

**STAFF REPORT:** 12/13/2023 REGULAR MEETING

**PREPARED BY:** D. RIEDEN

**APPLICATION NUMBER:** HDC2023-00101 **VIOLATION NUMBER:** 669

**ADDRESS:** 2465 CHICAGO

**HISTORIC DISTRICT:** BOSTON-EDISON

**APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER:** HASSAN AND MAURITA MUSSAWWIR

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION:** 10/30/2023

**DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS:** 09/21/2021, 01/21/2022, 2/17/2022, 11/28/2023

**SCOPE:** ALTER FRONT PORCH AND LANDSCAPING, INSTALL SECURITY CAMERAS

### EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1923, the property at 2465 Chicago is a 2 ½ story, Colonial Revival style home that faces northwest in the middle of the block. The hip roof features a centrally located dormer and deep overhanging eaves. The original 8/1, double-hung wood windows were replaced with 1/1 vinyl windows. The building is clad in dark brown brick with limestone detailing around the windows. The front porch that was present at the time of the district’s designation (see below photos), which included wood columns and roof, brick deck with concrete cap and steps, metal railings, and brick piers at each end was demolished without HDC approval and has been replaced with the concrete stoop, concrete rounded steps and brick wingwalls that now stand at a diagonal to the entrance. Raised beds of loosely stacked concrete blocks and a collection of potted plants currently flank both sides of the front porch. A centrally placed concrete walkway which bisects the front lawn leads from the front entrance to the public sidewalk.

This property has the following HDC approvals and violations. Please note that some Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) respond to the outstanding violations, although the work has not yet been completed:

- Outstanding violations: all windows replaced with vinyl, roof brackets removed, soffits and fascia replaced with vinyl, front door replaced, front porch altered, railings and wingwalls removed, rear deck and balcony removed, landscape altered, security cameras installed.
- Mar. 2017, COA: Removal of existing asphalt roof, replaced with asphalt roof, color black.
- Mar. 2022, COA: Brick-in rear door, replace front and rear doors, and install gutter system and rain barrels.
- Oct. 2022, COA: Replace all vinyl windows with aluminum-clad wood windows, repair fascia and soffits.
- Nov. 2022, COA: Construct rear wood balcony and rear wood deck, stain.
- Nov. 2023, COA: Replace basement windows with glass block.



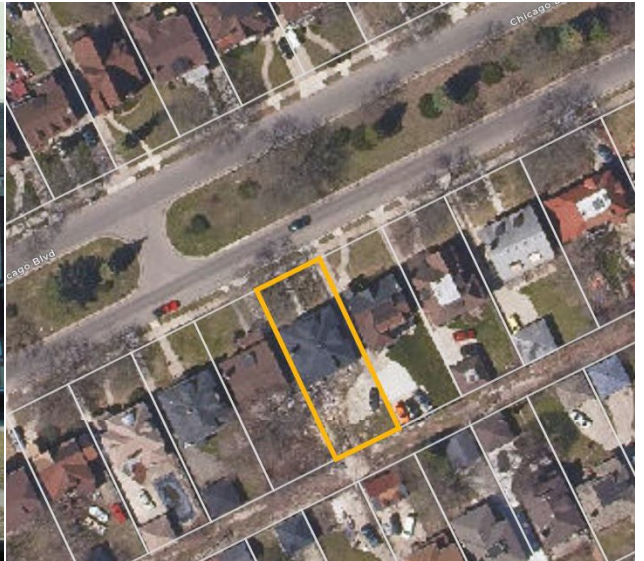
*Site Photo 1, by Staff November 28, 2023: (North) front elevation showing current conditions.*



*Photo 2 Designation Slide, 1974: (North) front elevation showing original windows, porch, entrance, and landscape.*



Photo 3, Historic photo, by HDAB 1980: (Northwest) front elevation.



Aerial 1 of Parcel # 10002695.by Detroit Parcel Viewer.

## PROPOSAL

See the attached letter from the property owner (entitled *HDC Application 20231030 11-01-2023 23.41* ) to note that the current proposal was received in response to a Notice of Work Observed letter issued by staff August 18, 2023. One of the items outlined in the submitted letter, the replacement of basement windows with glass block, received an administrative COA in November 2023. The proposed work consists of the remaining three violations listed that have not yet been addressed with an approval, to include the following work:

- replacement of front porch steps, wingwalls, and railing
- add raised plant beds at front yard, flanking the front porch
- installation of cameras on walls

Please note that as of the date of this report's completion, staff has not received current photos on all sides of the house and therefore cannot state whether there are any additional unapproved work items at this time. Also, staff has not received a formal detailed scope of work from the property owner and nor has staff received a response from the applicant regarding follow-up questions he had on the details for the work outlined in the owner's response letter. Therefore, staff has resorted to the assumption that the property owner is seeking the Commission's approval to keep the current conditions as described below (*Please see photos 1-3.*):

### FRONT PORCH DETAILS

This application seeks an approval for the existing changes to the historic front porch to remain, which include the removal of the historic front porch with the metal railing, porch overhang and detail over the doorway, and alteration of the porch steps from a rectangular shape to a curvilinear form and relocation of the steps wingwalls. This work was done by a previous owner without approval.

### LANDSCAPE DETAILS

This application seeks an approval of work done by a previous owner, which includes the installation of planter beds lined with stacked concrete blocks and topped by of a series of pots/planters at each side of the front porch. The owner does state that their intention is to create positive drainage away from the perimeter of the house to prevent storm water seepage into the basement.

### SECURITY CAMERA DETAILS

This application addresses work completed by the current property owner, who requests that the cameras remain in place as is. Staff did not receive a complete set of photos showing all camera locations, nor details of the product itself, but noticed cameras mounted on brick masonry at the front, and side elevations of the house. The

front elevation has cameras mounted on brick masonry at the upper left and right sides, and centered over the front door.

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was established in 1973. Its Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-106) provide the following guidance:
  - “*Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections.* In those examples derived from Classical precedents, entrances and porches, if any, tend to be centered on the front façade. Other examples display more freedom with entrance and porch placement. Porches and permanently enclosed sun porches are often placed at the side and, sometimes, at the rear of the building.”
  - “*Relationship of colors.* Natural brick colors, such as red, yellow, brown, and buff, predominate in wall surfaces. Natural stone colors also exist.
  - “*Relationship of architectural details.* Architectural details generally relate to style. Neo-Georgian buildings display classic details, mostly in wood, and sometimes in stone. Porches, shutters, window frames, cornices, and dormer windows are commonly, although not always, treated...”
  - “*Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.* The typical treatment of individual properties is a flat or graded front lawn area in grass turf, often subdivided by a straight or curving walk leading to the front entrance. Materials for such walks are concrete, brick, stone, or combinations of those materials. Some front yards have rectangular raised earthwork terraces upon which the house stands. These unpaved terraces having sloping embankments or retaining walls which are made of brick, stone, or both, at the change of grade foundation plantings, often of a deciduous character that are characteristic of the period 1900 to 1930, are present virtually without exception...”
  - “*Degree of complexity within the façade.* The degree of complexity has been determined by what is typical and appropriate for a given style. The buildings derived from Classical precedents usually have simple, rectangular façades with varying amounts of ornamentation...”
- Staff has the opinion that the original front porch, with its asymmetrically positioned raised, rectangular front floor/deck with the metal railing, brick piers with cast stone detailing that matches the house, matching brick clad wingwalls and wingwalls are historic, distinctive character-defining features. The removal of this feature, although completed without approval by a previous owner, and replacement with diagonally placed wingwalls with curvilinear steps is not appropriate, as this greatly alters the design and scale of this historic property, leaves scarring to the front façade, and creates a barren foundation. (See photos 1-5)



Photos 4-5, from 1974 Designation Photo: front porch detail with brick pier end posts, metal railing, concrete coping with concrete steps, brick clad walls and wingwalls.



Photo 6, by staff November 28, 2023: front elevation detail showing hints of a Juliette balcony railing over the entrance façade, indicated inside the red circles.

- Although the above photos indicate that the front porch had a wood roof and columns at the time of designation, staff has the opinion that this feature is not historic, and its removal is appropriate. Through careful reading of site and historic photos, staff perceives an outline of a Juliette balcony railing that may have been attached to the front façade of the house. Although photos of this condition were not found, a potential example of this feature can be inferred from the main entrance of a neighboring house at 1686 Chicago. (See photos 6-7) Staff recommends that the scars may serve as an informative outline to repair the pediment and pilasters around the top of the entrance. While the removal of the wood porch roof and columns is appropriate, staff has the opinion that this area of the front entrance requires attention and that leaving this area empty is not historically appropriate.



*Photo 7, by Facebook Detroit Area Historic group (date unknown, showing a Juliette balcony railing and entrance façade.*

- Re: the current plant beds that flank the front porch, while staff agrees that positive drainage should be encouraged to pitch water away from the house, the loose stacking of concrete block as raised beds in place of the front porch, is not an appropriate replacement for the original front porch, in staff's opinion. If the Commission decides that the current conditions of the lost front porch can remain, staff recommends that a more permanent structure which utilizes brick cladded walls with cast stone coping to match the materiality of the home be used to retain the existing plant beds. The footprint of the retention walls should be rectangular, to reference the former porch, and the plantings should reach a height which screens the scarring left by the removal of the porch.
- The applicant states that there is need for security cameras due to recent attempts for break-ins. Staff has the opinion that the front façade cameras are located inappropriately and recommends that the placement of these cameras follow HDC guidelines: that they be mounted in locations that are minimally visible from the public right-of-way, in the eaves of the roof rather than in central locations on the façade, and on wood, rather than masonry locations. If masonry is the only option, that the mounting be secured in mortar joints rather than drilled into the brick itself and that the cameras be painted a color which blends with the brick. These guidelines are available here: <https://detroitmi.gov/document/security-lighting-guidelines>.
- Staff has not received sufficient photos to see if there are any other work items that have been completed without approval. However, staff observed that the decorative brackets which were located in the roof's eaves have recently been removed. Staff is unsure if the bracket removal is temporary/-is a result of the soffit and fascia work that has been previously approved and not yet completed and will be reinstalled, or if the owner does not intend to reinstall the brackets.

## ISSUES

- Work in this application was completed without the Commission's approval.
- It is staff's opinion that replacement of the front porch with the new porch greatly alters and diminishes the home's historic character. Except for the wood roof and columns, the porch that was removed was original and thus was a character-defining feature of the home. If the porch was deteriorated, it should have been repaired in-kind. If it was deteriorated beyond repair, it should have been replaced with a new porch that exactly replicated the old. Therefore, the work does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.
- While removal of the nonhistorical roof and columns at the front porch is appropriate, staff has the opinion that leaving the front entrance in its current condition is not appropriate as it would have been sheltered by some sort of roof historically/originally.

- While the installation of security cameras is appropriate, the placement of the current cameras have been done in a manner that does not follow the HDC Guidelines. Staff recommends that these units be relocated in accordance to the guidelines.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### Recommendation #1 - Section 21-2-78, Determination of Historic District Commission - DENIAL

#### Replace front porch and install landscaping.

Staff finds that the replacement of the front porch with the current diagonal wall and curvilinear steps and the installation of concrete block retaining walls/raised beds at the home's foundation does not meet the Secretary of Interior Standards for the following reasons:

- The original front porch elements that were removed without HDC approval were distinctive, character-defining features that characterized the property.
- The application does not include documentation that these historic features were deteriorated beyond repair to an extent that merited their replacement.
- If the porch had been shown to be deteriorated beyond repair, it should have been replicated to match the old.
- The removal of the non-historic wood porch roof and columns should have included a proposal to install a new roof of a design which is compatible with the home's historic appearance as the front entrance would have originally been sheltered by some sort of overhang.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the proposed window replacement, as it does not the Boston-Edison Elements of Design nor 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.*

*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.*

### Recommendation 2 - Section 21-2-78, Determination of Historic District Commission - CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS- Installation of Security Cameras

It is staff's opinion that the installation of security cameras is appropriate. Staff therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work because it meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and the Boston-Edison Historic District Elements of Design.

*However, staff recommends the COA be issued with following conditions:*

- The cameras are relocated to positions that follow the [HDC Security and Lighting Guidelines](#).
- The applicant provides HDC staff with photos and description of the new locations for review and approval.