

STAFF REPORT: MARCH 12, 2025 REGULAR MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00052
ADDRESS: 4236 LESLIE
HISTORIC DISTRICT: RUSSELL WOODS-SULLIVAN
APPLICANT: ROBERT STASHEFSKY
PROPERTY OWNER: SYLVESTER OGLETREE
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION FEBRUARY 11, 2025
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: FEBRUARY 28, 2025

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

SCOPE: REPLACE WOOD SIDING AND TRIM WITH VINYL AND ALUMINUM



February 2025 photo by staff.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The house at 4236 Leslie is a two-story, red brick, Tudor Revival building built in 1926. Character-defining features include elaborate patterned brickwork, a projecting entry pavilion with brick buttresses and a recessed, arched entryway, prominent, flared vergeboards, original wood sash windows, and gable dormers.

The two-car garage, also subject of this application, was built at an unknown date. It has been altered with a newer, segmental steel door and replacement wood clapboard siding and fascia.

It appears (see photos next page) that the blue-green paint and the garage door installation occurred sometime after 1999 without approval of the Historic District Commission. The property owner is encouraged to submit an application for this unapproved work.



The garage. Undated photo from application materials.



1999 photo by the Historic Designation Advisory Board.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes the following scope of work:

Soffits and fascia (including vergeboards)

The soffits and fascia would be replaced on the front (south) and the east and west sides of the house. A sketch on page 5 of the application indicates that this would also include replacement of the historic vergeboards on the front of the house.



Image from page 5 of the application.

The new material would be Craneboard “solid core” siding, a vinyl material, in Lighthouse Red color, for soffits, and aluminum in Grecian Green color for other trim.



Craneboard siding. Image from application documents.

Dormers

The dormer walls, presently clad in wood shingles, would also be replaced with Craneboard siding and aluminum trim, also in the same color scheme.



Existing condition of dormer walls. February 2025 photo by staff.

Gutters and downspouts

All existing gutters and downspouts would be removed; new gutters and downspouts would be installed on the house and garage. The new gutters and downspouts would be 6” aluminum, in Grecian Green color.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District was established by Ordinance 33-99 of the Detroit City Council in 1999.
- The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-168) for the district provide the following observations:
 - (7) *Relationship of materials*. “Wood is almost universally used for window frames and other functional trim.”
 - (8) *Relationship of textures*. “The major texture is that of brick laid in mortar, often juxtaposed with wood or smooth or rough-faced stone elements and trim.”
- In general, the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation require that historic materials be retained and preserved whenever possible. The application does not provide an argument as to why the soffits, fascia, vergeboards, and dormer walls must be replaced. Even if extensive deterioration were to be demonstrated, in-kind replacement with readily available wood products is financially and technically feasible. (See Standards #2 and #6, quoted below.)
- The existing vergeboards are a highly distinctive feature that are particularly important to the character of the building. Removing these elements would greatly compromise the building’s historic appearance. Even if the vergeboards were substantially deteriorated, the Standards would require that they be replaced with new work of the same dimensions, design, and materials. (See Standard #5, quoted below.)
- From a staff site visit and available photos, noticeable deterioration was observed in only one location: an expanse of missing or damaged soffit board on the west side of the house. As mentioned above, the Standards would require that this be replaced with a wood tongue-and-groove material matching what was lost.



Area of lost soffit material. February 2025 photo by staff.

- The Elements of Design (quoted above) likewise direct that the materials used should be wood, rather than the vinyl and aluminum materials proposed.
- The proposed Lighthouse Red and Grecian Green colors are consistent with Color System D (English Revival).
- The proposed gutter installation is consistent with what is typically approved per Resolution 97-01.

ISSUES

- There is no evidence that the historic wood elements proposed for replacement are beyond repair. Their removal is contrary to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards #2.
- The historic vergeboards are highly distinctive elements, important to the building’s overall appearance and character. Their removal would eliminate a distinctive feature, contrary to Standard #5.
- Should any historic elements be demonstrated to be deteriorated to the point where repair is not feasible, Standard #6 requires that the replacement elements “match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.” The proposed new products do not match in texture and materials (they are vinyl and aluminum, which have a noticeably different appearance than wood and wear differently), and often do not match in design (the orientation and reveal would be different on the soffit panels and dormer walls, and the dimensions of the historic vergeboards would not be duplicated by the new installation).
- The Elements of Design #7 and #8 direct that wood trim should be used, painted in appropriate historic colors.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 2, Denial

Staff concludes that the proposed soffit, fascia, dormer wall siding, and vergeboard 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.*
5. *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 Elements of Design #7 and #8,

For the following reasons:

- The wood elements proposed for removal are historic and materials and features that contribute to the character of the property that have not been shown to be beyond feasible repair.
- The wood elements proposed for removal include highly distinctive, decorative, flared vergeboards.
- The proposed replacement materials fail to match the old in materials (they are vinyl and aluminum rather than wood), design (their profile, orientation, and reveal are different), and appearance (they have a different texture and sheen and will wear differently than historic wood).

Recommendation 2 of 2, Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff recommends that the proposed gutter and downspout replacement and installation will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Russell Woods-Sullivan Elements of Design.