STAFF REPORT MARCH 12, 2025, REGULAR MEETING **PREPARED BY**: T. BOSCARINO
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00706
ADDRESS: 618 ARDEN PARK
HISTORIC DISTRICT: ARDEN PARK-EAST BOSTON
APPLICANT: TYRONE SMITH, SMITH'S DESIGNER CONSTRUCTION
OWNER: FLOWERS, MICHAEL & DAVIS, VALARIE
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: DECEMBER 16, 2024
DATES OF STAFF SITE VISIT: FEBRUARY 28, 2025 AND MARCH 10, 2025

SCOPE: ERECT DWELLING AND GARAGE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is a vacant lot on the south side of Arden Park Boulevard. It is two houses from the eastern boundary of the Arden Park-East Boston Historic District at Oakland Avenue. According to city records, the parcel is 81 feet wide by 179 feet deep. The property is currently a mowed lawn. An ornamental tree of unknown species, formerly located near the center of the property was removed in 2023 or 2024. There are no other landscape elements on the site.

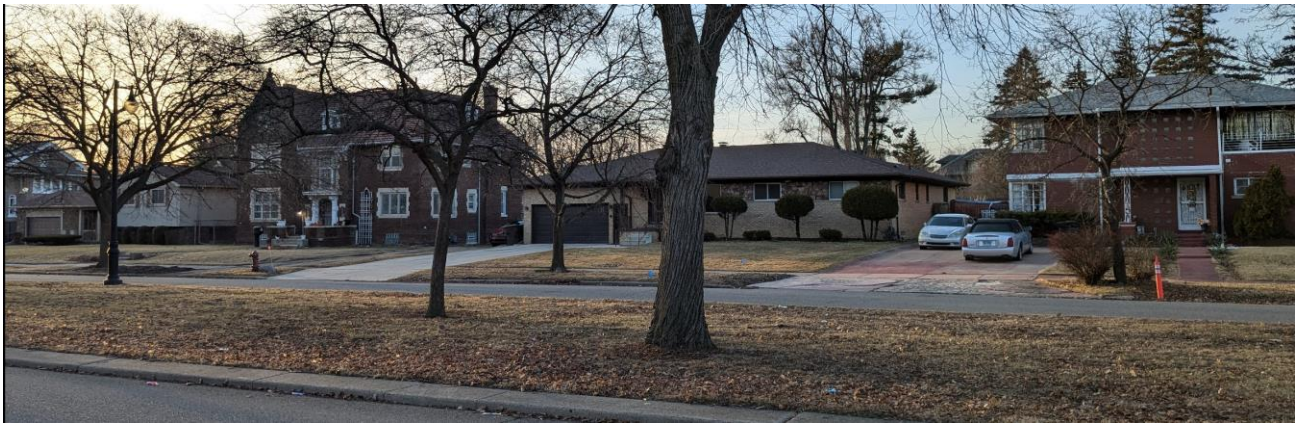
Looking south from Arden Park Boulevard towards the subject property. February 2025 photo by staff.

The immediate neighbors of the property are 600 Arden Park, a Colonial Revival house built in 1915, and 630 Arden Park, a Ranch house built in 1963 that staff considers to be noncontributing (non-historic).

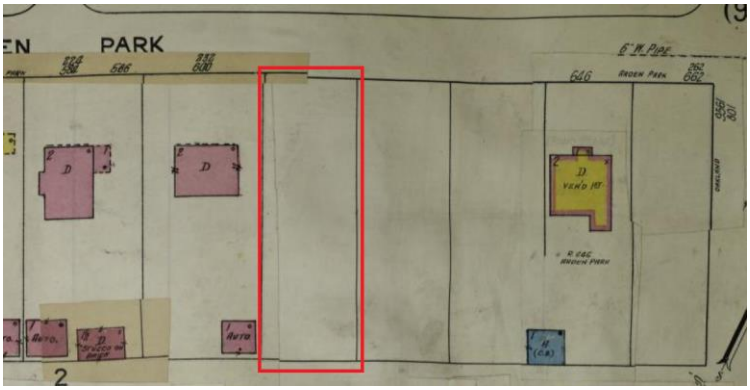
Subject property outlined in bold yellow box. Image from Detroit Parcel Viewer.



Left: 630 Arden Park. March 2025 photo by staff. Right: 600 Arden Park. March 2025 photo by staff.


Contextual view, looking approximately northwest from the subject property. March 2025 photo by staff.


Contextual view, looking approximately northeast from the subject property. March 2025 photo by staff.



Sanborn Map Company, 1951. The subject property (618 Arden Park) is outlined in red. Several other houses in the vicinity had not yet been built at the time of this map.

PROPOSAL

The proposal is to erect a single-family dwelling in a Colonial Revival style along with a relatively large, detached garage and studio building, plus associated paving and landscaping.

Rendering of proposed house, from application materials.

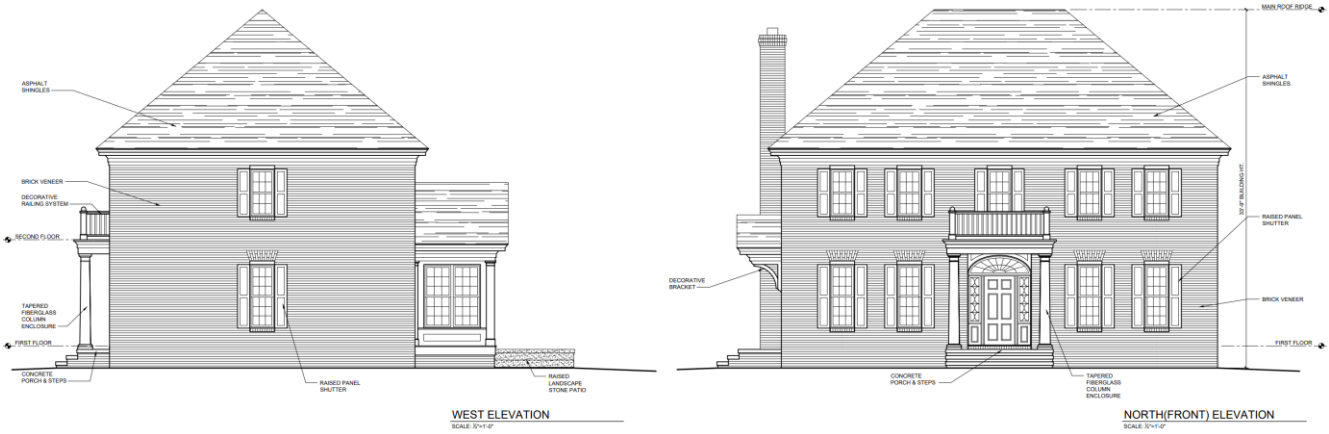
Facing north, the proposed house consists largely of a two-story, hip-roof, rectangular mass. It presents a symmetrical composition towards the street. The façade balances horizontal and vertical elements: windows are relatively tall and narrow and topped with pronounced jack arches, with applied shutters adding a sense of weight; a single-bay porch consists of Tuscan columns supporting a flat roof with balconet; a simple entablature runs along the porch roof and beneath the eave line of the building's hip roof. The roof would have a steep pitch, with a ridge height of 33 feet, 9 inches. A wide wall chimney and secondary entrance canopy project from the east wall of the proposed building. On the rear (south) is the only subsidiary mass, a single-story, gable-roof sun porch beside a raised patio.

The garage presents a two-bay, front-gable, front elevation facing the street, with a single window centered with

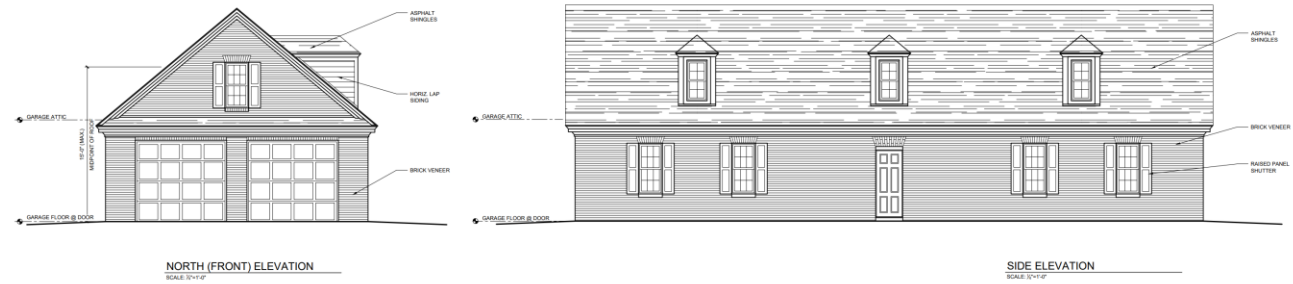
the attic story of its front elevation. It is uncommonly deep: 61 feet, ten inches from front to back. It has three dormers on its side (west) elevation. The materials and details are comparable to that of the house, with a jack arch above its front-facing window opening and flat, brick lintels above its vehicle doors.

The primary exterior material for both buildings would be Belcrest 500 modular face brick. Other materials include Marvin Elevate fiberglass windows with simulated divided lites, cellular PVC trim boards, fiber-cement siding for the sun porch and garage dormers, fiberglass reinforced polymer columns, a prefabricated polyurethane balustrade, wood doors, and asphalt architectural shingles.

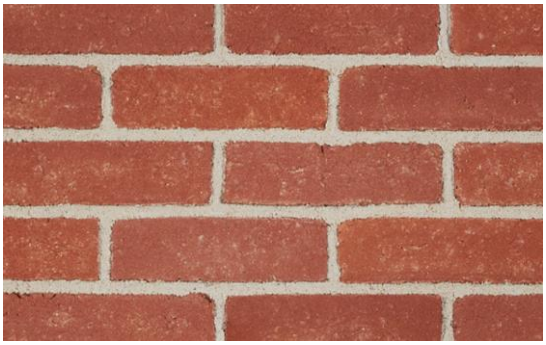
The site plan includes a straight concrete walkway, flanked by hedges, leading to the front entrance, a concrete driveway with apron, foundation planting beds, and several ornamental and shade trees.



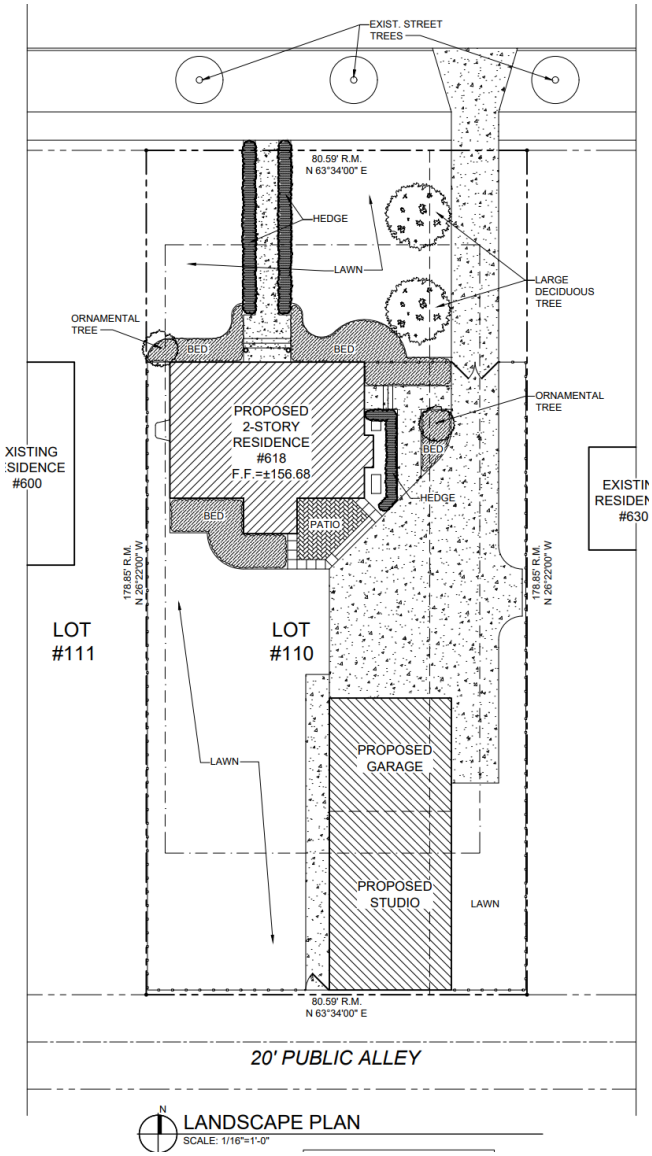
Elevation drawing of proposed house, from application materials.



Elevation drawing of proposed garage, from application materials.



Belcrest 500 face brick. Image from product website. (The flush joint depicted is discussed under "Staff Observations and Research," and "Issues," below.)



Site plan. Image from application documents.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Arden Park-East Boston Historic District was established by Ordinance 442-H in 1981. The Final Report for the district states "[t]he major building styles of the early twentieth century are represented within the Arden Park-East Boston Historic District … many of the homes are eclectic compositions which utilize elements from many sources."

- The Arden Park-East Boston Historic District is characterized by a wide range of architectural styles, materials, and other details; consequently, a great degree of flexibility is warranted regarding the design of new buildings in the district. However, overall scale and orientation of the buildings remains largely consistent, especially within individual blocks.

- As with all historic districts, the City Council has codified Elements of Design for the Arden Park-East Boston Historic District. Per the City Code, the Historic District Commission is required to use the Elements of Design in the context of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Given the prescriptive nature of these Elements, staff recommends that maximum conformance to the Elements in this review should be of particular concern to the Commission.

- Regarding the Elements of Design, especially as they apply to new construction, staff interpretation has consistently been that deviation from just one or two of the Elements is acceptable, sometimes desirable, as it provides the differentiation required by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, namely Standard #9: "The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment." At the same time, "compatibility" is required, and a deviation from the Elements that is too obviously different from the character of the district, or that is so prominent as to distract from the surrounding context, can act counter to this "compatibility."

- The Elements of Design for Arden Park-East Boston are provided in Sec. 21-2-123 of City Code. Nearly all are relevant to this proposed project. The elements are listed in full below, with staff comment following.

    1) *Height: Virtually all of the houses in the district are 2½ stories in height, meaning they have two full stories with an attic or finished third floor within the roof line. Original subdivision restrictions required that no house be less than two stories in height. Additions shall be related in height to the existing structure; new buildings shall meet the following standards:*
        a. *The eight adjoining houses on the same block face, excluding any houses built after 1930 and churches, shall be used to determine an average height. If eight houses are not available on the same block face, then one or more houses as close as possible to being directly across the street from the proposed structure may be used. The height of the two adjoining houses shall be added into the total twice, with a divisor of ten used to determine the average. Any new building must have a height of the main roof of at least 80 percent of the resulting average; in no case shall a new building be taller than the tallest roof height included in the computation. In determining the height of existing structures and proposed structures, the highest point of the main roof shall be used, even where towers, cupolas, or other minor elements may be taller*
        b. *The level of the eaves of a proposed new structure having as much or more significance for compatibility as the roof height, an average eave or cornice height shall be determined by the same process as described in Subsection (d)(1)a of this section. The proposed new structure shall have a height at the eaves, or cornice, of not less than 90 percent of the average determined from existing structures, and in no case shall the eaves or cornice of the proposed structure be lower than the lowest eave or cornice height used in the computation, or higher than the highest.*

    Staff assessment: The height of 33 feet, 9 inches appears to be in line with other historic houses on the block face (based on a visual assessment; the applicant did not provide measurements for other buildings). This element appears to be generally satisfied.

    2) *Proportion of Buildings' Front Facades: Proportion varies in the district, depending on style and age; height being established by the standards contained in Subsection (d)(1)a of this section; proportion will be established by permitting no proposed building or addition to create a front façade narrower or wider than those existing on the same block.*

    Staff assessment: The proposed house is 41 feet, 2 inches wide; other houses on the block range from under 40 feet in width to about 50 feet. This element is satisfied.

    3) *Proportion of openings within the façade: Window openings are virtually always taller than wide; several windows are sometimes grouped into a combination wider than tall. Window openings are always subdivided; the most common window type being double-hung sash, whose area is generally further subdivided by muntins. Leaded glass in windows, transoms, and sidelights are present in the styles derived from Elizabethan and Tudor precedence. Façades have approximately 15 percent to 35 percent of their area glazed.*

Staff assessment: The proposed building adheres to the window expression described above. This element appears to be satisfied.

4) *Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades: In buildings derived from classical precedents, voids are usually arranged in a symmetrical and evenly spaced manner within the façade. In styles influenced by the vernacular English architecture, and other styles, voids are arranged with more freedom into a balanced composition.*

   Staff assessment: The proposed rhythm is symmetrical and evenly spaced, consistent with the Classical Revival style proposed here. This element appears to be satisfied.

5) *Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets: Although the deed restrictions of the McLaughlin's and Owen's Subdivision required that no building be nearer than ten feet to the west property line of any lot, the spacing between buildings is generally wider than ten feet because houses are generally not located on the east lot line. The spacing of buildings tends to be consistent within blocks, even though lot widths may vary, as most houses are situated at or near the center of the lot, leaving open space on either side. Where buildings are closer to one side, a more spacious side yard exists, or, as in the third block where lots are smaller, space for a side driveway exists. The building restrictions did not apply for garages or other out-buildings erected on the rear 60 feet of any lot in McLaughlin's and Owen's Subdivision.*

   Staff assessment: The proposed house is five feet from the west lot line. This element is not satisfied. (The property is on the "third block" as described above; the side yard and driveway is provided by the proposed design).

6) *Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections: Steps, porches and projections were considered a part of the building and came under the building setback restrictions in McLaughlin's and Owen's Subdivision, although, in actuality, the porches sometimes varied from the setback line. Entrances and porches in the buildings of classical inspiration are usually centered on the front façade. Other styles exhibit more freedom with the entrance and porch placement. Side and rear porches and enclosed sunrooms are common.*

   Staff assessment: The proposed building is of Classical inspiration with a centered front porch and rear sunroom, consistent with examples found elsewhere in the Arden Park-East Boston Historic District. This element is satisfied.

7) *Relationship of materials: Buildings are brick or stone, or a combination of the two, or stucco; the upper stories are also of shingles, cement, and plaster (stucco) with half-timbering. Roofing materials include tile, slate, and asphalt shingles. Stone trim is common on buildings with stone and/or brick veneer; wood is used for window trim and other functional trim, as well as for decorative purposes.*

   Staff assessment: Although the primary material is an appropriate brick, other materials are synthetic and include fiberglass, PVC trim boards, fiber-cement, and polyurethane. This element is not satisfied.

8) *Relationship of textures: The predominant relationship of textures in the district is that of the low relief pattern of mortar joints in brick or stone contrasted to the smooth surface of wood or stone trim. Sometimes brick and stone are contrasted in the same structures. A stucco or shingled second story sometimes provides a contrast to the first story. Half-timbering on stucco, when it exists, is rough-sawn. Tile and slate roofing create textural interest, whereas asphalt shingles generally do not.*

   Staff assessment: The proposed brick product is available in both true brick and three-quarter-

inch “thin brick”. Only true brick would be compatible in a historic district and express a hand-laid appearance. It is not clear which would be used. (The architectural drawings depict a “veneer.”) Further, the type of mortar joint is not specified and will have a profound effect on the final appearance of the finished surface. A flush joint or concave joint will result in a flat appearance and will not create the “low relief pattern of mortar joints” described in the Elements of Design. A more recessed joint would create the appropriate appearance, and this would likely only be possible with a true brick, not a thin brick. This element is not satisfied.

9) *Relationship of colors: Natural brick colors (red, buff, brown, yellow) predominate in wall surfaces. Natural stone colors also exist. Stucco and concrete are usually left in their natural state or are painted in a shade of cream or gray. Roofs are in natural colors (red tile, green, brown, and gray-veined slate) and asphalt shingles are predominantly within this same dark-color range. Copper flashing stands out on some roofs. Paint colors generally relate to style; the classically inspired buildings, notably the Colonial and Georgian substyles, have wood painted in the range of white and cream. Doors and shutters are frequently black, dark green, brown, and white. Colors known to have been in use on buildings of similar type in the 18 th Century or 19 th Century may be considered for suitability on similar buildings. Buildings of English Medieval inspiration, most notably Neo-Tudor, generally have painted woodwork and window frames of dark brown, buff, or cream color. Light green is also used. Half-timbering is frequently stained dark brown or painted white, the latter not being the original state. Buildings with shingled second stories are painted or stained brown, dark green, or gray. The original colors of any house, as determined by professional analysis, are always acceptable for that house, and may provide suggestions for similar houses.*

   Staff assessment: Although the brick is an appropriate color, the many specified products appear to be pure white or bright white in color (staff interprets the “range of white and cream” quoted above to refer to the off-whites available in the early twentieth century, not a pure or titanium white). This element is only partly satisfied.

10) *Relationship of architectural details: Architectural details generally relate to style. Neo-Georgian and Colonial revival buildings display classical details, mostly in wood and sometimes in stone. Porches, shutters, window frames, cornices, and dormer windows are frequently treated. Details on Mediterranean style or Italian villa-type houses are often done in stone, brick, tile and sometimes stucco, and include arched windows, door openings, and porches. Buildings of Medieval inspiration tend to have details in the form of carved wood or stone ornament on window frames, door frames, eaves, and are frequently half-timbered. The buildings in the district are rich in architectural details.*

    Staff assessment: The level of detail is not clear without more detailed, sectional drawings. It is not clear if this element is satisfied.

11) *Relationship of roof shapes: A variety of roof shapes exist, again depending on building style. Shallow hipped roofs with dormers, roofs with triangular gables and steep hipped roofs predominate. A few gambrel roofs exist. Complex arrangements of the gabled and/or the hipped types, with subsidiary or transverse roofs are not unusual; dormers are common. Flat roofs are present only as subsidiary roofs on residential structures and as main roofs over two institutional structures.*

    Staff assessment: The proposed building is two stories with a high, unfenestrated attic story. Although the attic lacks the dormers most commonly found on houses in the Arden Park-East Boston Historic District, staff observes that a smaller number of historic houses in the district also lack attic fenestration. This element appears to be satisfied.

12) *Walls of continuity: Hedges and fences across side yards at the building setback line contribute*

to the major wall of continuity. Fences and hedges at the edge of the right-of-way, where they exist, contribute to a minor wall of continuity along the front property line. Where trees in rows on the tree lawns have survived in sufficient numbers and where new ones are planted, minor walls of continuity are created.

Staff assessment: The proposed building has the same setback as its historic neighbor to the west and continues the wall of continuity established by the nearby historic buildings (the non-historic building to the east has a deeper setback). This element appears to be satisfied.

13) *Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatment: Characteristic treatment of individual properties is a flat front lawn area in grass turf, often subdivided by a walk leading to the front entrance. Materials for such walks are concrete or brick or a combination of these materials. Some front yards have raised rectangular earthwork terraces upon which the house stands with sloping embankments or brick and/or stone retaining walls at the change of grade. Foundation planting, often of the deciduous type characteristic of the period of 1900 to 1930, are present virtually without exception. Hedges between properties are common. The American elm is virtually extinct in the district, though once the dominant tree. Replacement trees have been planted; additional trees should be characteristic of the area and the period. American elms would only be a practical choice if disease-resistant. Plantings of new trees should be directed toward the restoration of the former straight-line rows of large trees on the front yards and "tree lawns." Straight single-width side driveways leading from the street to the rear garages are the norm and are either paved in brick, concrete or asphalt. Where a house was built on more than one lot, as was frequent in the first two blocks off Woodward Avenue, landscaped side lots forming a part of the original site plan for the residence exist. Piers and walls form gates on Woodward Avenue at the entrance to Arden Park and East Boston Boulevards. The piers at Arden Park are of red brick with masonry cresting; smaller-scaled brick piers at the east entrance to Arden Park at Oakland exist. The gates at the west entrance to East Boston are of limestone. The 125-foot right-of-way is divided down the center by a grassy median planted with evergreens and deciduous trees. These medians and the wide tree lawns create a pleasant, airy residential urban atmosphere. Street lighting poles on East Boston and Arden Park are mostly of the "O.P." type with cast iron bases and wooden poles painted black, although some more modern replacements exist. Poles on Woodward Avenue and Oakland are of a more modern type and located near the curb. On John R., Brush and Belmont, lamps are on brackets attached to wooden "telephone" poles and are located near the curb. All but one lighting pole on Arden Park and East Boston are located in the medians of the boulevards. Although there is no generally observed pattern of placement of poles on the medians, a pole is usually placed at or near the end of each median island, and the poles are usually placed in an alternation from one side of the median to the other.*

Staff assessment: The proposed site plan includes a large grass lawn area, subdivided by a straight concrete walkway leading to the front entrance of the building. Foundation plantings are depicted around the front, rear, sides of the house. The driveway is straight and located to the side of the house. This element is satisfied.

14) *Relationship of open space to structures: Open space in the district was planned, for the most part, when the subdivision was platted and the lots on the corner of Woodward Avenue and Arden Park were deeded to the City for use as a park. The Woodward Avenue frontage at Boston now contains, on the southeast corner, a church structure, and on the northeast corner, a fenced-in open space relating to the Blessed Sacrament Church to the north and the Dodge House to the east. The medians in the center of the boulevards provide open space unifying the district as a whole. The siting of all houses on their lots create rear yards as well as front yards; where an original or early arrangement of a house and grounds included and still includes landscaped lots which form part of the landscaping plan for the residence, such landscaped lots are significant landscape features. Corner lots are sometimes shielded on the street side by*

shrubbery and/or fences.

Staff assessment: The proposed site plan includes distinct front and rear yards. This element is satisfied.

15) *Scale of façades and façade elements: The scale of the façades varies from block to block and style to style. The first and second blocks off Woodward Avenue on both Boston and Arden Park contain houses of a large and substantial appearance; the third block contains structures more modest in scale and generally sited on one lot. Façade elements have been determined by what is appropriate for the style, and the size and complexity of façade elements and details either accentuate or subdue the scale of the façades accordingly. Small one-story wings at the sides, porches, or porte cocheres are common; window sashes are usually subdivided by muntins, which affects the apparent scale of the windows within the façades.*

Staff assessment: The windows of the proposed building are subdivided by muntins and accentuated by prominent jack arches and applied shutters, and the front door is accentuated by a glazed surround and transom. This element appears to be satisfied.

16) *Directional expression of front elevations: While some front elevations emphasize the horizontal, the overall expression of direction is neutral.*

Staff assessment: The proposed design balances horizontal and vertical features. This element appears to be satisfied.

17) *Rhythm of building setbacks: Due to the existence of deed restrictions in McLaughlin's and Owen's Subdivision, the setbacks are generally consistent within each block, with the exception of the block between John R and Brush on Arden Park Boulevard where most houses are approximately 20 feet from the front lot line, but three houses on the north side are approximately 40 feet from the front lot line. Some houses on corner lots in the district appear to be set back very slightly closer to the right-of-way than the rest of the houses on their blocks. On Belmont, the setback of the four buildings is approximately 25 feet. The varying designs of the houses, with slight setbacks or porch projections in the façades, cause the houses to relate to the front setback line in different ways.*

Staff assessment: The proposed plan shows a proposed setback of 44 feet, matching the historic building to the west. This element appears to be satisfied.

18) *Relationship of lot coverage: Lot coverage ranges from 40 percent to ten percent or less in the case with homes with large yards. Most homes are in the 20 percent to 35 percent range of lot coverage.*

Staff assessment: Despite a relatively large garage, the proposed buildings together occupy under 35 percent of the parcel. This element is satisfied.

19) *Degree of complexity within the façade: The degree of complexity has been determined by what is typical and appropriate for a given style. The Classically-inspired buildings usually have simple, rectangular façades with varying amounts of ornamentation. Buildings of Medieval inspiration frequently have façades complicated by gables, bays, porches, and occasionally turrets.*

Staff assessment: The façade has a moderate degree of complexity, comparable to historic buildings in the vicinity. The planar façade is broken by its projecting porch with balconet. This element appears to be satisfied.

20) Orientation, vistas, overviews: All of the buildings in the district are oriented toward the boulevard. Buildings on corner lots may have secondary entrances or semicircular drives on the side street. Garages are always detached, at the rear of the lot and often oriented towards the alley as well as the driveway, or, where a house is sited on a corner lot, towards the side street. The primary vista is created along the wide boulevards by the median.

Staff assessment: The proposed garage is oriented to face the street, not the alley, and is accessed by a driveway. Several historic garages on the same block share this orientation. This element is satisfied.

21) Symmetric or asymmetric appearance: Classically inspired buildings are generally symmetrical. Other styles, including the Medievally inspired buildings, exhibit more freedom in plan and are generally symmetrical but balanced compositions.

Staff assessment: The proposed building is asymmetrical, but balanced, in that the weight of features is roughly even on both half of the façade—for instance, a projecting box-bay on the north half is balanced by a balconet on the south half. The attached garage, an asymmetrical feature, is deemphasized by being set back. This element appears to be satisfied.

22) General environmental character: The Arden Park-East Boston Historic District, with its boulevards entered through gates on Woodward Avenue and divided by a grassy median strip, and its relatively large lots and dignified single-family residences, has an urban substantial, yet low-density residential character with one major institutional complex. It exhibits a variety of early 20th Century architectural styles.

Staff assessment: The proposed building is consistent with this character. This element appears to be satisfied.

- As outlined above, the proposed project appears to meet only seventeen of the twenty-two Elements of Design. In general, staff suggests that the remaining elements can be satisfied with relatively minor adjustments to the proposed design, described under "Issues," below.

- Further, although not connected to a specific element, staff suggests that the lack of fenestration on the sides (east and west elevations) of the proposed house is a concern. The west elevation (see image on page 4 of this report) has only two, centered window openings, with large expanses of blank wall on either end. The east elevation has one door but no window openings. Staff opinion is that these large expanses of unfenestrated wall area result in an appearance and overall lack of detail and complexity that is incongruous and incompatible with the Colonial Revival style of the proposed building and is inconsistent with other buildings within the district.

East elevation. Image from application documents.

- Finally, staff suggests that there is an overall lack of detail in the submitted drawings. To achieve

compatibility, details such as lintels, jack arches, doorway details, windows, and entablature should be projected or be recessed as appropriate to add a sense of texture, depth, and shadow to break up the otherwise flat, planar façade of the building.

- Staff notes that the unusually deep footprint of the garage is uncharacteristic with respect to other, historic garages in the district. However, staff opinion is that this effect is mitigated by facing the narrow, two-bay face of the building towards the street, lessening the overall effect. Staff also notes that the position of the garage with respect to the house and the two deciduous trees shown on the landscape plan will render it less prominently visible.

ISSUES

- The proposed house does not have the ten-foot west setback indicated by the Elements of Design. This could be remedied by repositioning the house five feet to the east (and adjusting the driveway and patio as needed), or, alternatively, by mirroring the entire site plan.

- The proposed cellular PVC trim boards, fiber-cement siding, and prefabricated polyurethane balustrade are incompatible with the Elements of Design and will have a synthetic, artificial, and prefabricated appearance that is not compatible with the character of the surrounding district. Such elements are still technically and feasibly produced in wood. The materials for the shutters and garage door are not specified.

- It is not clear if the proposed buildings use true brick or thin brick; the type of mortar joint is also not specified. True brick and recessed mortar joints will be required to create adequate depth and texture.

- The bright white or pure white colors are incompatible with the Colonial Revival style of the building and with the district as a whole.

- Section drawings are not provided; the window and door openings and associated details, entablature on both the porch and eaves, and other façade details must have adequate depth and texture to avoid a flat or shallow appearance.

- The expanses of unfenestrated, blank brick wall on the sides (east and west elevations) of the house are incompatible with the Colonial Revival style of the building and with the character of the district as a whole.

RECOMMENDATION(S)
Section 21-2-78, Determinations of Historic District Commission

Recommendation 1 of 1, Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Arden Park-East Boston Historic District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that:

- The site plan shall be adjusted to provide a ten-foot west setback, subject to staff approval.

- The trim boards, siding, and balustrade shall be wood.

- The shutters and garage door selection shall be subject to staff approval for compatibility with the Elements of Design.

- The wall material shall employ true brick with a recessed mortar joint, subject to staff approval.

- Window color and trim color shall be consistent with Color System C (Colonial Revival, Neo-Dutch Colonial, Neo-Georgian, Post-Depression Colonial), subject to staff approval.

- Section drawings of façade details shall be provided to ensure appropriate depth and complexity, subject to staff approval.

- Additional fenestration shall be added to the sides (east and west elevations) of the house, subject to staff approval.