of the existing windows.

Component	Existing	Replacement	Dimensional Change	
Top Rail	1-3/8”	3-1/8” 2-5/16”	Replacement 2” thicker.	The proposed windows are single hung, and do not have a traditional top rail. This figure represents the exposed portion of the top of the window frame.
Meeting Rail	2-3/4”	2-3/16”	Replacement 9/16”-approx. 1/2” thinner	
Bottom Rail	2”	1-7/8”	Replacement 1/8” inch thinner	
Stile				

## Porches

- The issued Certificate of Appropriateness for the two front porches required the outer posts be constructed to match the existing interior corner posts. Currently all posts have been removed from the porch. The drawing on the following page shows unadorned (and not dimensioned) posts.
- The 2018 approved porch railing was to be similar to a historic design with square spindles affixed within a top and bottom rail that terminates at square corner posts. The railing shown on the drawing is a contemporary deck railing and not appropriate for a front elevation porch of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century house.
- Staff inquired with the applicant if the drawings were a change to the design or a drafting error. The applicant confirmed the drawings don’t reflect what will be constructed.





Applicant photo and drawings; photo at right is an enlarged Google street view from 2013.



## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **Recommendation One – Denial – Windows, Siding, Rear Porches**

#### **Section 21-2-78, Determination of Historic District Commission**

The replacement of the historic wood siding and existing windows is not compatible with the architectural style and age of this house. The current application did not provide sufficient documentation outlining the deterioration of the original wood siding that was removed without approval. Therefore, it is not clear to staff that the original wood siding merited wholesale removal, rather than replacement of only those boards that were deteriorated beyond repair. Additionally, there is no indication that the proposed synthetic siding can faithfully reproduce the narrow siding expression at the front elevation, as well as the dimensional window frames. Only true wood siding can restore this historic character. Similar documentation of the existing condition of all of windows was not submitted, and the proposed replacement window is not an adequate match to the historic sash. It is staff's opinion the project has destroyed features and spaces that characterize the property, and therefore recommends the Commission issue a denial for the work as proposed because it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and the Elements of Design for the district, specifically Standards:

*1 - A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.*

*2 - The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*

*5 - Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.*

*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.*

*9 - New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*

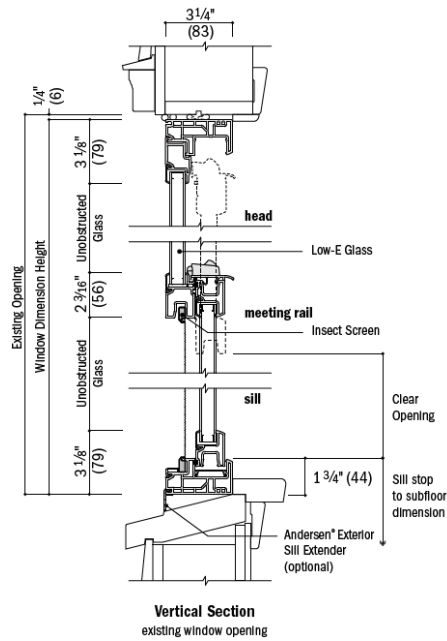
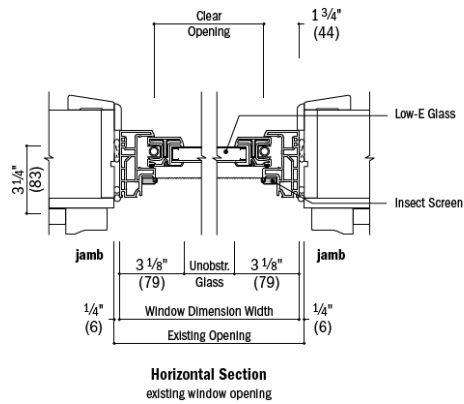
### **Recommendation Two – COA – Front Porches, Entry Doors**

The erection of two front porches, matching the placement and general design of the previous porches is compatible with the architectural style and age of this house. The existing front entry doors are not historic nor character-defining features, so it is staff's opinion the fiberglass with ¾ clear glass panel are appropriate at this location. It is staff's opinion the erection of the front porches and installation of new entry doors will not destroy features and spaces that characterize the property, and therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed because it meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and the Elements of Design for the district.

However, staff recommends the Commission issue the COA with the following conditions:

- The porch corner columns will match the previous interior corner columns in dimension and design,
- The porch and stair railings will have straight spindles, top and bottom rails, and square corner posts.
- The porch components will be left to dry for one to three months before painting; and will be painted C4 Yellowish White.
- Revised plans noting all of the above conditions will be submitted for staff review prior to pulling a permit.





### Upper sash

- Width – 30"
- Stile – left – 2"
- Stile – right – 2"
- Top rail – 1 3/8 "
- Meeting rail – 2 3/4"

### Bottom sash

- Width – 30"
- Stile – left – 2"
- Stile – right – 2"
- Top rail – 2"
- Meeting rail – 1 3/4 "