

STAFF REPORT 02-07-2024 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00028

ADDRESS: 708 PALLISTER

HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW CENTER AREA

APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: TIM FLINTOFF, AIA/4545 ARCHITECTURE

OWNER: THOMAS TYPINSKI

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 01-18-2024

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 01-24-2024

SCOPE: ADD ROOF DORMERS, REHABILITATE DWELLING



View of 708 Pallister, looking northwest from the sidewalk. Staff photo, January 24, 2024.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

This is a 2½ story frame house located on the north side of Pallister Street between 3rd Avenue and Bethune Court. The house was erected prior to 1915 and is finished in narrow-exposure clapboard at the 1st story, and wood shake at the 2nd story, juxtaposed with generous wood trim and handsome divided light windows, some of them with an unusual 2/1 geometry. The quality and care incorporated into the original materials and design is evident.

The original porch is missing, with only its original roof surviving, and was replaced decades ago by a concrete block porch of poor design, which negatively impacts the overall historic character.

Adjacent to the property is a vacant lot where a historic house stood until about thirty years ago. The larger context of the block is somewhat unique, as the neighborhood underwent radical changes during a late 1970s urban renewal project meant to accommodate future development. The designation of the area as a historic district occurred during this transitional era. This block of Pallister Street is closed to regular automobile traffic, boasts a brick-paved street, and is notably accessed by cars only at the rear. Every property, subject to deed restrictions and agreements during the renewal era, was required to erect or maintain a historically appropriate garage and pave an additional rear parking (“visitor”) spot convenient to the rear service drive.



Subject site outlined in yellow. North is up. Note adjacent vacant lot (to west) and visible brick-paved character of Pallister Street. Detroit Parcel Viewer.

Address	Resident Name
648-114	Martin Francis J
655-111	Bohns Albert G
658-120	Haskins Lewis H
665-123	Schmeman Herman W
668-126	Ford Geo A Dr
675-125	O'Brien Ernest A
676-139	Cook Wm C
682-136	Allan Albert T
685-135	Lorimer Geo D
694-140	Hewitt Fred G S
697-139	Sink Wm H
702-146	McCullom Cecil G
707-141	Enggrass Barbara Mrs
708-150	Sedlaczek Jennie Mrs
716-154	Camelon T B, phys
717-143	Lauver Andw J
726-158	Kinney Albert B
731-149	Springborn A J
736-162	Yates Jos S
741-161	Webb Milton S
746-164	Beyster Harry E
749-163	Koerner Theo W
759-169	Hodges Howard R
800-184	Olson Alice R Mrs
801-185	Chaney Willard L Dr
810-186	Bingham Henry H

708 Pallister (150 Pallister prior to the 1920 address changes) seen here on the 1915 Sanborn map (red arrow). Excerpt from 1920-21 Detroit City Directory at left, showing old and new addresses for this block, and residents' names.



Detail view of 1st floor bay window at front, showing narrow-exposure clapboard siding, original 2/1 windows, cedar shake at the second floor, and deterioration due to deferred maintenance. The 2/1 windows at the rear, proposed for removal, are partially visible in this view through the house. The incompatible porch is also partially visible at far right. Staff photo, January 24, 2024.



View of the rear elevation, from alley. Note the high level of historic integrity here, with original windows and historic siding fully wrapping the house. The pair of 2/1 windows at lower right are proposed for replacement with a sliding glass door. Staff photo, January 24, 2024.



View east along Pallister Street. Subject house is visible at left, more so than others due to the adjacent vacant lot. Staff photo, January 24, 2024.



View east in alley/service drive. Some of these garages are historic reproductions that were erected during the urban renewal activities that included the formation of the historic district. Subject garage at 708 Pallister is at right. Staff photo, January 24, 2024.



Detail view of second floor and dormer at front, showing historic materials and conditions. Staff photo, January 24, 2024.

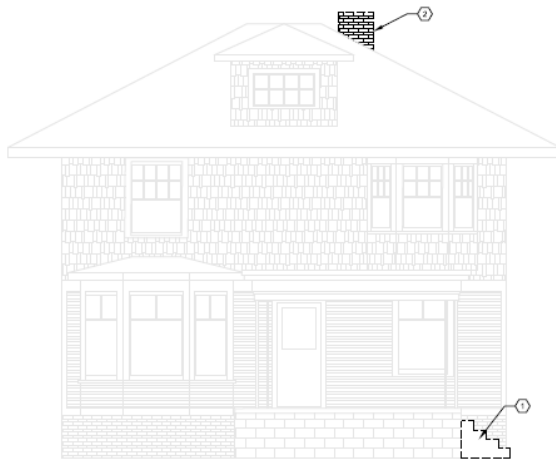


View of existing non-historic concrete block porch at front entrance. Staff has confirmed that the porch, including the incompatible 1970s-style support columns, was extant at the time of district designation in 1982 (not a violation). Staff photo, January 24, 2024.

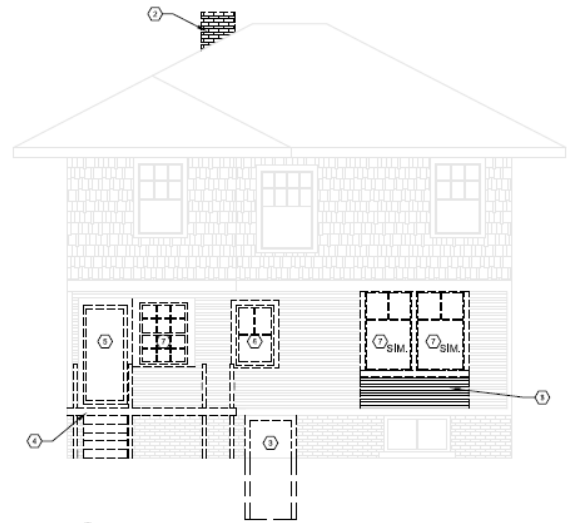
PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes a rehabilitation treatment and exterior alterations per the attached drawings, documents, and scope of work, including but not limited to:

- Repair and/or replace existing wood siding, detailing, and soffits where required, with wood
- All wood elements are to be painted in accordance with appropriate Detroit Historic Commission Color System E
- Repair and paint existing windows as required (excepting those at the rear proposed for removal)
- Repair masonry front porch
- Remove front masonry stair
- Install new wood handrail at masonry front porch. Paint to match window trim.
- Install new 4x4 wood support columns on existing front porch
- Wrap support posts in pine to 12x12, paint to match window trim
- Infill below-grade basement entry door, using matching brick
- Contractor is to use brick that matches existing
- Infill rear entry door, patch with matching wood clapboard
- Demolish existing rear deck and stair
- Construct new full-width wood rear deck and stair
- Remove (2) rear windows, replace with Anderson 100 series sliding glass door
- Replace (2) windows with Anderson windows
- Demolish chimney
- Construct (3) new dormers, one of which requires removal of the chimney
- Dormer siding and roofing material and color to coordinate with existing structure
- Dormer windows to be Anderson 100 series casement with traditional grille; window color to coordinate with painted existing windows

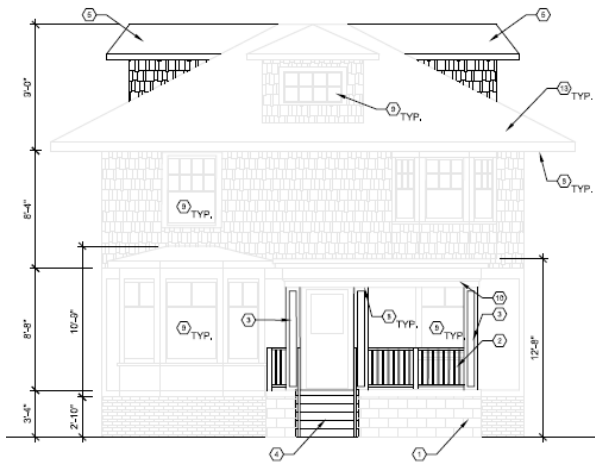


1 SOUTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

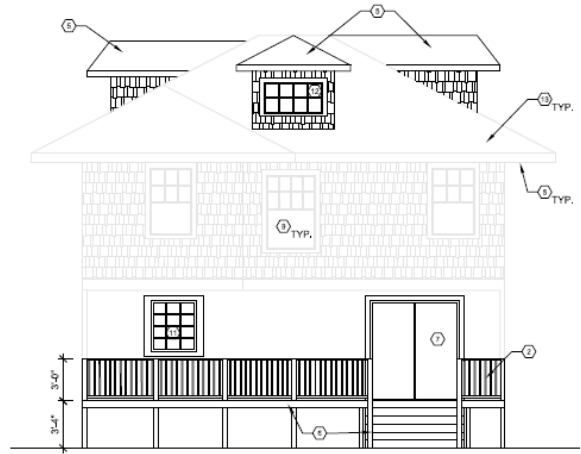


2 NORTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

Demolition elevations (above) showing proposed removal of the chimney and rear windows (dashed lines). The south elevation is the front, the north elevation is the rear. Not to scale.

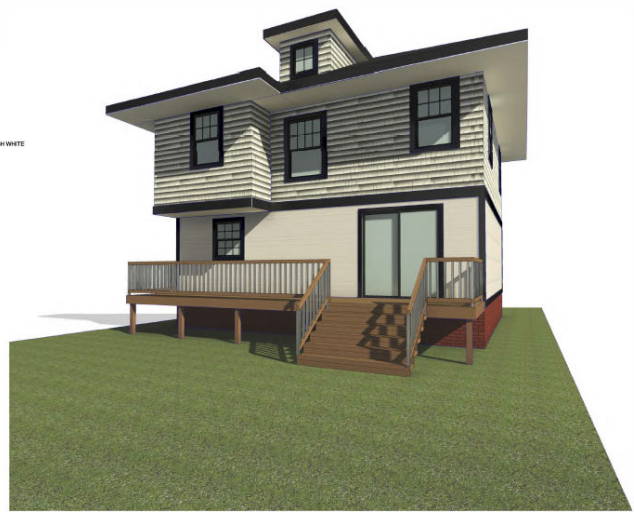


1 SOUTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"



2 NORTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

Architectural elevations showing proposed addition of two roof dormers, alterations to non-historic porch, and alterations to rear including sliding glass door and full-width deck. Not to scale.



Perspective renderings showing proposed rehabilitation design (left image – front, right image – rear). Not to scale.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- The New Center Area Historic District was established in November 1982. Commission records show no previous approvals for work at this property.
- The adjacent vacant lot is the result of a major fire which occurred in 1989. The Commission approved demolition of the damaged house several months later and the lot has been vacant since.
- Compared to nearly every other house on the street, 708 Pallister has obviously suffered from years of neglect and deferred maintenance, and is thus in obvious need of attention. The proposed rehabilitation, in general, has the potential to finally restore this house to its proper position in contributing to a well-preserved historic streetscape.
- Staff recognizes the historically correct treatments proposed for rehabilitation of the original wood shakes and siding, and restoration of the majority of the original wood windows. These should be found appropriate by the Commission, in staff's opinion.
- Wood frame houses of this type often have wood frame porches; though staff has not located an earlier photo, it is highly likely that the house originally had an ornamental wooden porch, with wooden steps, that matched or exceeded the design quality of the rest of the building. The current plain concrete block porch, with steel support columns, existed legally at the time of historic designation in 1982, and can continue to be maintained in its present form, despite its abject lack of character. However, staff recommends that the owner, when feasible, seriously consider replacing this incompatible porch deck with a new wooden design that restores historic character. In the current application, the proposed wooden columns and balustrade are a positive first step, and their design is compatible with the house. The relocation of concrete steps to the front is reasonable and appropriate, in staff's opinion, given the porch's current non-historic condition and appearance.
- There are two major alterations proposed in today's application. The first is the addition of three additional dormers to the roof line, facing generally south (rear), west, and east (sides). They are proposed to receive a similar design treatment as the front-facing dormer (wood construction including shakes, with windows of an appropriate design). The construction of an east-facing dormer requires the removal of the historic chimney, which is of a utilitarian design. Though chimneys should typically remain on houses as an important roofline element enhancing complexity and texture, in this case staff does not assess that its removal for the dormer as demonstrably inappropriate. The dormers themselves are compatible additions to the property, do not destroy important historic character or sight lines, and are additionally compatible with the district's Elements of Design and the character of surrounding houses.
- The second major set of alterations in this proposal is to reconfigure the rear elevation, to include the installation of a modern sliding glass door in place of paired historic windows, the alteration of the existing door/window to a single window, the closing up of a small historic window with in-kind wood clapboard, and the addition of a full-width deck. Alterations to the rear of a property, as the Commission knows, are subject to the same historic character and appropriateness assessments as the front, if the rear is found to express significant and distinctive historic character.
- Staff assesses that the rear of 708 Pallister does indeed retain significant and important historic character; in fact, given that the original porch is missing from the front and has negatively impacted that elevation, the historic character of the front and rear are quite similar, in staff's opinion. In particular, the original paired 2/1 windows at the rear, which perfectly complement corresponding units on the front elevation, are improbably still intact and should be preserved. This 2/1 configuration is a relatively rare design in Detroit houses, and to see it still extant on a non-primary elevation is rarer still. Notice also how the building's "belly band", an apparently 8" width of trim board dividing the first floor from the second, serves as the top of the window framing for the bay window at the *front* of the house, continues around the west side, and then also serves as the top of the paired windows at the *rear* that are proposed for removal. This belly band similarly incorporates the line of the surviving historic porch roof and continues around the east side, fully encircling the building. The relationship between the rear 2/1 windows and the "belly band" is a deliberate and historically resonant design element that would be lost in the proposed alteration. In staff's opinion, removal of these paired windows and replacement with a modern sliding door assembly is inappropriate. If new access to the rear is desired, staff suggests that a smaller swing door, installed adjacent to the historic windows, may be a more appropriate option. This may or may not be possible given the interior layout, but the Commission's principal concern should be

the preservation of the exterior character.

- There is another small original 2/1 window at the rear, which is indicated to be removed and replaced with matching clapboard to accommodate interior reconfiguration. Though it is small, in the context of this house its surviving 2/1 design is important and valuable, and shows a deliberate and historically significant design decision on the part of the original designer. Staff recommends that it be preserved.
- The Commission has regularly approved backyard recreational decks (those built without roofs and with treated or stained wood) at the rear of houses, as long as they exist as a distinctly readable structure that does not attempt to confuse itself with the historic architecture. Such approvals are generally made under the concept that, when the deck reaches the end of its useful life, it can be removed and/or replaced without impacting the historic building; quoting Secretary of the Interior Standard #10, “*if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*” Conversely, in cases where the design goal is to permanently integrate with and add to the house architecturally, a *porch* design is called for; in historic contexts, wood porches will almost always have wood roofs, weather-resistant treated wood being a modern phenomenon. Porches also share design elements, textures, and colors with the main building; decks mostly do not.
- The rear porch/deck design here is somewhat of a hybrid, in that it seeks to replace the location of a deteriorated earlier porch (which incidentally does **not** appear on the 1915 Sanborn map), and then continues to expand to the full-width of the historic house. In interpreting the drawings, especially the renderings, it appears that the deck is designed to be of modern construction, either stained or treated, differently from the painted wood of the historic house. This would be the most appropriate expression. However, the design for the railing (balustrade) of the rear deck is intended to be the same as the railing around the front porch. No detail drawing for either railing system is provided. In staff’s opinion, the railing/balustrade at the front porch and steps should be a historic design (painted, with interior balusters mounted in-between the top/bottom rails), while the rear deck should be of a modern design (unpainted, with “outboard” balusters fastened into the side of the top/bottom rails, or a similar contemporary design not intended to appear historic). “Setting off” the modern deck as an obvious addition to the original composition, in the manner described above, would help preserve the understanding of the core historic house, which is consistent with NPS guidelines.
- The repairs and improvements to the garage are needed and appropriate.

ISSUES

- The overall rehabilitation treatment for the house is well-designed and commendable in its comprehensiveness, with like-for-like material replacement as necessary to preserve authentic conditions, and appropriate colors.
- The paired 2/1 historic windows at the rear are distinctive character-defining features and should be preserved; if rear access is desired a less destructive solution should be considered.
- The front porch and rear deck rail designs should be further developed, and distinct from each other, as they have different roles to play in the historic understanding of this house. The front porch rail should be historically correct, while the rear deck balustrade should be of a more contemporary character distinguishing the deck as a later addition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Recommendation, Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff recommends that the proposed work should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the New Center Area Historic District's Elements of Design, with the following design revisions subject to staff approval:

- The three 2/1 historic windows at the rear (two large paired windows, and one small individual window) are distinctive character-defining features and must be preserved; if new rear access is desired a less destructive solution incorporating a swinging door should be considered.
- The front porch and rear deck rail designs should be further developed, and distinct from each other, as they have different roles to play in the historic understanding of this house. The front porch rail should be historically correct, while the rear deck balustrade should be of a more contemporary character distinguishing the deck as a later addition.