

STAFF REPORT: 10/09/2024 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: D. RIEDEN

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00509

ADDRESS: 150 W. BOSTON (a.k.a. Benjamin Siegel House)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON

APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER: MAURICE MORTON

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 09/16/2024

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 09/25/2024

SCOPE: CONSTRUCT SWIMMING POOL, PERGOLA STRUCTURES, HARDSCAPING, AND ASSOCIATED LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1914, the property at 150 W. Boston is an Italianate dwelling designed by architect Albert Kahn. Siegel immigrated to the United States from Germany made his fortune selling women's apparel at his B. Siegel Company stores in Detroit. Occupying half a block, this 2-acre site is a park-like setting with lines of hedgerows and a tree canopy that feature this 2 ½ story house on the west portion of the lot. The simple hipped roof features broad eaves, clay tile and three dormers symmetrically placed. Limestone chimneys on either side of the main structure match the limestone cladding. The symmetrically placed double hung windows each have stone surround detailing, the first floor features a series of glass doors, each with its own elaborate enframement of stone. Broad stone-columns support a limestone Juliette balcony, under which the main entrance is slightly recessed. Simple stone entrance steps lead to a small stone terrace surrounded by a hedgerow that leads to the main walk to the public sidewalk. This walk is a procession of perennials, hedgerows and evergreen shrubs that contribute to this grand landscape.

Property files indicate that there are no violations and a former Historic District Commission (HDC) approval in 2022 to erect a greenhouse/conservatory at the rear side of this property.



Site Photo 1, by Staff Sept. 25, 2024: (South) front elevation.



Designation image, 1980: (South) front elevation.

PROPOSAL

The applicant is seeking a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for construction of a pool, gazebo, pergola, raised patio, surrounding garden, and new walkway to the public sidewalk, all located at the northeast area of the property, per submitted plans and drawings.

- Install 16' x 40' fiberglass, prefabricated inground swimming pool (6'6" maximum depth) with a 8' x 8' raised spill-over spa (3' maximum depth), also fiberglass, prefabricated material.
 - Install pool equipment surrounded by evergreen planting screen per submitted drawings.
- Install cedar wood 18' x 12.5' area gazebo
 - Supported by 42" footings, colored concrete units.
 - Finished cedar tongue and groove ceilings, standard gutters/downspouts, and cedar wrapped posts, with asphalt shingled roof.
 - Beam height is 8', roof height is 14' 5".
 - Install 36" outdoor granite counter with wood burning pizza oven, log storage, charcoal grill, drop-in ice chest fridge and trash bin.
 - Install 42" granite bar counter



Aerial 1 of Parcel # 02001524. by Detroit Parcel Viewer, showing location of proposed pool and landscape (arrow).

- Install cedar wood 12' x 15' area pergola.
 - Finished cedar tongue and groove ceilings, and cedar posts.
 - Beam height is 8', top of beams is approximately 9'.
 - Install 16" planter walls per submitted drawings.
- Install hardscape pavers around pool, gazebo and pergola per submitted plans.
 - Concrete pavers are 2" thick Nueva® XL Slab, colors "champaign" and "onyx" on 12" of compacted stone with sand between the joints and pitched for proper drainage.



Fig 1, Site Plan by Applicant: Proposed installation of the pool, pergola, gazebo and pavers and gardens.

- Install 24" seat wall with 36" pillars with Nueva 75 Wall concrete units, colors "champaign" and "onyx"
- Install 7' x 3' gas powered fire feature
- Install 5' wide new concrete walkway to the front sidewalk. Sidewalk will have diamond-shaped saw cuts to match existing front walkway that leads to the front door.
- Plant arborvitae trees, shrubs and perennials per submitted drawings as follows:
 - Trees: (56) Green Emerald Arborvitae 6'
 - Shrubs: (26) Green Mountain Boxwood 24", (103) Green Velvet Boxwood, (28) Green Gem Boxwood, (19) Little Lime Hydrangea #5
 - Perennials: (20) Autumn Joy Sedum #3, (24) Catmint 'Jr. Walker's Low' #3



Figure 2, by Applicant, concept rendering: (Facing East) showing proposed pool, gazebo, pergola, pavers and planting areas.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was established in 1974, its Elements of Design offer the following insights for this proposal:
 - “Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets... “The house is located in the center of the site with extensive side yard space, which only occurs with extremely large houses by district standards... The house is located at the side of the wide site, which creates an extensive side yard on one side of the house.”
 - “Relationship of textures. The most common relationship of textures in the district is that of a low-relief pattern of mortar joints in brick contrasted with the smooth surface of wood or stone trim.”
 - “Relationship of colors. Natural brick colors, such as red, yellow, brown, and buff, predominate in wall surfaces. Natural stone colors also exist. Where stucco or concrete exists, it usually remains in its natural state, or is painted in a shade of cream..”
 - “Relationship of architectural details. Architectural details generally relate to style... Details on “Mediterranean” style or vernacular buildings, including arched windows, door openings and porches, are often done in stone, brick, tile, and sometimes in stucco.”
 - “Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments... Materials for walks are concrete, brick, stone, or combinations of those materials... Hedges between properties and along front property lines are not uncommon. It is characteristic for corner lots to have hedges or fencing at side lot lines along the sidewalk... Fencing within the public view was generally designed to compliment the style, design material, and date of the residence... Replacement trees should be characteristic of the area and period... Side lots are not uncommon for the larger properties in the district, and a number of these form a part of the original site plan for the

residence. Such side lots are usually landscaped and are often fenced at or near the setback line...”

- “Relationship of open space to structures.... Where an original or early arrangement of house and grounds included, and still includes, landscaped lots which form part of the landscaping plan for the residence, such landscaped lots have significant landscape features.”



Site Photo 2, by Staff Sept 25, 2024: (East) side facing north, showing side lot location for the pool area behind the existing fence. The red lines added to indicate approximate location of the proposed concrete walkway to the pool area. Note that the site is clear of any impact to existing historic-aged tree root system.

- It is staff’s opinion that the front lawn, the centered walkway and the of evergreen plantings along the foundation are historic, character-defining features of the landscape. Upon site visit and studying aerial photographs, staff assessed that the location for the pool site, surrounding hardscape and landscape features, and the proposed walkway to the public sidewalk will have no significant impact on historic aged trees (trees over 50 years old) nor any detrimental impact on historic features. It is staff’s opinion that this rear and side lot location, behind major sight lines to and from the front façade and side of the house is an appropriate location for this proposed use of the landscape and suitably fits within the historic spatial organization of the landscape.
- The placement of the pool, patio, hot tub, fireplace, pergola, gazebo, and walking path creates an appropriately unconfined spatial relationship of outdoor activities, surrounded by a privacy enclosure of plantings.
- The scale of the proposed gazebo and pergola are deferential to the scale of the house and appear to be a modern interpretation of the use of materials and design that are character of Italianate homes. Design elements such as the raised masonry garden walls, cedar wood beams and broad scaled pavers all in a formal, nearly symmetrical composition reflect a relationship of scale and design to the existing architectural features of the home.
- Staff observed that the current planting plan shows a repetitious single row of evergreen plantings, which creates a visual barrier. While used as a visual screen to the pool site, the proposed use of the Green Emerald Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis* ‘Smaragd’) has an appropriate historic context that relates with this Italianate architecture. Historically, this species was sent to Europe in the 1500s and was one of the first North American native trees to be cultivated in Europe. The ‘Smaragd’ variety was cultivated in Denmark, and a surge of its popularity in the United States spread during the age of suburban expansion in the 1950s. Staff has the opinion that while the species is appropriate in its context for this landscape, the tight spacing of this proposed planting as a green wall, which can grow 10-15 feet high, is more contemporary application that is too dense and wall-like and is not appropriate for this historic landscape. Staff recommends that spacing these shrubs out, similar to the current spacing in front of the main house’s foundation evergreens, would be a more appropriate use by sustaining the historic continuity and legibility context of this large evergreen’s use.

ISSUES

- Staff identified no major issues with the new construction features because this proposal meets the Elements of Design for the Boston-Edison Historic District, as applied to this particular property.
- The growth behavior of the fence-line proposed evergreens would likely create a 10-15 foot high “green wall”. This variety of arborvitae is not typically used for low-growing hedgerows and are often planted for tall screens, this creates a new element that conflicts with the historic landscape of this property and district’s Elements of Design. Due to its public visibility, staff recommends that the screening effect can be achieved by spacing these evergreens out, similar to the rhythm and spacing that is at the foundation plantings along the façade of the home and/or use a grouping of plantings to a similar effect.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation: Construct Swimming Pool, Pergola Structures, Hardscaping, and Associated Landscape Elements

It is staff’s opinion that the construction of the swimming pool, pergola structures, hardscaping, and associated landscape elements are 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 Historic District’s Elements of Design.

Staff recommends the COA be issued with following conditions, subject to staff review:

- The applicant provides a planting plan with a more relaxed spacing of the evergreen screen plantings that compliments the front façade of the house approved by HDC staff.