

STAFF REPORT: FEBRUARY 12, 2025 REGULAR MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00015 (VIOLATION #24-835)
ADDRESS: 3774 CORTLAND
HISTORIC DISTRICT: RUSSELL WOODS-SULLIVAN
APPLICANT: KEVIN FUQUA, BLUE WOLVERINE PROPERTIES LLC
PROPERTY OWNER: BLUE WOLVERINE PROPERTIES LLC
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JANUARY 16, 2025
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JANUARY 31, 2025

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

SCOPE: REPLACE WOOD WINDOWS WITH WOOD AND VINYL OR ALUMINUM-CLAD WOOD WINDOWS (WORK BEGUN WITHOUT APPROVAL)



January 2025 photo by staff.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The house at 3774 Cortland is a one-and-one-half-story, red brick, Tudor Revival building built in 1927. Character-defining features include a complex roofline with a subsidiary front gable, a gable dormer, and a clipped-gable entry pavilion, a round-arched entryway with stone-tabbed surround, and one remaining historic window, a quarrel-pane attic window.

The other historic windows, also important to the building's character, have been removed. The second-floor, front-facing windows had already been replaced prior to the establishment of the historic district in 1999. These were again replaced in early 2024, along with all the other windows, other than the attic window mentioned above; this work was done without approval from the Historic District Commission. Staff became aware of this work in February 2024 and the Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department promptly issued a Stop Work order.



1999 photo by the Historic Designation Advisory Board. Note the windows on the second floor that had been already been replaced prior to the 1999 historic district designation.



Left: 2018 photo from Google Maps, showing the condition prior to the unapproved work. It appears that there were six diamond-pane windows total: five on the front elevation, first floor, and one on the west face of the first-floor box-bay window.

PROPOSAL

The proposal before the Commission is to replace all windows on the house other than the small attic window (the windows have already been removed without approval). The applicant has provided two alternatives:

“Option 1” is to “replicate the old-style windows” on the front of the house only, and to retain the unapproved vinyl windows on the sides and rear.

“Option 2” is to replace the windows with double-hung, aluminum-clad wood windows by Lincoln Windows. According to the applicant, the windows would have “proper mullion patterns and brick moldings.” The windows would be white.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District was established by Ordinance 33-99 of the Detroit City Council in 1999. The Final Report for the district states, “The residential buildings in Russell Woods are among the finest examples of middle class, builder-designed residential architecture in the city of Detroit erected between 1920 and 1949,” implying a period of significance.
- The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-168) for the district provide the following observations:
 - (3) *Proportion of openings within the facades*. Typical openings are taller than wide. It is not uncommon for several windows, which are taller than wide, to fill a single opening, which is wider than tall.
 - (7) *Relationship of materials*. Wood is almost universally used for window frames and other functional trim. ... Windows are commonly either metal casements or wooden sash.
- The diamond-pane windows on the first floor, front elevation, were distinctive, character-defining features that were removed without approval. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, particularly Standard #2 and Standard #5 (quoted below) direct that such features be retained. If they had been deteriorated beyond feasible repair, Standard #6 (also quoted below) directs that they should have been replaced with new windows that match as closely as possible in materials and appearance.
- The two, second-story windows on the front of the house had already been replaced when the Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District was established in 1999. National Park Service guidelines on “replacement windows where no historic windows remain” would apply (See *Replacement Windows that Meet the Standards*, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/windows-replacement-meet-standards.htm>.) An appropriate window would be “compatible with the overall historic character of the building” and be “consistent with the general characteristics of a historic window of the type and period,” among other concerns. Based on the period of style of the house, and on the Elements of Design quoted above, staff suggests that mullioned groupings of two or three windows would be an appropriate means of filling each opening. These windows may be casement or double-hung sash windows, most likely in wood.
- Based on available photographs, the other windows formerly on the building were a mix of leaded-glass windows in various patterns and, perhaps less distinctive, but still historic, double-hung, wood sash windows. Many of the lost windows have no photographic documentation available, especially on the rear.



West elevation, second floor. February 2024 photo by staff.



East elevation. February 2024 photo by staff.

- Staff opinion is that the proposed window replacement (other than the two, second-story, front façade windows, described in a separate bullet point below) is not appropriate as the previous windows were not shown to have been deteriorated beyond repair.
- Staff opinion is that the replacement of the two, second-story, front façade windows, is generally appropriate, but the proposed windows are not appropriate. Per the submitted window schedule, the windows would be “two unit double-hung [sash windows].” However, almost invariably, upper gable areas on Tudor Revival houses in the vicinity are occupied by a rank of three, relatively tall and narrow, windows separated by a wood mullion; this configuration is also alluded to in the Elements of Design quoted above. Filling this area with a double window, lacking a mullion, would not provide the vertical emphasis that would be expected on such a building. For the dormer, two sash windows would be appropriate, but they should be separated by a mullion, the dimensions of which would be based on similar features elsewhere on the building.



Google Maps images showing examples of mullioned, second-story, wall-gable windows on the same block as the subject property. Such window groupings are very common and are an important part of the district’s character.



Red box indicates the windows that would appropriately be replaced with the three-unit, mullioned windows as depicted above.

- Should the Commission choose to approve the removal of the historic windows (already removed without approval), staff offers the following opinion on the appropriateness of the proposed replacements:
 - “Option one” proposes a replication of the lost front-façade windows, which would certainly be appropriate, but it also proposes vinyl windows for the sides and rear, which are certainly inappropriate.

- “Option two” proposes aluminum-clad wood windows that are generally appropriate. The application states that original mullion patterns and brickmold would be retained (from application photos, these appear to be in place presently, though in a few cases they have been covered with aluminum wrap).
- Should the Commission approve “option one” or “option two,” or a hybrid of these options, staff suggests that approval conditions for staff review would be needed to ensure appropriateness. For the replicated windows of “option one,” staff review would be required to ensure appropriateness of the final design. For the aluminum-clad replacement windows of “option two,” staff review would be required to document that the mullions and brickmold were retained. If these were beyond repair, staff review could ensure that they are replaced in kind.
- Finally, staff opinion is that the proposed white color is not appropriate on a Tudor Revival, dark red brick building. On a masonry building, windows are generally of more subdued colors that enable them to visually recede into the façade.

ISSUES

- There is no evidence that the historic windows had been beyond repair. Their removal is contrary to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards #2 and #5.
- Many of the historic windows (removed without approval) were highly distinctive, quarrel pane or rectangular pattern, leaded glass windows. Their removal eliminates a distinctive feature, also contrary to Standard #5.
- Should the historic windows (removed without approval) be demonstrated to be beyond repair, Standard #6 requires that they “match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.” “Option one” accomplishes this for the front façade only; “option two” does not satisfy this Standard.
- The proposed windows for the second floor, front elevation, do not satisfy Element 3: “It is not uncommon for several windows, which are taller than wide, to fill a single opening, which is wider than tall.”

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial

Staff concludes that the proposed window replacement will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and the Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District Elements of Design, 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.*
3. *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 where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be documented by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*

And Element:

3. *Proportion of openings within the façades.* In residential buildings, openings amount to between 20 percent and 35 percent of the front façade, with the majority ranging from 25 percent to 30 percent. Buildings of the "moderne art deco" styles will have a percentage of openings in the upper portion of the general range. Typical openings are taller than wide. It is not uncommon for several windows, which are taller than wide, to fill a single opening, which is wider than tall. Houses built later in the period of development sometimes have individual windows which are balanced or somewhat wider than tall; such a window is often the main opening of the first floor front façade.

For the following reasons:

- The historic windows proposed for removal (already removed without approval) are historic and materials and features that contribute to the character of the property that have not been shown to be beyond repair.
- The historic windows proposed for removal (already removed without approval) include highly distinctive, leaded-glass windows.
- The proposed second-floor, front-façade windows lack mullioned, horizontal emphasis required for compatibility.