

STAFF REPORT: JUNE 14, 2023 REGULAR MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8405
ADDRESS: 950 LONGFELLOW
HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON
APPLICANT/OWNER: CAROL DARGIN
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: MAY 22, 2023
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: MAY 30, 2023

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

SCOPE: REPLACE WOOD WINDOWS WITH COMPOSITE WINDOWS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Dating from the 1950s, 950 Longfellow is one of the latest-built houses in Boston-Edison. The construction date of the building is not available in city records; DTE aerial photographs show that it was built between 1952 and 1956. The wide, pylon-like chimney and horizontal emphasis of the eaves and other features are International Style elements commonly found in the 1940s and 1950s; these items, plus the stretcher-bond, red brick veneer also show a slight Ranch influence. Nonetheless, the house departs from these styles in its scale, cubelike massing, and two-bay façade, showing a Prairie-style influence and rendering the building largely compatible with other, older houses in the vicinity. Its low, pyramidal roof appears to be almost flat when viewed from the street; consequently, the house does not have the upper half-story common among Boston-Edison houses. The first-floor and second-floor windows, subject of this application, are a mix of multilight fixed, sash, and casement windows with one glass block window. Basement windows, not subject of this application, are glass block. The property also includes a fenced side lot¹ where an adjacent house once existed.



May 2023 photo by staff, view from Longfellow looking north towards south elevation of the building.

¹ The side lot is enclosed by a white vinyl fence, erected according to a Certificate of Appropriateness issued in 2017. The Historic District Fence and Hedge Guidelines were amended in 2019 (Resolution 19-04) to state that vinyl is no longer considered to be an appropriate material.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to replace ten of the fifteen windows on the house, as shown in the submitted application documents and window schedule.

The proposed new windows are Fibrex, a trade name from Renewal by Andersen denoting extruded composite windows produced from a proprietary blend of reclaimed wood fibers and thermoplastic polymers.

In general, the windows are proposed to be replaced as follows:

- Fixed, four pane (one wide and four high) windows would be replaced with fixed windows with between-the-glass grilles (one wide and four high).
- Two-over-two (one wide and four high) sash windows would be replaced with casement (one wide and four high) windows.
- On one opening on the first floor, rear (north) elevation, three casement (one wide and four high) units would be replaced with a single, undivided picture window.

The application notes that the limestone sills are to be retained, or replaced in kind if damaged.



Rendering of house with windows replaced. Image from application.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was established by resolution of the City Council in 1974.

Contributing vs. Noncontributing Resource

- As the house at 950 Longfellow was built significantly later than the vast majority of buildings in the Boston-Edison Historic District, the first step in staff's analysis is to determine if the building is a contributing or noncontributing (i.e., historic or nonhistoric)² resource.
- Typically, staff would look to the district's Final Report for guidance on whether a resource is contributing

² The *Detroit City Code* and the *Michigan Local Historic Districts Act* use the terms *historic* and *nonhistoric*. Staff uses the equivalent terms *contributing* and *noncontributing* for consistency with the National Register of Historic Places, whose evaluation criteria local governments are required to follow when identifying resources for inclusion in historic districts. Michigan Department of History, Arts, and Libraries, Michigan Historical Center, and State Historic Preservation Office, *Criteria for Evaluating Resources for Inclusion in Local Historic Districts*, 2012.

or noncontributing. However, Boston-Edison is one of eight historic districts, established prior to 1978, for which no Final Report was prepared.

- Secondly, in cases where a local historic district is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Registration Form or Inventory/Nomination Form would provide additional insight. However, the Inventory/Nomination Form (1975)³ for Boston-Edison is not conclusive. An introductory statement describing the district reads:

All of the structures (approximately 900) within this 36 block area are large single residences, and the great majority were built between 1900 and 1925. While eclectic in style, they possess a uniformity in roof line, in scale, in set-back from the street, and in the use of stone or brick construction.

On one hand, the paragraph quoted above places an emphasis on buildings built between 1900 and 1925 (as emphasized in the remaining pages of the document as well); on the other hand, it acknowledges that additional buildings, built after 1925, exist, and that architectural eclecticism is an inherent quality of the district.

The Inventory/Nomination Form also does not specifically list or distinguish between contributing or noncontributing resources. However, it does state “the only intrusion within the district is the John C. Lodge Expressway,” arguably suggesting that that the expressway is the only noncontributing resource.

- Staff observes that the house at 950 Longfellow appears to meet all twenty-two of the Boston-Edison Historic District Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-106); this is remarkable as the Elements of Design, of course, were written after the house was built. This suggests that the design of the building was shaped by the same historical, economic, and technical forces and conditions that influenced the design of the earlier buildings.
- Based on the above observations, staff concludes that the house is a contributing resource.

Appropriateness of Proposed Work

- The Elements of Design for Boston-Edison (Sec. 21-2-106) mention windows as “always subdivided” and “usually [further] subdivided by muntins;” “the most common window type is double hung.” The Elements of Design also note that “wood is almost universally used for window frames.
- The existing windows appear, based on materials and style, to be original to the building. Staff considers the windows, in general, to be important and distinctive character-defining features.⁴ An exception is the glass block window on the west elevation (not proposed for replacement according to the submitted window schedule).

³ The practice of identifying contributing and noncontributing resources in National Register documentation was not widely adopted until after the introduction of federal tax incentives for contributing buildings in 1976 and the publication of *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* by the National Park Service in 1977. As of 2022, contributing status now provides a potential benefit to homeowners due to a state tax credit for qualifying rehabilitation work.

⁴ According to the National Park Service, windows are significant if they “reflect the original design intent for the building” or if they “reflect period or regional styles or building practices.” Both are the case here. John H. Myers, “The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows,” Preservation Brief 9, (National Park Service Technical Preservation Services), <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/9-wooden-windows.htm>.

ISSUES

- The submitted application narrative argues that the proposed windows meet the Elements of Design and are appropriate for the Mid-Century Modern character of the building. Staff generally agrees (with the exception that true or simulated muntins, rather than between-the-glass grilles, would be required on all windows to emulate the texture and profile of the historic windows); however, the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation direct that historic, character-defining materials and features may only be removed if they have been shown to be deteriorated beyond repair. Specifically:
 - Standard #2 directs that “the removal of historic materials ... shall be avoided.”
 - Standard #6 directs that “deteriorated historic features must be repaired rather than replaced.”
- According to the City Code, the Historic District Commission shall “follow the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for rehabilitation and guidelines for rehabilitating historic buildings ... to give consideration to the permit application.”⁵
- The submitted application documents do not provide evidence that the windows have deteriorated beyond repair. The submitted photos show cracked glass and peeling paint, but these conditions are typical maintenance needs of old windows and are repairable.⁶



Example photos of windows proposed for replacement. Images from application; please see application for additional photos.

- Although the application documents discuss the value of sustainability and the importance of energy efficiency, staff notes that energy efficiency would more appropriately be accomplished with storm windows.

⁵ Sec. 21-2-73.

⁶ Myers, “The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows.”

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78: Determinations of Historic District Commission

Staff concludes that the proposed window replacement does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the following reasons:

- The property is a contributing building.
- The wood fixed, sash, and casement windows proposed for removal are historic and distinctive materials and features that contribute to the character of the property.
- The windows proposed for removal have not been shown to be deteriorated beyond repair.
- The proposed replacement windows, with between-the-glass grilles, rather than true muntins (or undivided, in the case of one rear window), would result in a noticeable visible difference in profile and texture from the historic windows.
- Increased energy efficiency can be accomplished with storm windows, avoiding alteration to historic features and spaces.

Therefore, staff recommends that the Commission issue a Denial as the proposed work fails to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular:

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.*
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 where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be documented by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*