

STAFF REPORT: 05/14/2025

PREPARED BY: L. SAINT JAMES

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00163

ADDRESS: 3728 BUENA VISTA

HISTORIC DISTRICT: RUSSELL WOODS-SULLIVAN

APPLICANT: MIKEL BRESEE

PROPERTY OWNER: RUSSELL WOODS-SULLIVAN AREA ASSOCIATION

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 04/17/2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 05/08/2025

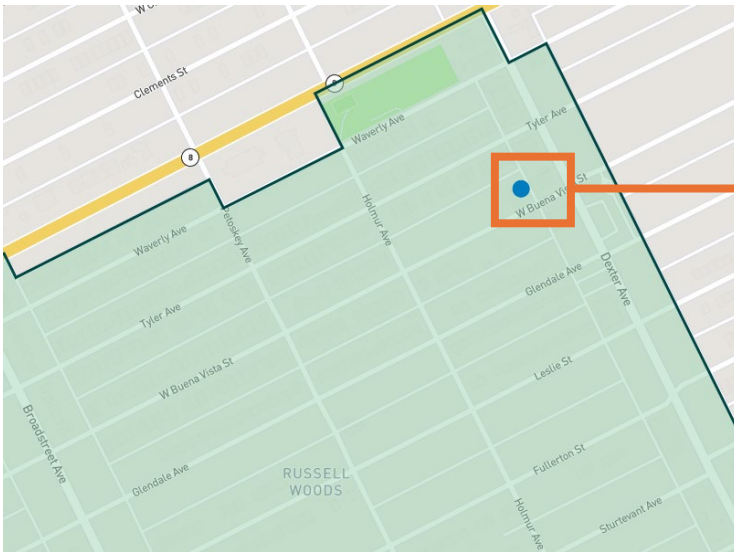
SCOPE: REMOVE TREES, FENCE, AND GARDEN BEDS AND ERECT FENCE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The subject property is a vacant parcel of approximately 4,300 sq. ft. (0.099 acres) near the northeast area of the Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District, being the first northern parcel on Buena Vista east of Dexter and a few blocks south of Davison. Since at least 2009, no buildings were on the site at that time, nor have any been erected in the decades since. Grass, multiple aged trees, and some shrubs cover the site, along with chain link fencing.



Staff photo, 05/08/2025



Local Historic District map



Detroit Parcel Viewer



Staff photo, 05/08/2025



Staff photo, 05/08/2025

PROPOSAL

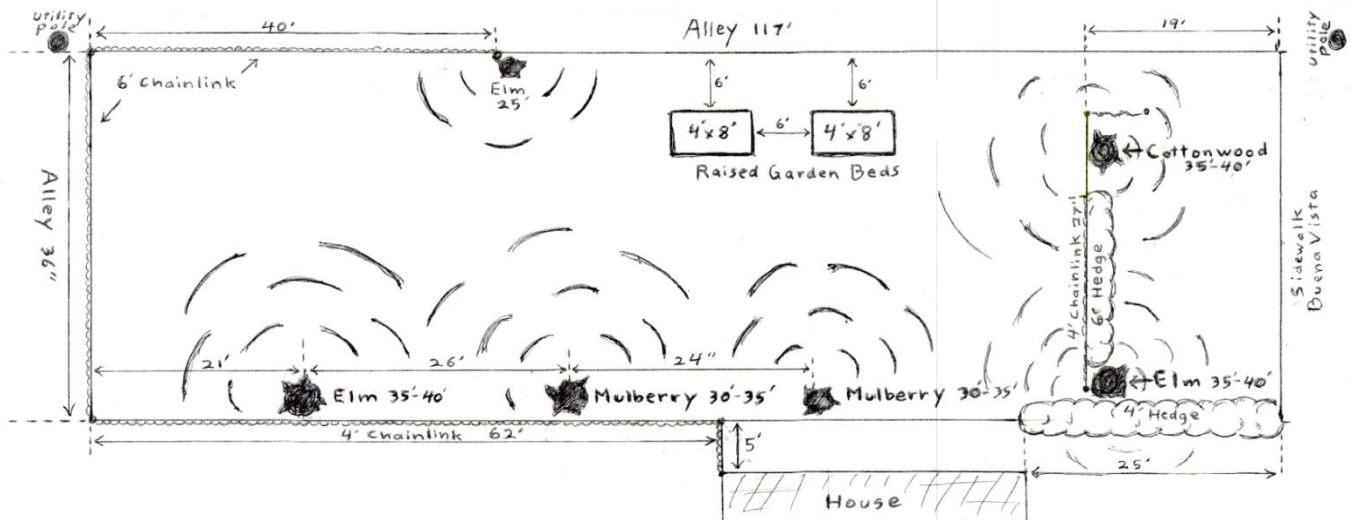
Russell Woods/Sullivan Area Association (RWSAA) has been approved for a Neighborhood Beautification grant from Wayne Metro in this application RWSAA seeks to secure the vacant lot by removing overgrown “trash trees,” old fencing, and heavy debris. A decorative corner fence will be installed.

- Remove trees, fence, and garden beds
- Erect fence

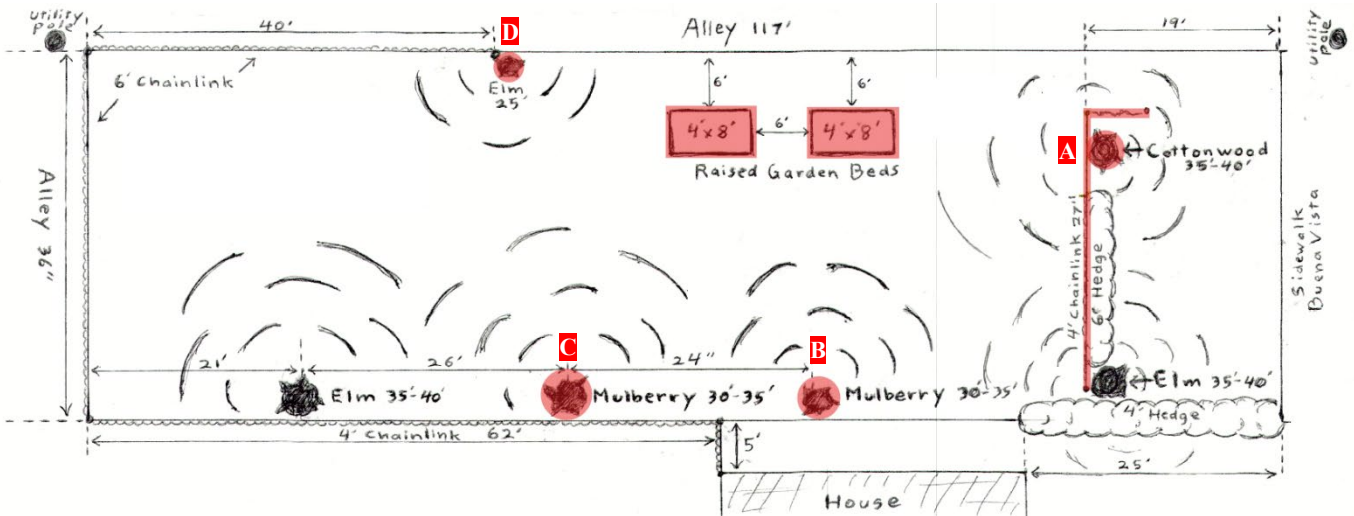
STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District was enacted in 1998.

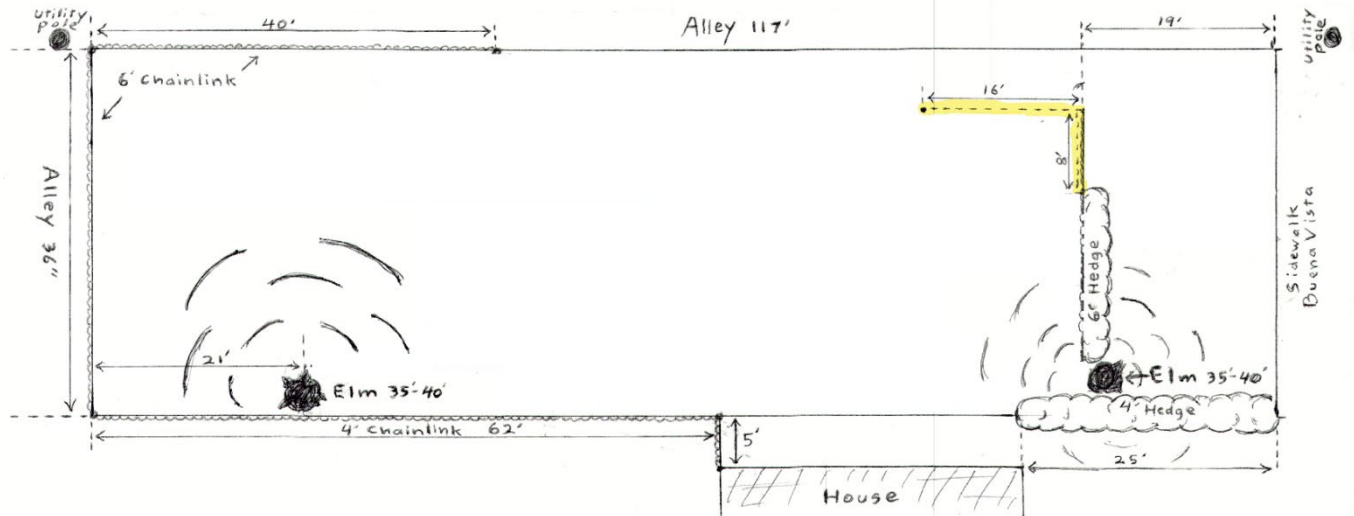
SITE PLAN: EXISTING



SITE PLAN: PROPOSED REMOVAL



SITE PLAN: PROPOSED - WITH ERECTED FENCE



REMOVE TREES

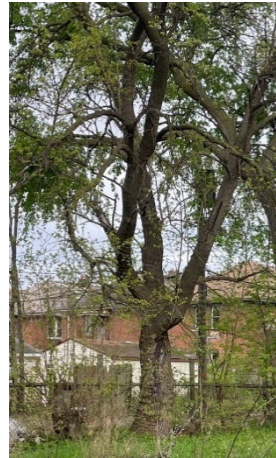
TREE A — COTTONWOOD



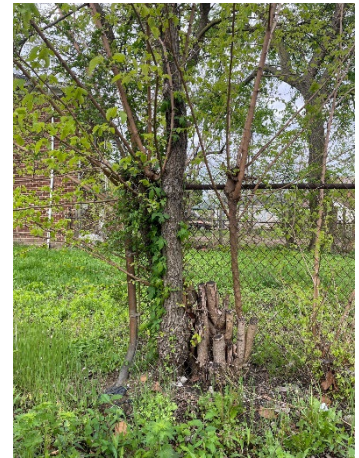
TREE B — MULBERRY



TREE C — MULBERRY



TREE D — ELM



Staff photos, 05/08/2025

- The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-168) mention “large evergreen trees shield some houses from view.”
- The applicant reasoning for removing the four trees is “to provide more open sunlight, fewer rotting berries and falling limbs, remove two 30’-35’ mulberry trees against neighbor’s house, the 34’ – 40’ cottonwood at the SE corner, and the 25’ elm on the alley.”

TREE A

- The applicant’s reasoning for removing the 35’ - 40’ cottonwood at the front corner is that it “has grown into the decrepit 4’ chain link fence”
- Provided by the applicant, a written statement from a sales arborist state that the tree does “not currently have any major defects that make it hazardous, but it will quickly grow into the fence creating damage to the vascular tissue.” and “The upper canopy is starting to show signs of decline with about 20% deadwood throughout the canopy. The exposed root growing across the front of the property also poses as a tripping hazard to pedestrians in the area and cannot be safely remediated without posing a large risk to the tree.”
 - Since this proposal includes removing said chain-link fence, the issue of the tree growing into the fence at a future date is moot.
 - Deadwood removal is a critical component of tree maintenance. Pruning dead branches back to the main trunk or a healthy lateral branch improves the tree's aesthetics but also eliminates safety hazards.

TREE B + C

- The applicant’s reasoning for removing the two 40’ - 45’ mulberry is that they “are at the end of their lifespan, are dropping branches 6” through, cast too much shade to garden in the plot, and shed rotting mulberries attracting swarms of bees while overhanging the neighboring house creating both a safety and insurance liability.”
- Mulberry trees are known for their invasive tendencies, including the ability of their roots to damage nearby infrastructure.

- Staff has authority to approve the removal of landscaping if it is in close vicinity to a historic building to the extent that it is damaging/has the potential to damage the historic building, suggesting Historic District Commission opinion that such a reason would be appropriate.

TREE D

- The applicant's reasoning for removing the elm is that it "has grown around the utility line and was not cut by DTE when they cut the others on the alley."
- During the site visit, staff observed this elm tree to be entwined with the existing chain link fence.

ERECT FENCE

- The applicant would like to install 24' of 6' height fence near the southeast corner of the lot. They state that "it's a strategy pioneered several decades ago by the Philadelphia Mural Project- putting corner fences on vacant lots" because it "cuts way down on illegal dumping."

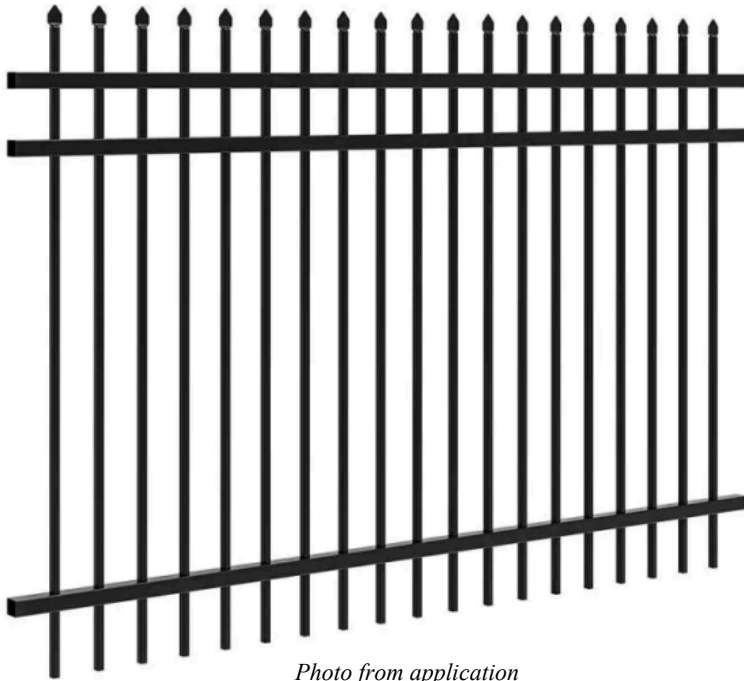


Photo from application

- The proposed fence, shown on the left, is galvanized and powder coated "ornamental" steel fence.
- The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-168) mention "hedges and fencing between properties are not common, although rear yards are commonly fenced. There is a wide range in the type of fencing with chain-link common."

- In recent years, according to the Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department (BSEED) records, illegal dumping has occurred at this parcel.

ISSUES

- There is no written statement from a professional service or arborist that the Cottonwood removal is necessary due to it being dead, diseased, or damaged.
- Historic landscapes, which include residential gardens and community parks, (per Preservation Briefs: 36 linked below) are considered character-defining features which individually or collectively contribute to the landscape's physical appearance as they have evolved over time. Additionally:
 - *Most historic properties have a cultural landscape component that is integral to the significance of the resource. Imagine a residential district without sidewalks, lawns and trees.*
 - *...plants may have historical or botanical significance... A plant may be an uncommon cultivar, exceptional in size, age, rare and commercially/ unavailable. If such plants are lost, there would be a loss of historic integrity and biological diversity of the cultural landscape.*
 - National Park Service — [Preservation Briefs: 36 “Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes”](#)

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 2 – Denial – Removal of Cottonwood tree

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District’s 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.

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.

Elements of Design #: 13

For the following reasons:

- There is no professional evidence that the Cottonwood tree is dead, diseased, or damaged.
- The Cottonwood tree contributes to the historic integrity and biological diversity of the historic district.

Recommendation 2 of 2 – COA – Remove chain link fence, three trees, and erect a fence

Staff finds that the proposal for the remaining work items will not alter the features and spaces that characterize the property and district and therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed as it meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and the Elements of Design for the district.