

STAFF REPORT: 06/11/2025 MEETING
ADDRESS: 141 W. BOSTON BOULEVARD
APPLICATION NO: HDC2025-00238
VIOLATION NO: 1023

PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON
APPLICANT: STEVE DEBRUYN/STEVE'S IMPROVEMENT SERVICES
OWNER: DEREK AND SANDHYA BERK
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 4/30/2025 & 5/25/2025
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 4/19/2025

SCOPE: REMOVE CLAY TILE ROOF AND REPLACE WITH ASPHALT ROOF (WORK STARTED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The house located at 141 W. Boston was designed by architects Edward C. Van Leyen & Edward Schilling for publisher Joseph Mack and erected in 1912. The rectangular plan dwelling features a two-story, hipped-roof central mass with projecting, hipped-roof wings and lower flat-roofed wings at the rear. Arched, hipped, and shed-roof dormers top the roof. Green clay tiles cover portions of the roof while a canvas tarp has been installed to cover areas of the roof where tiles have been removed without HDC approval. The roof also features deep, overhanging eaves with decorative brackets. Exterior walls are clad with stucco and windows are wood, double-hung units.

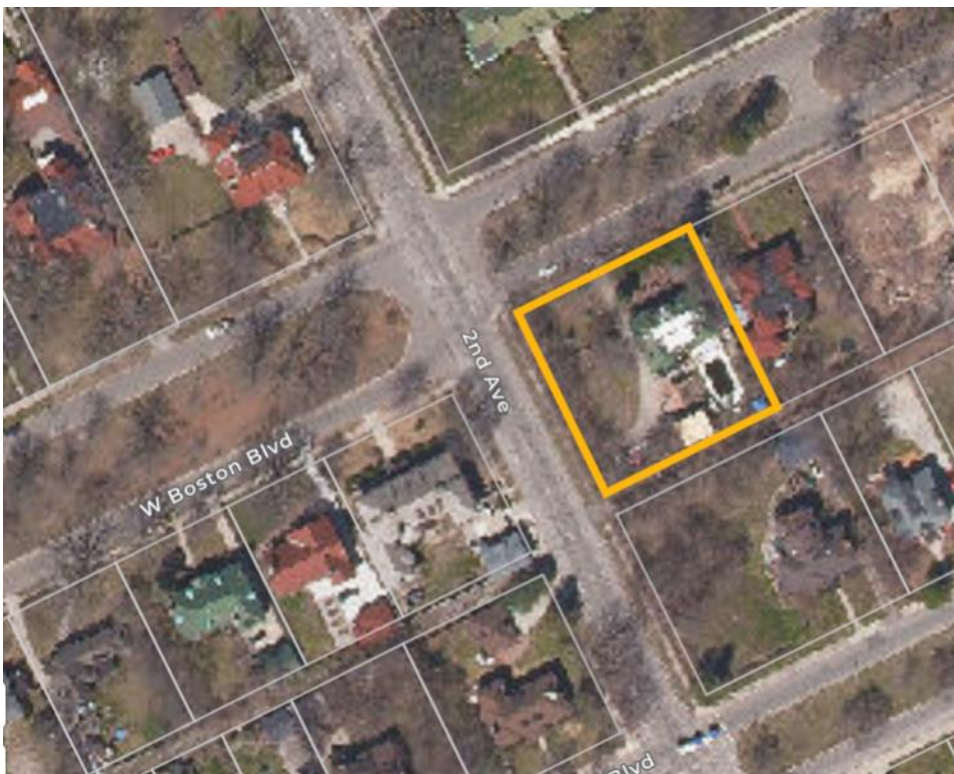
The parcel also includes the original two-story garage/carriage house to the rear of the dwelling. As the garage is not fully visible from the public right-of-way, staff was able to note that the garage has stucco-clad exterior walls. The roof is flat with a hipped pent secondary roof at the parapet. The pent roof is covered with green clay tiles.



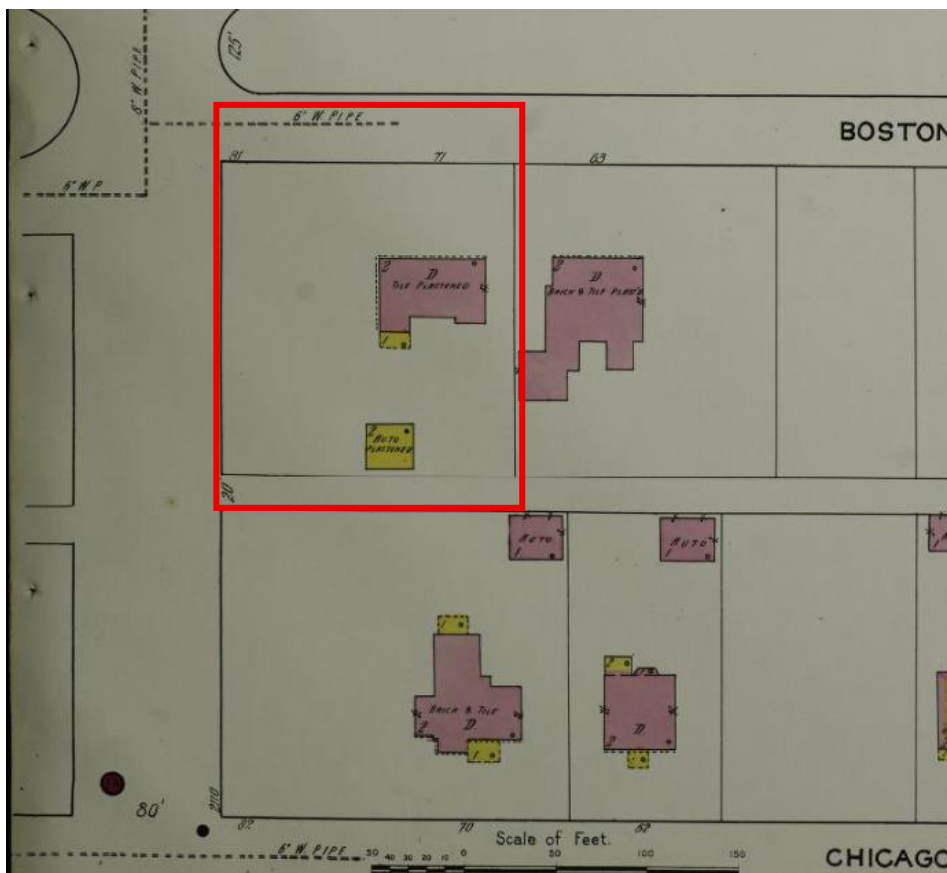
141 W. Boston. Photo taken by staff on 5/23/2025. Note the tarp covering the area of roof tiles that were removed without HDC approval.



141 W. Boston. Photo taken by staff on 5/23/2025. Note the tarp covering the area of roof tiles that were removed without HDC approval.



141 W. Boston, outlined in yellow. Detroit Parcel Viewer



Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1915. 141 W. Boston outlined in red.



Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1970. 141 W. Boston outlined in red.

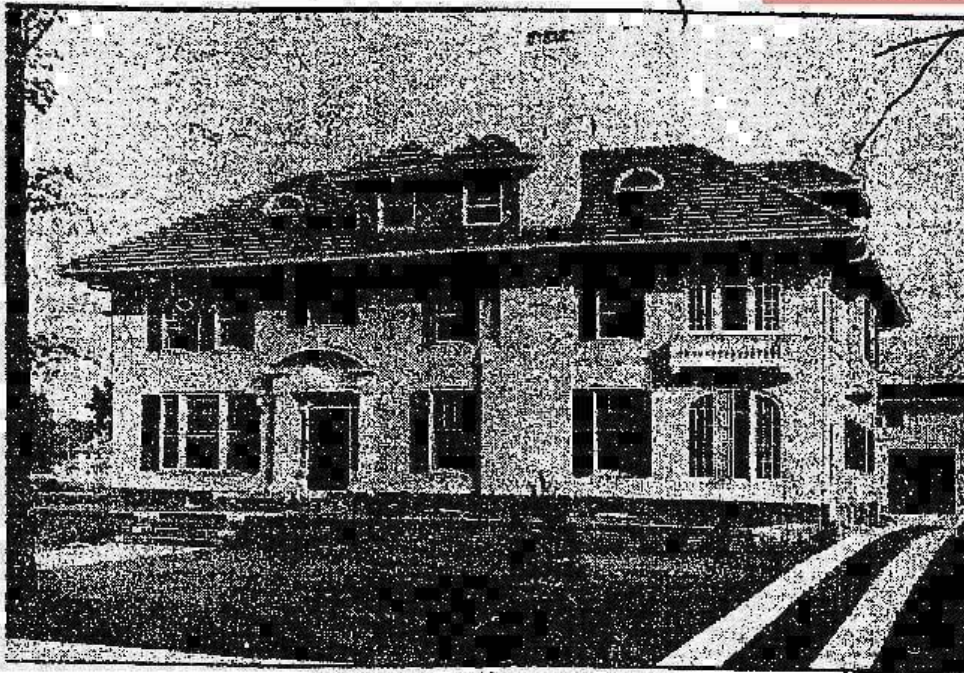
PROPOSAL

With the current submission, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to replace the existing historic clay tiles with a new asphalt shingle roof. CertainTeed Cedar Impressions shingles (made from a "polymer material" would be installed at the dormer front and side walls. As previously noted, the applicant has initiated the removal of the existing roofing without HDC approval and/or permit.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was designated in 1973
- On 4/30/2025, HDC staff was made aware that the applicant was in the process of removing the current roofing system. A review of files maintained by the HDC and the Detroit Building Safety Engineering and Environmental Department (BSEED) revealed that a COA had not been issued for the work. BSEED therefore issued a stop work order and directed the property owner to contact HDC staff so that they might address the violation.
- Please see the below photos, which depict conditions prior to and after the unapproved removal of the roofing removal.

GRAY AND GREEN FORM THE COLOR SCHEME OF FINE NEW HOME ON BOSTON BOULEVARD



RESIDENCE FOR JOSEPH MACK.

Among the most attractive architecturally of many fine residences that are being erected in that neighborhood, is the new home of Joseph Mack, recently completed on the north side of Boston Boulevard, between Woodward and Second avenues. The residence has a frontage of 60 feet and depth of 42 feet. It was designed by Edward C. Van Lely and Edward A. Schilling, architects.

In general character the residence is on the order of the American country house. A grass terrace, 20 feet in length, extends across the entire front. The exterior, built of fireproofing tile, with rough pebble cement finish, is in soft gray tones and the roof is of green tile. The blinds, finished in soft greens, harmonize with the roof, giving a

very satisfying and pleasing effect to the whole.

East of the main entrance on the ground floor is a spacious living room, extending the full length of the house, with a sun parlor to the south.

The dining room, in the front, breakfast room, grade entrance and kitchen are on the west side of the central hall, which extends from front to rear of the house, and opens on a tiled pergola to the south.

A service corridor extends from the basement to the servants' quarters in the third story, and is arranged so it may be used independently of the balance of the house.

There are five spacious bedrooms on the second floor with a private bath and general bath. There is also a large porch in the northwest

corner and a sleeping porch in the rear of the house.

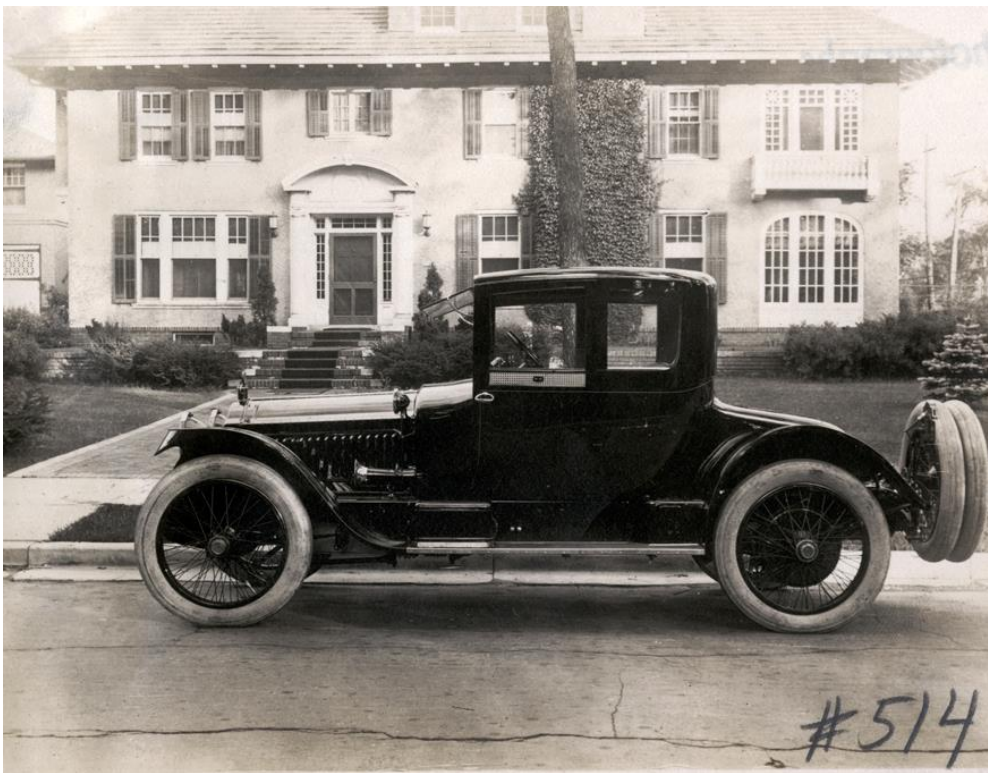
Quarters for the servants and a large bathroom occupy the third floor.

The entire down stairs section of the house is finished in genuine mahogany and enamel, with mantel pieces of imported Lavanazzo and Bresciani violet marbles. The floors of the first story are in quartered white oak, except the sun parlor, in which the floor is of red vitreous tile in basket weave pattern.

Kitchen and butler's pantry are finished in marble, and have inlaid oak fronts with marble border.

The second floor throughout is finished in enamel, the bathrooms being in tile with porcelain fixtures.

The residence is equipped with metal screens and weather-strips, bright system and vacuum cleaner. The house and garage are heated by the vapor vacuum steam system. The garage is planned for three machines, with chauffeur's quarters, provided with bath and shower, occupying the entire second floor.



National Automotive Historic collection, ca. 1916



141 W. Boston. Condition at time of the district's designation/in 1974. Photo by HDAB



141 W. Boston. Photo taken in 1982 by HDC staff. Showing condition of the roof and the garage/carriage house to the rear



141 W. Boston, 2009. Flickr



Eagle View aerial, 2024. Yellow areas indicate areas of past repairs



Eagle View aerial,, 2024. Looking NE.



Eagle View aerial 2024. Looking NW.



Eagle View aerial 2024. Looking SE.



Photo by applicant. Showing area of past roof repair

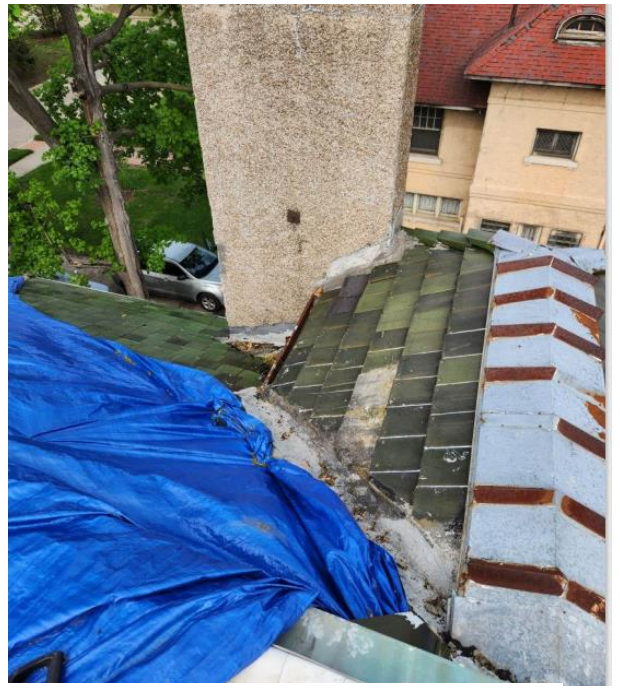


Photo by applicant. Showing area of past roof repair



Photo by applicant. Showing area of past roof repair. Note areas of asphalt roofing



Photo by applicant. Showing condition of clay tile

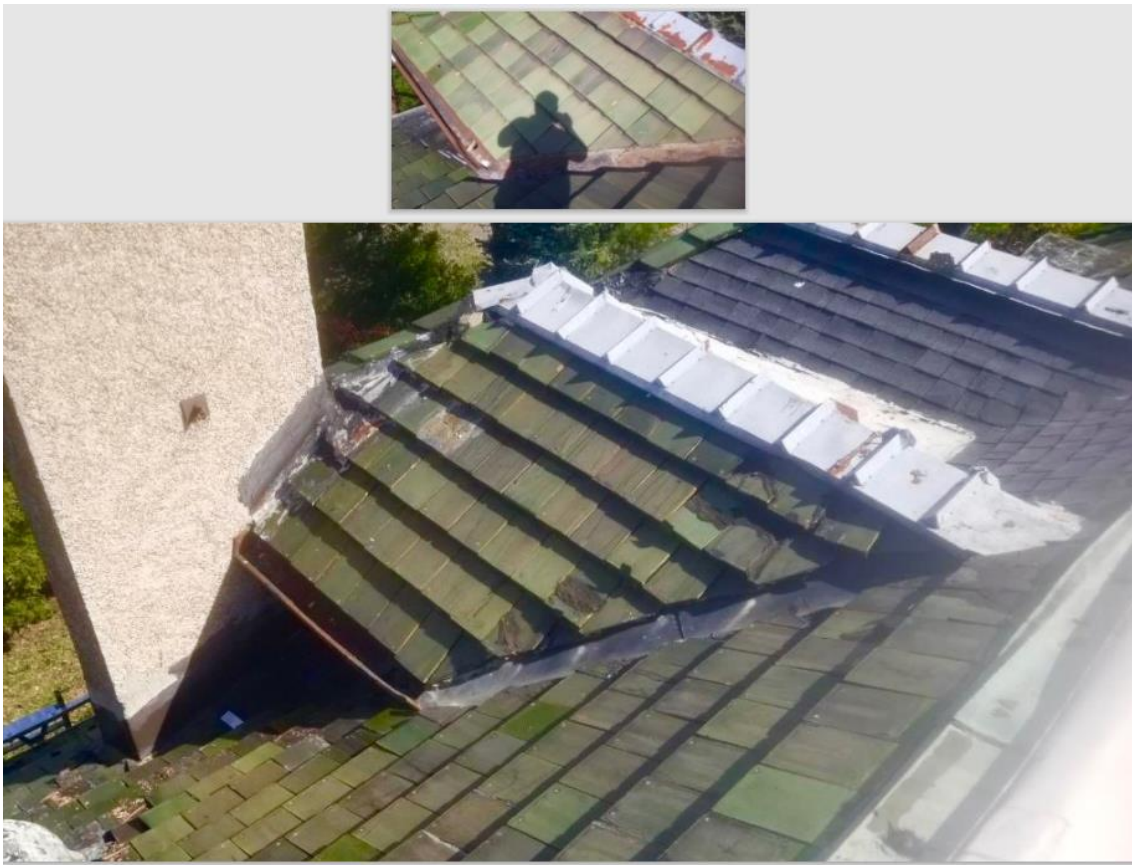


Photo by applicant. Showing area of roof repair at front paired dormers. Note small area of asphalt roofing



141 W. Boston. Photo taken on 4/30/2025 by HDC staff, showing current unapproved roof removal in progress



141 W. Boston. Photo taken on 4/30/2025 by HDC staff, showing current unapproved roof removal in progress



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- Material and visual qualities of a clay tile roof are intrinsically tied to each other. Even tile roof components, such as ridge end caps further accentuate the unique roof material and design. The dimensionality, patterning, profile and saturation of color of tile roofs make them distinctly important character-defining features of a building. At this residence, the use of green rectangular clay tiles offers a dramatic contrast against the minimal ornamentation of the house's white stucco walls. Staff sees the deep eaves and eave brackets as proportional to the clay tile roof. Any alteration to the tiles, most notably their replacement with asphalt shingles, will alter the features and architectural proportions that characterize the property. It is staff's opinion that the clay tile roof clearly is a distinctive, character-defining feature of the property as the entire composition of this house was designed to showcase the roof. Beginning with the façade's centrally-located, raised porch with arched portico, one's eye naturally travels upward to the vertical lines of the eave brackets which then leads a person to look (no matter the side of the house) to the hip roof and dormers.
- The property owner had provided a narrative outlining the reason why they are seeking a wholesale replacement of the current, character-defining roof with asphalt shingle and polymer shake. Per an email dated 5/9/2025:
 - *"This is an emergency situation. Our roof has several active leaks. It breaks our hearts not to do tile but it is insanely expensive. We just can't afford it. Every expert who has been out to look at our roof agrees it needs replacing, not just fixing. It's been patched and repaired for the last 50 years. We can not keep fixing it with 115 year old used tile over and over again and repairing the collateral damage from the leaks every season. Broken tile falls from our roof every storm. Repairs with new tile are not possible due to the size of the tile. They lock together on 2 sides and the new tile does not fit with the old. If we don't get a new roof on our house immediately we risk imminent further damage to the structure."*
- The applicant has submitted the following in support of owner's above statement:
 - Quote for \$194,800 to install new 16" clay tiles - Butcher and Butcher Construction Co.
 - Quote for \$263,127 to install a new 14" Ludowici clay tile roof and EPDM membrane at the flat portions of the roof - Bruttell Roofing
 - Quote for \$62,000 to install a new shingle asphalt roof per the current application - Steve's Improvement Services
 - Three photos of the interior showing water damage/damage to plaster
 - Exterior photos, showing areas of past repairs
- While staff does acknowledge that the roof is now 115 years old and likely in need of extensive repair, staff notes that the application does not include an assessment/statement of condition of the roof from a qualified clay tile roof repair contractor which notes that the roof merited wholesale removal and replacement with all new clay tiles.
- A full photographic documentation can often suffice in re: to demonstrating the condition/level of deterioration of an historic roof. However, as the roof was not fully documented before the unapproved clay tile removal was undertaken, staff is left to rely on the few submitted photos to understand the condition of the entirety of the historic clay tile roof. It is not clear to staff that the few submitted photos clearly indicate that remaining tiles could not have been salvaged for reinstallation.
- The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation require that distinctive character defining features be retained and repaired in kind. However, "where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials." In this case, as the clay tile roof is a distinctive character-defining feature of the house, clay tile roofing can be acquired and there are local contractors who have the expertise to repair historic clay tile roofs, the Standards require that the clay tile roof be retained and repaired, if technically and economically feasible. If the roof is deemed to be deteriorated beyond repair by a qualified expert, then the Standards require that a new roof new which matches the existing character-defining clay tiles be installed.

- It is staff's opinion that the proposed new roofing materials will present an inadequate match for the house's historic, character-defining clay tile roofing for the following reasons:
 - The proposed asphalt shingles are designed to resemble slate, not clay tile. Also, they do not adequately match the existing clay tiles in profile, dimension, texture, and color variation
 - The "polymer" shake proposed for the dormer side and front walls are designed resemble wood shake, not clay tile. Also, they do not adequately match the existing clay tiles in profile, dimension, texture, and color variation.
- Staff therefore recommends that the Commission deny this application because the work does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

ISSUES

- The application does not include an assessment/statement of condition of the roof from a qualified clay tile roof repair contractor which notes that the roof merited wholesale removal and replacement with all new clay tiles
- The Standards require that the clay tile roof be retained and repaired, if possible. If the roof is deemed to be deteriorated beyond repair by a qualified expert, then the Standards require that a new roof new which matches the existing character-defining clay tiles be installed
- The proposed new roofing materials will present an inadequate match for the house's historic, character-defining clay tile roofing

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial: Remove tile roof and replace with asphalt roof

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Boston-Edison 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

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 other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

9). New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. 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.

For the following reasons:

- The application does not include an assessment/statement of condition of the roof from a qualified clay tile roof repair contractor which notes that the roof merits wholesale removal and replacement with all new clay tiles/is deteriorated beyond repair
- The proposed new roofing materials present an inadequate match for the house's historic, character-defining clay tile roofing for the following reasons:

- The proposed asphalt shingles are designed to resemble slate, not clay tile. Also, they do not adequately match the existing clay tiles in profile, dimension, texture, and color variation
- The “polymer” shake proposed for the dormer side and front walls are designed resemble wood shake, not clay tile. Also, they do not adequately match the existing clay tiles in profile, dimension, texture, and color variation.