

STAFF REPORT: AUGUST 9, 2023 REGULAR MEETING **PREPARED BY:** T. BOSCARINO
APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8482
ADDRESS: 630 VIRGINIA PARK
HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW CENTER AREA
APPLICANT/OWNER: JOE GUADAGNINO
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JULY 17, 2023
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JULY 19, 2023

SCOPE: REPLACE FRONT DOOR, TRANSOM, AND SIDELIGHTS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

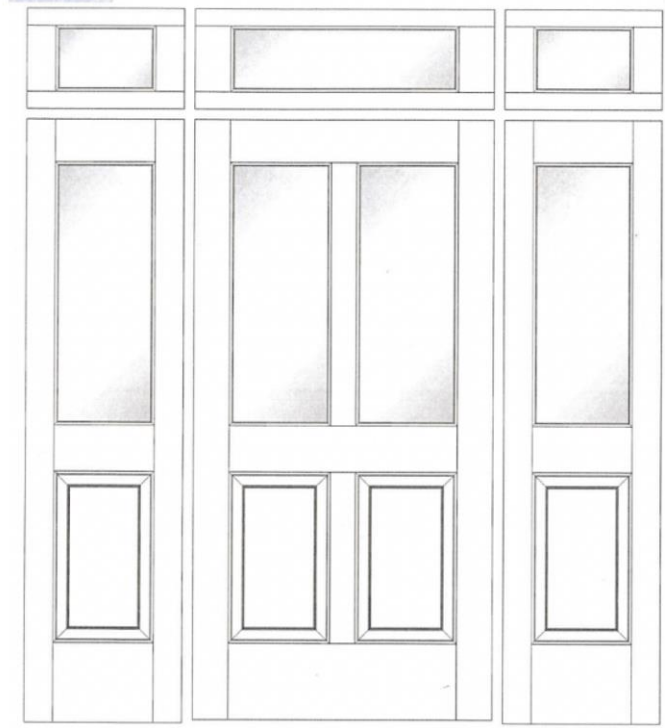
Built in 1906, the property at 630 Virginia Park is a two-and-one-half story building, located midblock and facing south towards the street. It is an English Revival or Tudor Revival house, clad in brown brick. Character-defining features include the asymmetrical façade with a dominant Tudor-style gable that projects forward from the east side of the front façade. On the west side of the front façade, a covered porch with a limestone cap also projects from the centrally located front entrance. Above, expressive fascia boards and half-timbering in the upper portion of the gables are supported by decorative dentils. An articulated gable aligned with the front door projects past the rest of the porch canopy and balances the composition of the front façade. Within the doorway, a door surround (subject of this application) with transom and sidelights is also a defining feature. Windows were replaced in 2020 or 2021.



July 2023 photo by staff.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to alter the front doorway and surround by replacing a non-historic steel door, a historic transom, and historic sidelights.



Left: Current front entrance. Right: Proposed new front entrance. Images from application materials.

The proposed replacement is a Sampson Door Company custom unit. It would be wood, painted black, with brass and bronze hardware.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The New Center Area Historic District was established by Ordinance 530-H in 1982. The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-129 of the Detroit City Code) provide the following guidance:
 - Where there are transom windows above doors, they are wider than tall.
 - Window sashes are most often the same color as the window frames, with a few exceptions.
- The application provides several reasons for wanting to replace the current door and surround. These include “door itself is not original,” there are “non-matching trim/casing,” and “missing panels,” and “most items need replacement due to non-original and/or damaged” (Please see application materials for complete statement).
- Based on the photo provided by the applicant and a staff site visit, the header and jambs of the door frame appear to be composed of dimensional lumber and are likely recent, non-historic elements. The glass in the sidelights and, potentially, the transom, is also likely to be non-historic as fixed, non-subdivided windows were historically very uncommon.

- The current door is non-historic as it was installed sometime between 1982, when the historic district was established, and 2009, when it is visible in a Google Street View photo. There is no record of Historic District Commission approval.



1982 Historic Designation Advisory Board photo (cropped) depicting previous door.



Designation Photo, 1982, Historic Designation Advisory Board

1982 Historic Designation Advisory Board photo.

- Inferred by staff from the age and style of the building, the remaining wood components appear to be historic or original. They also appear, from photos, to be in good condition. Staff has asked the applicant for additional clarification regarding any elements that are believed to be non-historic or damaged.

- Replacing the sidelight and transom panes, themselves (but not the wood surrounds), would potentially be appropriate, as they appear to be non-historic features. The replacement should be a pane of a compatible design, such as one subdivided by metal came or wood muntins.
- The proposed black paint color is potentially appropriate, depending on a plan for painting the rest of the building. If the building continues its current color scheme, black is appropriate for window sashes only (see Color System D, as adopted by the Historic District Commission, for additional guidance).

ISSUES

- Staff notes that the door has already been replaced without evidence that it has deteriorated beyond repair. Further, the proposed new door does not match the historic door, as seen in the above 1982 photo. These issues are contrary to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, particularly Standard #6: “Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced.” If the feature has deteriorated beyond repair, “the new feature shall match the old . . . replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.”
- The doorway surround, still in place, should also be retained unless it is shown to have deteriorated beyond repair, according to Standard #6. If deteriorated beyond repair, it should be replaced in kind.
- Even if the door and surround were to be deteriorated beyond repair, the proposed new unit is not appropriate, as it does not match the old, as noted above.
- Staff further suggests that the overall configuration of the door and sidelights, consisting of tall, glazed areas above much shorter wood panels, is a “feature and space that characterize[s] the property” that should be “retained and preserved” (Standard #2). The proposed doorway, by reducing the glazed area and incorporating larger wood panels below, disrupts this character.

RECOMMENDATION

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

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

- The existing doorway surround (i.e., sidelights, transoms, and associated trim) is a distinctive historic feature, consisting of historic materials, that has not been shown to be deteriorated beyond repair.
- The historic (removed without approval) door also constitutes a distinctive feature and materials that have not been shown to be deteriorated beyond repair.
- The proposed new doorway unit introduces a design, with smaller glazed areas and larger wood panels, that does not adequately match the historic doorway.

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.