

STAFF REPORT: DECEMBER 13, 2023, REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2023-00138

ADDRESS: 4086 STURTEVANT

HISTORIC DISTRICT: RUSSELL WOODS-SULLIVAN

APPLICANT/OWNER: LILLIE WILLIAMS

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: OCTOBER 31, 2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: NOVEMBER 30, 2023

SCOPE: INSTALL VINYL WINDOWS AT REAR PORCH

EXISTING CONDITIONS

4086 Sturtevant is a two-story, Tudor Revival house constructed in 1936. It faces south onto the street. Defining features include prominent, sharp gables on the front façade entrance bay and a hip roof. The house is clad in common-bond brick on the first floor and portions of the second floor, with simulated masonry above. A rear sun porch, subject of this application, is not visible from the street or alley.



December 2023 photo by staff.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to install ten vinyl windows on the rear sun porch where screens currently exist. Removing and reframing wood mullions is also part of the proposed scope of work. The windows would be Wallside double-hung windows in white vinyl. The new framing would be wrapped with aluminum stock in #209 Scotch Red color.



Rear porch proposed for alteration. Image from application documents.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District was established in 1999. The Final Report for the district implies a Period of Significance from 1920 through the 1950s.
- The Elements of Design for the district (Sec. 21-2-168) provide the following pertinent guidance:
 - “It is not uncommon for several windows, which are taller than wide, to fill a single opening, which is wider than tall.”
 - “Windows are commonly either metal casements or wooden sash.”
 - “Buildings of vernacular English Revival styles generally have painted woodwork and window frames of a dark brown or cream color.”
- Neither rear porches, nor sunrooms, nor screens are mentioned in the Elements of Design or the Final Report.
- Staff opinion is that the rear porch, as a whole, including its wood mullions and casing, constitute an “overall visual aspect” that is an important, character-defining feature, but the individual screens and panels do not contribute to the “visual character at close range,” and thus are not character-defining features requiring preservation, as directed by to National Park Service guidance.¹
- The National Park Service also provides guidance on enclosed porches:

¹ *Architectural Character: Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character*, Preservation Briefs 17, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-17-architectural-character.pdf>.

If a porch enclosure is being considered, its significance and location—as well as the nature of the planned enclosure—play key roles in whether it can be done without changing the porch’s and building’s historic character. While it is almost never appropriate to enclose a front porch on a historic building to create interior space, enclosing a less prominent porch on a less visible elevation could have less impact . . . an enclosure should retain as many of the historic porch features as possible.”²

- Based on the guidance quoted above, staff opinion is that further enclosing the porch with new windows, in general, would be an appropriate and acceptable alteration. However, the scope of work, as proposed, is inappropriate for the reasons discussed under “Issues,” below.

ISSUES

- The proposed work introduces windows in vinyl, which is not a compatible material. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, namely Standard #9 (quoted in full below), require that “new work” be “compatible” with the existing building and its features.
- The proposed removal of mullions does not “retain as many of the historic porch features as possible,” as quoted above. It would change the overall, character-defining appearance of the porch, contrary to Standard #2: “The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.”
- The proposed work, when taken together, would also noticeably alter the dimensions and character of the window openings, also contrary to Standard #2. The use of new framing and coil stock would result in thicker mullions than the approximately 2” elements visible on the porch presently. In the existing configuration, each existing screen panel sits within a single, thin, wood frame. Replacement windows, however, employ thicker sashes; further, the sashes are set within an outside frame that also adds thickness. The thicker mullions, frames and sashes would decrease the sense of openness that is an important feature of the porch.

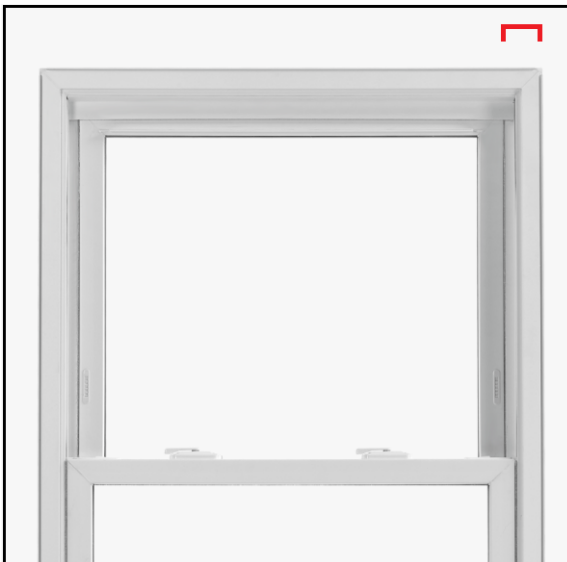


Image from Wallside website, with bracket added by staff to indicate added thickness.

² *Preserving Historic Wood Porches*, Preservation Briefs 45, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-45-wood-porches.pdf>

RECOMMENDATION

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

Staff concludes that the proposed window installation is inappropriate for the reasons listed below.

- The proposed work introduces vinyl, a material that is incompatible with the character of the building. (The use of wood or aluminum windows would likely be appropriate.)
- The proposed work removes original mullions, a feature that contributes to the historic character of the building.
- The proposed work reduces the size of the openings, diminishing the open character that is a defining feature of a sun porch. (Work that does not alter the existing openings, such as the use of removeable storm windows or permanent windows that are able to fit into the existing openings without alteration, would likely be appropriate.)

Therefore, staff recommends that the Commission issue a *Denial* of the proposed work as it does not 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.*
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.*