

**STAFF REPORT:** 09/11/2024 REGULAR MEETING

**PREPARED BY:** D. RIEDEN

**APPLICATION NUMBER:** HDC2024-00437

**ADDRESS:** 1501 ATKINSON

**HISTORIC DISTRICT:** ATKINSON AVENUE

**APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER:** STERLING HOWARD

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION:** 08/19/2024

**DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS:** 10/15/2020, 07/12/2022, 06/24/2024, 08/22/2024

**SCOPE:** REPLACE WINDOWS WITH VINYL WINDOWS, REPLACE DOORS, ALTER FRONT PORCH AND REAR DECK (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Built in 1916, the property at 1501 Atkinson features a front gabled asphalt-shingled, cat-slide roof and side-facing dormers. The English Cottage-style (English Revival) house is clad in stucco with brick around the foundation. Several features have been altered without approval since historic designation of Atkinson Avenue Historic District. The lozenge detail of the chimney has been removed or covered. All original wood double-hung, 6/1 true divided-light windows have been replaced by 1/1 vinyl windows. Basement windows have been replaced with glass block. Details around the façade's windows have been altered: wood and brick windowsills altered, and the second story planter box was removed. The front porch roof was replaced with a sloped shingled roof that alters the design of the front façade. The original front porch deck was rebuilt by replacing the porch with an elevated stair and brick wing-walls that were not historically present. Front door was replaced. The house and trim were repainted, changing the black trim to white. Also, not publicly visible, but a rear deck with a concrete pad and walkway were added at the rear of the property. Front yard foundation evergreens were removed and replaced with a lawn. In addition to these violations, property files indicate that there is a former Historic District Commission (HDC) approval in 2001 for a new roof and steps due to fire damage on this property (photos of this damage/work were not found).



*Site Photo 1, by Staff Aug. 22, 2024: (North) front showing replaced vinyl windows, altered porch and landscape.*



*Fig. 1, Designation image 1980: (North) front showing original windows and porch condition.*

### **PROPOSAL**

The current project is seeking a Certificate of Appropriateness for all the work that has been completed without HDC approval by a previous owner to include the following:

#### CHIMNEY (Work completed without approval)

Cover/remove lozenge (diamond shaped detail), paint to match stucco.

WINDOWS (Work completed without approval)

Replace all double-hung 6/1 wood windows with vinyl windows and basement windows with glass block, per attached photos. Remove planter box at second story window. Alter front elevation wood and brick sills per attached photos.

FRONT PORCH, REAR DECK & DOORS (Work completed without approval)

- Rebuild front porch roof with sloped asphalt roof and supporting bracket per attached photos.
- Replace front porch with stoop, staircase and brick wing-walls per attached photos.
- Replace wood front and side door with steel doors per attached photos.
- Replace front yard walkway, add step per attached photos.
- Erect rear wood deck with wood railing and skirting per attached photos.
- Install rear concrete pad and walkway per attached photos.

PAINT (Work completed without approval)

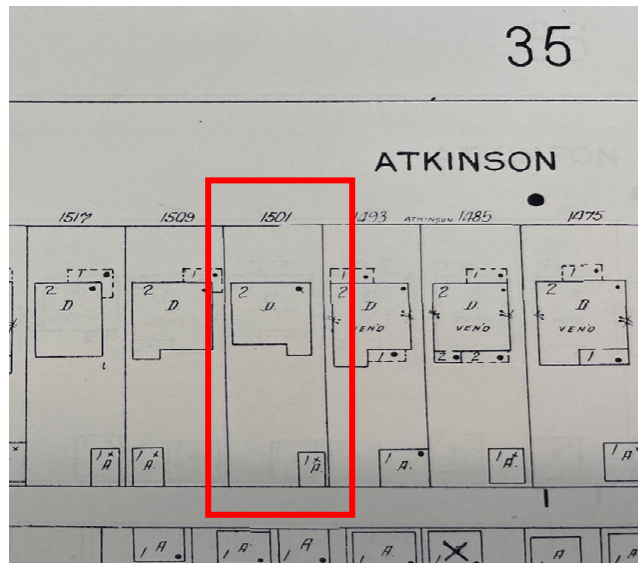
- Paint body of house, change black trim to white trim.

LANDSCAPE (Work completed without approval)

- Remove front foundation shrubs and replace with lawn.
- Plant two (2) evergreens in front yard per attached photos.



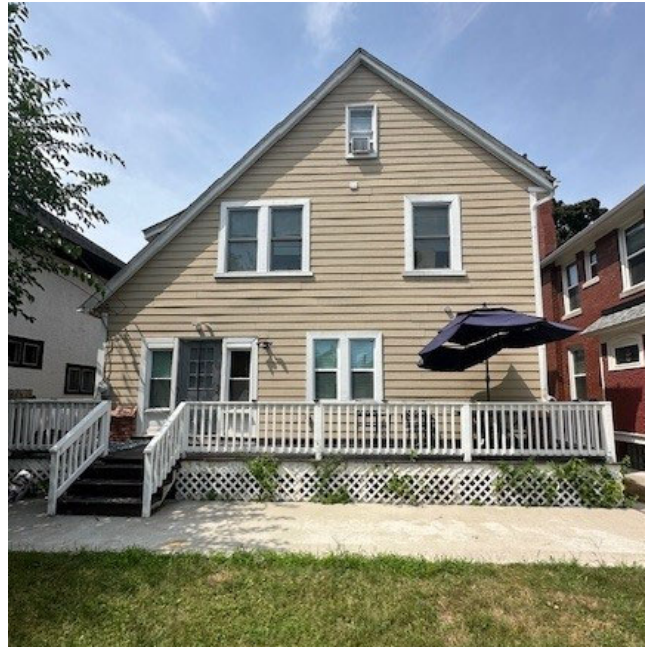
*Aerial 1 of Parcel # 06002336 by Detroit Parcel Viewer.*



*Sanborn, 1996 Vol 9: showing no prior rear or front porch.*



*Fig 2, by Google Street View, June 2019: (North) front elevation showing conditions prior to previous owner.*



*Site Photo 2, by Applicant: (South) rear side elevation showing replaced vinyl windows, rear deck and concrete pad/walkway.*

## **STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH**

- The Atkinson Avenue Historic District was established in 1984.
- Although staff requested records and documentation of the installed/unapproved products, the applicant has not been able to provide this information. Staff reviewed several real estate agent listings of this property but found no photos that showed prior conditions other than Google Street View and those provided by the current owner. Rather than product information specification sheets, staff has referenced photos for the following items: asphalt shingles, windows, doors, brick, rear deck construction, and plantings.
- Staff observed from files that a fire had once occurred on this property and received a COA (Certificate of Appropriateness) in 2001 for a new roof and steps due to fire damage, but no photos or drawings were found to locate this damage.



*Site Photo 3, by Applicant 2024: front (north) and side (east) sides, showing front porch roof and replaced windows and side door.*

### CHIMNEY (Work completed without approval)

- The stucco covered brick chimney once featured a lozenge (diamond-shaped) element that staff believes contributed to the historic character of this house. Staff believes that the removal/covering of this feature contributes to the destruction of character-defining features of this house and is not appropriate.

### WINDOWS (Work completed without approval)

- The 4/4 and 6/1 true divided-light, double-hung wood windows and the planter box that was removed at the front elevation were distinctive character-defining features. Their loss substantially detracts from and destroys the historic appearance of the building.

- Staff observed that the lengths of the wood sills and trim at the front face of the house have been slightly lengthened or thickened at the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stories. Also the brick ledge/sill along the first story ribbon of windows has been rotated from a diagonal to more perpendicular angle. It is staff’s opinion that these changes alter the historic narrow features of the window’s trim set against the stucco surface, creating a more square, blocky appearance that greatly alters the distinctive character-defining features of the façade’s fenestration.
- No documentation of the condition of the original windows was available but staff observed that the wood windows were present until at least 2019 from Google Street View images. (See figures 1&2)
- It is staff’s opinion, through limits of fabrication and material, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic districts.
  - Vinyl windows and wrapped brickmould offer a plasticity and flat/thick appearance that does not adequately match the profile/dimensionality and appearance of historic windows, such as wood.
  - Consumer grade vinyl windows weather poorly, deteriorate rapidly, and exhibit poor detailing and detracting color/sheen.
  - The framing material, glazing, and seals (which keeps the argon gas intact between the insulated glass) of vinyl windows break down more quickly in ultraviolet light than wood or steel-framed windows.
  - Vinyl also lacks rigidity and can expand and contract more greatly than wood and steel. This can result in discoloration and warping of the vinyl frames, as well as condensation between the glass layers.
- Although the glass block basement windows did not strictly follow the HDC guidelines by recessing the glass block into the window opening that was once occupied by the historic location of the wood windows, staff has the opinion that the installation at these side basement locations is reasonably appropriate.



*Site Photo 4, by Applicant, 2024: (West) side elevation showing vinyl and glass block windows. (Image is slightly skewed by applicant to fit this tight location in one photo.)*

#### FRONT PORCH, REAR DECK & DOORS (Work completed without approval)

- Staff observed from Sanborn maps that neither a front or rear porch were shown as features to the house. (See Sanborn image.)
- It is staff’s opinion that a front roof overhang once occupied the location where the current front roof is located, supported by a bracket (see site photo 1, fig 1&2). While the current construction is located approximately to the original, staff has the opinion that the introduction of a sloped roof at this location, rather than the original, near-flat structure, creates a heaviness and covers more than an appropriate amount of the front face of the façade, thus changing the architecture of the house.
- It is staff’s opinion that the repoured front porch deck, steps and front walkway meet the Standards and are appropriate. However, the installation of the brick wingwalls introduces a symmetrical feature that further detracts from the English Cottage style, which features asymmetry and a modest entrance. Along with the removal of the landscape foundation plantings, and the installation of symmetrically placed evergreens (see below), this introduced symmetry creates a pronounced entrance that is more conducive to Colonial styles and is incompatible with the modesty and assymetry of the English Revival form.
- Staff received confrimation that the front and side doors are steel. While staff has no issue with the side door, it is staff’s opinion that the vision panel for the front is not appropriate for the design of this house. In the case of the front door, a leaded-glass oval form is inconsistent with the simplicity of the rectilinear fenestration of this house. A rectangular panel wood door with a rectangular vision panel would suffice, in staff’s opinion. (See photo 1 and fig. 1.) Finally, the introduction of black mesh fabric with a center divider further obscures the front door with a material and design that is not appropriate, in staff’s opinion.
- It is staff’s opinion that the newly constructed rear deck, railing and concrete pad/walkway are compatible elements.

#### PAINT(Work completed without approval)

- According to the HDC Color Guidelines, the associated architectural style for this English Cottage-style house is Color System D. While the stucco is considered an acceptable color, the white trim is not listed as a recommended color. It is staff's opinion that this stark white color contributes to the blocky vinyl windows and alterations to the wood framing around the window openings, changing the front fenestration to a look that detracts from this style of architecture. Staff offers the opinion that this white color is not appropriate at the following locations and the HDC Guidelines be followed for a more appropriate, contrasting color: front door trim, window trim, fascia and front porch brackets, ceiling and fascia.

#### LANDSCAPE(Work completed without approval)

- Although in need of some pruning and care, the foundation evergreen shrubs and ornamental tree were present at the time of designation and were replaced with lawn with no plantings at all. Staff has the opinion that this foundation garden contributed to the property's English Cottage character and complement the architecture of the property. Their removal without substantial cause and without a plan for replacement is not appropriate. *(See photo 1 and fig. 1.)*
- Staff finds that the two planted columnar evergreens on either side of the front walkway in the middle of the yard detracts from and is incompatible with the asymmetry of the English Cottage character of the house. Staff recommends their relocation and/or incorporation with additional plantings to complement the architecture of this property.

#### **ISSUES**

- Many details of this English Cottage style house have been altered or erased, thereby diminishing and destroying the historic character of this architecture, which includes: the removal or covering of the lozenge element of the chimney, the narrow trim around the window openings, the altering of the brick ledge, and the removal of the planter box at the second story window. While small or nuanced, the features contribute as a whole to this English Revival style and the property's historic expression.
- No documentation establishing that the condition of the original wood windows was beyond repair was submitted or available.
- The removal of the original 4/4 and 6/1 true divided-light, double-hung wood windows and replacement with white vinyl 1/1 windows greatly alters the original *scale, design, and materiality* of the building's fenestration, and the new windows are incompatible and inappropriate for this historic property.
- The introduction of the brick wingwalls with concrete coping, while complementary in materiality, is incompatible with the asymmetry and modesty of the English Cottage style of entrance, and creates a new architectural expression that is not compatible with the historic features, scale, massing, and proportion of the historic architecture of this property.
- Similarly, the roof over the front porch, while the correct location and placement, has introduced a larger massing by introducing a sloped, asphalt shingled roof that obfuscates the stucco façade, also creating a new architectural expression that is not compatible with the historic features, scale, massing and proportion of this property.
- The replacement of the front wood door with a steel door and addition of a black fabric screen is inappropriate as it introduces a design and material that alters the historic character of the property: the oval vision panels this door introduces a new form that is not compatible with the English Cottage style of the house.
- Bright white is not an appropriate color for front door trim, window trim, fascia and front porch ceiling and brackets as this is not compatible with the English Cottage style of the house.
- The removal of foundation plantings without cause or a planting replacement alters the historic character of the property by removing distinctive, character-defining features in the landscape. The symmetrical placement of the columnar evergreens in the middle of the yard introduces a conflict with the asymmetrical design of the English Cottage style.

## RECOMMENDATION

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

#### Recommendation 1: Removal And Alterations Of Architectural Details, Replace Original Wood Windows with Vinyl Windows, Install Brick Wingwalls and Front Porch Roof, Replace Front Door, Paint, Remove Foundation Plantings (Work Completed without Approval)

Staff finds that the removal and alteration of front façade architectural details, replacement of the original wood windows with vinyl windows, installation of the front porch roof and wingwalls, replacement of the front door, painting of front door trim, window trim, fascia and front porch ceiling and brackets white, removal of foundation plantings does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the following reasons:

- Many important details of this English Cottage style house have been altered or erased, thereby destroying the historic character of this architecture, which includes: the removal or covering of the lozenge element of the chimney, the narrow trim around the window openings, the altering of the brick ledge, and the removal of the planter box at the second story window.
- No documentation establishing that the original condition of the casement windows were beyond repair was submitted or available.
- The replacement of the original wood windows with vinyl windows is not compatible with historic architecture in the house in that they:
  - destroy the distinctive, character-defining features of the original windows, particularly the true-divided lights with a 4/4 or 6/1 configuration,
  - introduce a new operation, design, and scale,
  - introduces a new material, vinyl, which is not historically appropriate material and does not conform to the District's Elements of Design.
- The installation of the front porch wingwalls and the sloped roof destroys distinctive, character-defining historic features and creates a new architectural expression that is not compatible with the historic features, scale, massing, and proportion to the English Cottage architecture of the house.
- The oval vision panel of the front door and the introduction of the black fabric mesh are not compatible with the English Cottage style of the house.
- The paint color location is not compatible with the English Cottage style of the house.
- Removing the foundation plantings and introducing symmetrically placed evergreens in the middle of the front yard drastically alters the appearance and features of the historic property.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the above work items, as it do not 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.*

*9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing*

*to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*

Recommendation 2: Install Glass Block Basement Windows, Rebuild Front Porch Deck, Install Rear Deck and Walkways, Paint Stucco, Replace Side Door, (Work Completed without Approval)

It is staff's opinion that the installation of glass block basement windows, rebuilding of the front porch deck, stairs, and walkway, installation of the rear deck and walkway, paint stucco, and replacement of the side door is appropriate. Staff therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed because it meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and the Boston-Edison District Elements of Design.