

STAFF REPORT: 8/9/2023 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: D. RIEDEN

APPLICATION NUMBER: #23-8478

VIOLATION NUMBERS: 736, 753

ADDRESS: 2325 W BOSTON

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON

APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER: STERLING HOWARD

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 7/17/2023

DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS: 5/12/23, 6/2/23, 7/18/23, 7/21/23

SCOPE: DEMOLISH GARAGE, REBUILD FRONT PORCH AND OTHER EXTERIOR REHABILITATION
(WORK STARTED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1923, the property at 2325 W Boston, is a 2 ½ story residence facing north. The dwelling displays Colonial Revival detailing to include red brick exterior cladding, deep overhanging eaves with brackets and three dormers with clapboard siding peering out from the side-gabled, slate roof. The original 1/1 double-hung wood windows are still in place. Stone sills and a stone surround accentuate the recessed front door and side lites, which staff notes are not original doors, replaced by previous owners prior to 2009. The brick walled front porch with concrete decking has had its original metal railing removed and the front porch steps removed without approval. All shrubs in the front yard have been removed without approval. The concrete walkway has a step that has been removed without approval along with the driveway. In the back yard, a near-collapsed garage has been removed without approval. The garage demolition, and other work listed here without approval are scope items included in this application.



Site Photo 1, by Staff July 18, 2023: (North) front elevation.



Designation Image, 1980: (North) front elevation.

This property has the following former HDC approvals and violation on Detroit Property Information System (DPI):

- Violations: Demolition of garage; removal of front porch steps, railing, landscaping, trim paint, driveway and walkway; replacement of front door, soffits and fascia without approval.
- No Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) or Denials are found on file for this property.
- This property is not occupied, and not currently listed for sale.

PROPOSAL

Staff initially received an application for the demolition of the driveway and porch steps. Upon site visits and subsequent observations, Staff observed additional work started or completed without approval and received confirmation from the applicant to add this work, which consists of the following:

- Demolition of the rear garage. No replacement at this time.
- Repair soffits and fascia, replacing wood with wood where necessary, using 1x6 and 1x8 pine wood. Surfaces shall be painted.
- Remove paint and re-paint windows, trim, soffits/fascia, and cedar shake siding with color from Color System C. The exterior trim will be painted C:4 Yellowish White and dormers will be painted C:3 Pale Blue.
- Install new seamless aluminum gutters and downspouts, color white.
- Tuckpointing front porch and replace front steps with concrete decking and concrete steps, no changes to dimensions of porch or steps. Concrete shall have broom finish, no color added.
- Fabricate and install iron porch railing to match original design and installed at original height of porch railing, color black.
- Replace asphalt and concrete driveway with all concrete driveway within the existing footprint. Concrete shall have broom finish, no color added.
- Replace front walkway and concrete steps with concrete, no changes in dimensions. Concrete shall have broom finish, no color added.
- Removal of front yard landscaping (foundation plantings). No replacement planting at this time.



Aerial 1 of Parcel # 10002767 by Detroit Parcel Viewer, showing the former garage location (arrow).



Site Photo 2, by applicant May 2023: (facing south) north elevation of garage, showing roof collapse and wood framing failure.



Site Photo 3, by applicant May 2023: (facing south) north elevation of garage, showing missing siding and framing failure.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was established in 1974.
- The applicant provided before-after photos to show the condition of the garage's structural failure. No other documentation or assessment has been provided. The applicant states that the garage was not built on a concrete foundation and that the base of the garage was eroded. Also, he states that the roof system and other wood components failed. The applicant states that they decided to demolish the garage in advance of its collapse. The applicant does not have any plans to rebuild the garage currently.
- Staff has utilized images from photos provided by the applicant to yield the following observations regarding the condition of the garage prior to its demolition:
 - The 1974 designation image of the adjacent property at 2135 W Boston shows the presence of a one-story wood frame garage at the northeast property corner (See site photo 4). It is staff's opinion that this is the same garage that was standing up until the recent demolition.
 - Staff observes from these and the applicant's images that the building appears to be wood frame with brick cladding construction, and while a utilitarian product of its time, does not share character-defining architectural features with the primary structure (ie., the house).
 - As shown by the applicant's photos, the roof appears to have a severe damage and beyond feasible repair, showing signs of subsidence failure in the center (see site photos 2 and 3), and the exterior walls in a state of collapse.
- While the garage was a contributing structure to the property and the historic district, at some point, it appeared to lose the integrity necessary to convey its historic significance, because of its ruinous condition. The garage was severely compromised, which challenges the economic viability for repair of the structure. Demolition of a contributing structure that has lost its historic integrity due to catastrophic damage would meet the Standards.
- Staff observed that the rear house has no steps or deck that reaches the rear doors. Staff received confirmation from the applicant that this work is not included in the application.
- It is staff's opinion that the front yard foundation plantings were a historic character-defining feature of the property, which was removed without approval. This removal has created a stark and isolated condition of the structure, with respect to the landscape and to the corresponding neighborhood.



Site photo 4, 2135 Boston designation Image, 1974: (North) front elevation showing the 2325 Boston garage at rear.



Site photo 5, by Staff, July 2023: (South) rear elevation showing missing rear steps.

ISSUES

- All work in this application was completed or started without Historic District Commission (HDC) approval.
- It is the staff's opinion that the garage's structure was severely compromised, and the building had lost its historic integrity. Given these conditions, the staff finds it reasonable to approve demolition.
- From the time of designation, there has been some form of landscape that connects the house to the ground plane, which has since been destroyed. While the staff offers flexibility in the foundation planting design, the absence of any foundation planting creates a landscape vacancy that is not appropriate for the Boston-Edison Historic District. Staff recognizes that this absence of landscape may be an interim stage during rehabilitation of the house and recommends a plan for restoration of the foundation plantings.
- Staff have no issues with the proposed remaining work in this application.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation: Demolish Garage, Rebuild Front Porch And Other Exterior Rehabilitation (Work Started Without Approval)

It is the staff's opinion that the demolition of the garage and the remaining rehabilitation work are appropriate. Staff therefore recommend the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed and completed because it meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and the West Village Historic District Elements of Design.

With the conditions that:

1. The applicant shall present a planting plan for the front yard that addresses the removal of foundation plantings.
2. HDC Staff has an opportunity to review and approve the planting plan prior to installation.