

**STAFF REPORT: 8/9/2023 REGULAR MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: D. RIEDEN**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: #23-8484**

**ADDRESS: 2485 BURNS**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: INDIAN VILLAGE**

**APPLICANT: TERRY SWAFFORD**

**PROPERTY OWNER: JARED STASIK**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 7/19/2023**

**DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS: 1/5/22, 7/18/22, 7/20/22**

**SCOPE: ALTER FRONT PORCH**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Built in 1930, the property at 2485 Burns is a 2 ½ story, Georgian Revival home that sits on the northern side of a vast, one-acre property in the middle of the block. The hip roof features two dormers symmetrically located over the shuttered windows below. The building is clad in red brick with limestone detailing around the windows. Patinated copper downspouts line each front elevation edge and is visible around the north side of the front entrance porch balcony. This central balcony protrudes from the arching window and side lights and is supported by highly detailed column supports that frame the front entrance with a similar palladium transom. This porch and entrance has been compared to historic Joseph Starbuck houses in Nantucket, as found in Historic District Commission records (See photo #7). The front yard is minimally landscaped with an evergreen hedgerow that embraces the front concrete walkway. The grand yard is surrounded by an iron wrought fence with brick column posts capped by matching limestone. From the southeast side of the house, the rear sunporch, now enclosed is publicly visible.



*Site Photo 1, by Staff July 20, 2023: (East) front elevation, showing the existing front porch.*



*Site Photo 2, by Staff July 20, 2023: (East) front elevation, showing the existing front porch.*

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

- July 2017, HDC Certificate of Appropriateness (COA): Replace rear, screened porch per approved drawings.
- Feb. 2022, HDC Denial: redesign of the front porch as proposed
- Feb. 2022, HDC COA: Replacement of wood siding, replacement of casement windows of the rear sleeping porch, enclosure of the rear screen-in porch, repair of the front porch and columns, and replacement of gutters and fascia.



Sanborn V8, P065.



Aerial 1 of Parcel # 17006629 by Detroit Parcel Viewer, highlighting property with adjacent lot (not highlighted).

## PROPOSAL

Staff initially received an application which contains elements that have already been previously approved by the Commission: repair of the front porch columns, capitals and bases; repair of the front porch balcony/ceiling; paint door and surround paneling and side lights; and replace gutters and fascia. The applicant has also submitted a previous application that received the Commission’s Denial for the redesign of the front porch. More than a year passed since the Denial, giving the applicant the right to resubmit the proposal per the Commission’s Rules of Procedure. This proposal is focused on an adaptation of the previous application with some key changes to the design: the location and scale of the proposed wingwalls and change of materials used. Here is a detail of the proposal:

### Front Porch Alteration

- Expand Porch:
  - Demolish, excavate and haul away existing front porch decking, setting aside the columns their bases for replacement upon completion.
  - Compact infill
  - Install Fendt pavers with sand infill at two levels:
    - Expand first step level in a semi-circle, 27’ 6” wide
    - Expand the second step/landing, which supports balcony columns, into a semi-circle, 5’ 5” wide
    - Install limestone perimeter with crushed limestone infill for both steps
- Install Wingwalls:
  - At each end of new first level porch, install two (2) partial wing walls (3.5’ long, 2’ high, 10” wide) terminating with curved scroll ends and 10” wide limestone caps.
- Replace front walkway:



Site Photo 3, by Applicant: (East) front porch existing conditions.

- Demolish existing concrete walkway.
- Install 6' wide walkway with Fendt clay fired brick pavers with sand infill and limestone perimeter.

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- Indian Village Historic District was established in 1970. Its Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-103) provide the following guidance:
  - *“Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections. In those examples of classical inspiration, entrances and porches, if any, tend to be centered on the front façade...”*
  - *“Relationship of architectural details. These generally relate to style. Neo-Georgian buildings display classic details, mostly in wood, and sometimes in stone. Areas commonly, but not always, treated are porches, shutters, window frames, cornices, and dormer windows...”*
  - *“Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatment. The typical treatment of individual properties is a flat front lawn area in grass turf, often subdivided by a walk leading to the front entrance, and sometimes with a walk at the side leading to the rear. Materials for such walks are concrete, brick, or stone, or combinations of those materials...Foundation plantings, often of a deciduous character, characteristic of the period 1895 to 1930, are present virtually without exception...”*
  - *“Scale of façades and façade elements. There is a variety in scale from block to block and style to style; most houses have a large and substantial appearance. The size and complexity of façade elements and details either accentuate or subdue the scale of the façades. Façade elements have been determined by what is appropriate for the style...”*
  - *“Degree of complexity within the façade. The degree of complexity has been determined by what is typical and appropriate for a given style. The classically inspired buildings usually have simple, rectangular façades with varying amounts of ornamentation...”*
- Staff observed that the existing front porch features cast stone capping and matching brick underlay detailing that matches the material, scale and color of the house (See photos 1-3). Staff offers the opinion that the rectangular shape and material of the porch, especially the top step that supports the columns, is a character defining feature that supports the symmetry and geometry of this Georgian Revival architecture.
- It is staff’s opinion that the introduction of 4x8 cement pavers, replacement of the square form with circular forms, and the introduction of wingwalls destroys the character defining features of the front elevation critical to an understanding of the building’s style by introducing a new style and historically anachronistic material, scale and design that is not appropriate.
- Staff reviewed the Fendt material as proposed by looking at the companies supply materials and the proposed material in this application. Even though the applicant states that this material is clay-fired brick, staff found that this material is concrete. Concrete pavers are not an appropriate material for replacement of the limestone deck of the porch nor the front porch steps and walkway. Staff recommends that a more appropriate material is clay-fired brick for the expanded first step and walkway only, but not to replace the existing front porch limestone deck.

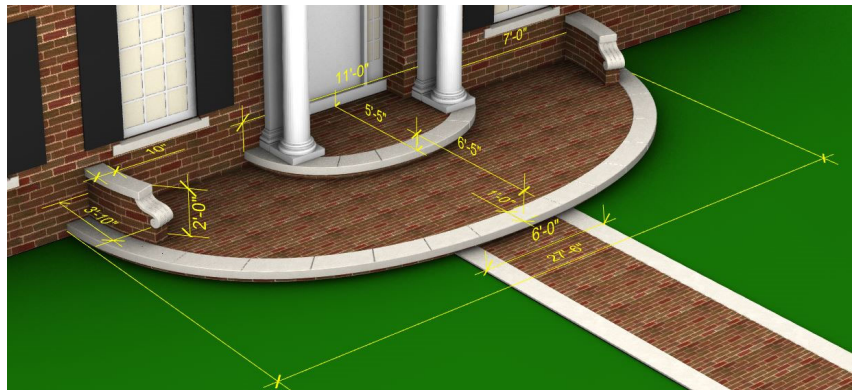
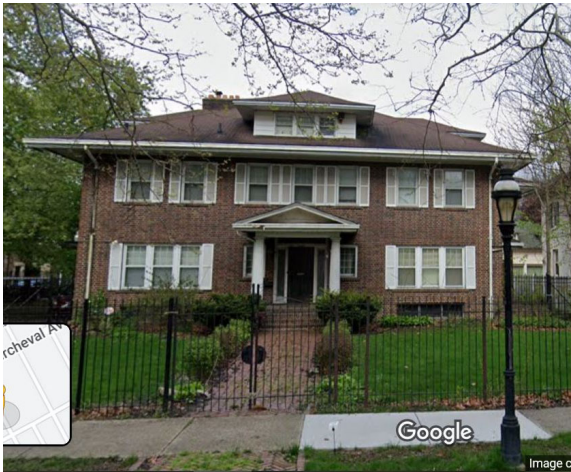


Figure 1, by Applicant: proposed front porch

- Staff does offer the observation that retaining the original material of the porch deck, its rectangular form and scale of the top step supporting the columns, and the potential modest expansion of the first step, maintaining a rectilinear geometry, rather than introducing a circular form, and the elimination of the introduced element of the wingwall could be an appropriate solution that would meet the Standards.
- Staff observed that in the previous application, which was denied by the Commission, Commissioners offered suggestions during the meeting that suggested the following guidelines for any changes to the front porch:
  - The rectilinear geometry of the front porch be maintained, rather than a circular form introduced.
  - The lower step could be expanded, but the upper step (porch decking) be maintained.
  - Limestone and brick would be appropriate materials, rather than concrete pavers.
  - The balustrade (or wingwalls) added to the porch interrupts the architecture of the house.
- Staff offers the opinion that the expansion of the existing concrete walkway from a 4' approximate width to a 6' width is another expansion of scale that reduces the significance of the front porch by calling more attention to the expansive walkway and therefore is not appropriate. A modest increase in width, by 1 foot (5' maximum), could be appropriate.
- Staff observed other colonial-style homes in Indian Village and recognize that while there were some incidents of a circular form in some of the steps and porches, most held to a rectangular form and all were at a modest scale that supported the particular architecture and scale of the house, rather than call undo attention to itself (See images below).



Site Photo 4, by Google Street May, 2019: 1745 Iroquois



Site Photo 5, by Google Street May, 2019: 2211 Burns



Site Photo 6, by Google Street May, 2019: 2239 Burns showing rectilinear porch expanding to the window line.



Photo 7, by Library of Congress: 95 Main Street, Nantucket, showing similar front entrance features.

## ISSUES

- It is staff's opinion that the proposal to replace the front porch's material from cast stone and limestone to concrete pavers and new limestone does not match the house's material nor scale, changing the shape of the front porch to a circular form, and introducing "wing walls" that diminishes the front elevation the house's Georgian Revival architecture would destroy the original scale, design, and materiality of this historic property, and therefore does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.
- The expansion of the width of the lower step to the extent that is shown, 27' wide, rather than a more modest increase, say one that extends out to the first window, for example, and the expansion of the sidewalk by approximately 2' creates a break from these elements supporting the complexity and scale of the front entrance, by reducing their importance, and call more attention the porch steps and sidewalk themselves. This extensive expansion along with introduction of a curved form alters historic character defining features and is not compatible in scale that characterize this property and therefore does not meet the Standards.

## RECOMMENDATION

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

#### Recommendation 1: Alter front porch

Staff finds that the altering of the front porch does not meet the Secretary of Interior Standards for the following reasons:

- The proposed replacement of cast stone and limestone stone decking of the porch, by introducing concrete pavers and new limestone in a circular form destroys historic distinctive character defining features of the classically inspired building.
- The introduction of wingwalls adds a new element that obscures and diminishes the distinctive, character-defining features of the Georgian Revival architecture.
- The expansion of the scale of the lower step and sidewalk are at a scale and width that diminishes the proportions of the approach and entrance to the building, thereby breaking the composition and complexity of the façade elements by over-extending the modest foundation that supports these character-defining features of the entrance.
- Concrete pavers are not an appropriate substitute to clay-fired brick pavers in the Indian Village Historic District.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the above work items, as it do not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standards:

*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.*

*3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.*

*4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.*

*5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a 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.*