

STAFF REPORT: DECEMBER 13, 2023, REGULAR MEETING PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2023-00065
ADDRESS: 859 EDISON
HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON
APPLICANT/OWNER: NICHOLAS SEHY
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: OCTOBER 10, 2023
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: NOVEMBER 30, 2023

SCOPE: REPLACE PORCH ROOF, REHABILITATE GARAGE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1910, the house at 859 Edison is a two-and-one-half story, Prairie-style foursquare facing north onto Edison. Curved brackets beneath the eaves, beneath a box bay window, and, formerly, supporting the front porch roof demonstrate an Italian Renaissance influence. The façade is rough stucco on the first floor and smooth stucco on the upper floor.

The garage, also subject of this application, was built in 1924. It is a two-bay, hip roof building with a two-car, vehicle door on the alley side and, on the north side facing the house, (formerly) paired pedestrian doors flanked by window openings.



PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to replace the front porch roof, reframe and rebuild the garage roof, alter all four window openings on the north side of the garage, and paint the garage to match the house. The work is mostly complete, without Historic District Commission approval, and is visible on the house and garage.



“Before” photo of porch roof. May 2022 photo by staff. (Photo was taken during a site visit pertaining to the security light, a separate scope item described below.)



“After” photo of porch roof. November 2023 photo by staff.



“Before” photo of garage, from April 22, 2022, garage repair application by previous owner.



“After” photo of garage. Undated photo provided by applicant.

The application scope of work states that the door opening, visible in the photo above, would be filled with the hollow, steel panel door that is presently visible on the front of the house.

Additional work observed

Also observed by staff are a security light at the northwest corner of the house and an expanse of unfenestrated vinyl siding on the rear of the house, potentially enclosing a two-story sun porch or similar mass. The former

work was completed between 2009 and 2011 and observed by staff in May 2022. Notice of Work Observed letters were issued to the prior owner and realtor on May 16, 2023, and August 18, 2023. The applicant and current property owner indicated in a December 7, 2023, email to staff that the light will be removed. The vinyl siding work appears to be an older violation, as it is visible in the earliest available Google Maps image, taken in August 2011.



Left: Observed security light. 2022 SeeClickFix submission. Right: Vinyl siding observed by staff during November 2023 site visit.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was established by resolution of the City Council in 1974. No Final Report was prepared for this district.
- The Elements of Design for Boston-Edison provide the following relevant observations:
 - “Roofing includes slate, tile, and asphalt shingles.”
 - “Wood is almost universally used for window frames and other functional trim and is used in many examples for all trim.”
 - “Roofs are in natural colors (tile and slate colors, natural and stained wood colors), and asphalt shingles are predominantly within this same dark color range.”
 - “Porches, shutters, window frames, cornices, and dormer windows are commonly, although not always, treated.”
 - “Window sashes are usually subdivided by muntins.”
- The proposed (already mostly complete) porch is compatible with the house. The application scope of work states that the porch was inspired by the next-door house at 867 Edison. The two houses were both built at the

same time (building permits dated March 21, 2010) and have nearly identical massing and proportions on their front facades—although the house at 867 Edison is Tudor Revival with a gable roof while 869 Edison is Prairie-style with a hip roof. While keeping the proportions the same, the proposed (mostly complete) work adapts the porch from 867 Edison with Prairie-style details appropriate to 869 Edison, including angled vergeboards and stuccoed, rectangular supports. However, despite this compatibility, the work is inappropriate (see “Issues,” below).



A side-by-side comparison of 859 Edison (left) and 867 Edison (right) highlights the architectural compatibility of the new porch. The work is nonetheless inappropriate (see “Issues,” below). November 2023 photo by staff.

- A separate COA for garage repairs was issued to a prior owner dated May 17, 2022. It is not known if that work was performed.
- The texture and depth provided by paired, operable sash windows, and paired recessed doors, created a sense of depth and texture that was formerly an important, character-defining feature of the garage.
- The four, north-facing garage openings consisted of (from left/east to right/west, as seen in the “before” photo on page 3):
 - A non-historic, makeshift window created by repurposing an old, glazed wood door. Replacement of this opening with a compatible window would be appropriate.
 - A non-historic, inoperable wood panel enclosing a former door opening. Replacement of this with a compatible door would be appropriate.
 - A door opening with missing door. Installation of a compatible door at this location would be appropriate.
 - A historic, fifteen-over-one wood sash window that appears to have been in good or repairable condition. The upper sash and surrounding frame and casing appear to have been intact. The applicant states that the lower sash was missing, but staff notes that this can be replicated. Replacement of this window is not appropriate.
- The proposed door (the hollow steel panel door as seen on the front of the house) is a compatible and appropriate replacement for the missing garage door.
- The proposed garage paint colors closely match a color scheme previously approved (COA May 17, 2022) for the house. The colors are appropriate for the garage as well.

- The garage shingles were specified as black in the application scope of work. However, brown shingles were installed instead. The brown shingles are more appropriate as they match the color of the house.

ISSUES

- The (former) projecting, bracketed porch is a historic and distinctive feature that defines the character of the house and original design, which combined elements from two architectural styles that were popular at the time. The removal of historic and distinctive features is contrary to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, namely Standard #2 and Standard #5, respectively (quoted below).
- The proposed (already completed) garage roof work eliminates projecting rafter ends that were a distinctive and character-defining feature. Although deterioration of the garage rafters is visible in 2022 photos, likely requiring replacement of much or all of the structure, Standard #6 (quoted below) requires that replacement materials match the historic materials that were removed.
- The westernmost sash window on the garage was a historic (it appears to have been original to the house) and character-defining (it added to the texture and character of the façade, as mentioned above, and was a subdivided wood window, as mentioned in the Elements of Design) feature. Standard #2 requires that it be preserved. If beyond repair, it should be replaced in kind.
- Although the replacement of the easternmost window on the garage is appropriate, the new window lacks the depth and character of a historic wood window and is therefore not an appropriate new window. Examples of appropriate new windows include double-hung, wood, or aluminum-clad wood, sash windows with a recessed lower sash as seen on historic windows.
- The elimination of the westernmost, north-facing, garage door opening is not appropriate. Interventions that retain the character of the historic door opening, such as the installation of a compatible new door, or infill with stucco recessed several inches to retain the sense of depth provided by the original opening, would be appropriate.
- The security light fixture does not meet the Commission’s *Security Lighting Guidelines* (2023).

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78: Determinations of Historic District Commission (porch, garage roof repairs, garage windows and westernmost garage door)

Staff concludes that the proposed porch replacement, alteration of garage window openings, alteration of the westernmost, north-facing garage door opening, and security light are inappropriate for the reasons listed below.

- The work removes a historic and character-defining porch overhang, projecting rafter ends on the garage, and a garage window. According to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, such distinctive elements should not be removed unless they have deteriorated beyond repair. Even if they are beyond repair, they should be replaced with matching elements.
- The new garage windows, due to their lack of depth and texture, are not compatible replacements.

- The westernmost, north-facing, garage door opening is a historic feature that should not have been eliminated.
- The light fixture is not compatible with the house, as described in the *Security Lighting Guidelines*.

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.*
5. *Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic 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 a missing feature shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*

Section 21-2-78: Determinations of Historic District Commission (garage shingles, easternmost garage door, and garage paint color)

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a *Certificate of Appropriateness* for the remaining work items as the work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.