

STAFF REPORT: JULY 9, 2025 MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00300
VIOLATION NUMBER: 1019
ADDRESS: 1725 SEYBURN
HISTORIC DISTRICT: WEST VILLAGE
APPLICANT: TRACY LOWE
PROPERTY OWNER: TRACY LOWE
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 6/17/25
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 6/23/25

PREPARED BY: E. THACKERY

SCOPE: REPLACE HISTORIC WINDOWS, MULTIPLE EXTERIOR ALTERATIONS (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The 1 1/2-story dwelling at 1725 Seyburn is a bungalow with a deep, shaded front porch, a first-floor bay window looking onto the front porch, and two prominent second-story shed-roof dormers on the front façade. The house's first floor is brick, and the second floor is currently covered in white vinyl siding, including the front-facing dormers (the vinyl siding was recently installed without historic district commission approval). Some rear additions have been added to the house and they, too, are covered in recent white vinyl siding. A partially new concrete path leads to concrete steps to the front porch, which has a concrete floor. A newer (non-historic) Craftsman-inspired front door has been installed, an address plate has been hung on the brick column to the right of the front door, and a white rectangle has been painted onto the brick column just to the left of the front door.



Photo 1 from site visit 6/23/25, staff. To the right of the house, the driveway is visible and at the end of the drive, the end of a one-story addition is visible. On that addition, an entry door, a storm door, a six-over-one window, and vinyl siding are visible.

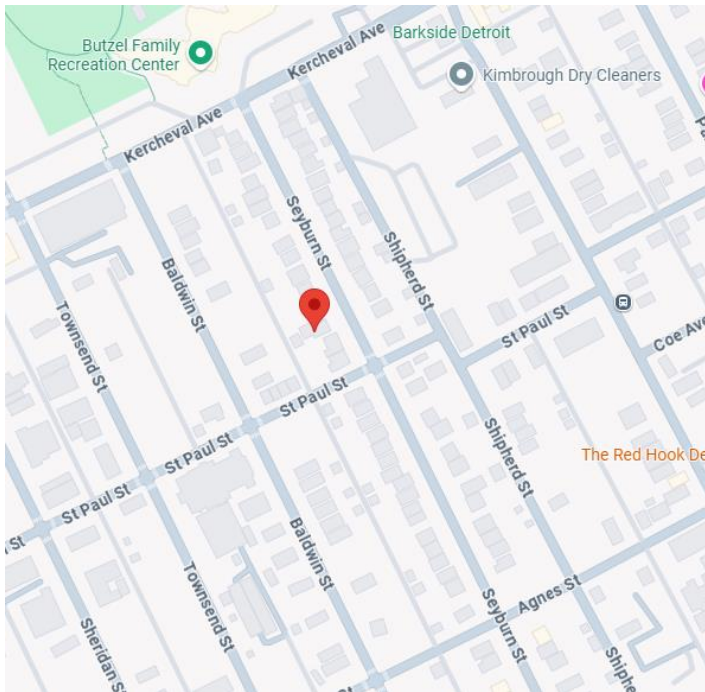


Figure 1. Pin showing location of 1725 Seyburn, between Kercheval and St Paul, Google maps. E Lafayette is a block below Agnes on this map. Google, 2025.

The streets in this neighborhood are positioned on a grid, but the grid has been turned slightly from the north-south axis, so the streets don't run strictly north to south or east to west. The streets' grid runs on an angle, so this house's front elevation faces northeast and the rear elevation faces southwest. However, for the purposes of this report, staff will refer to the front elevation as the east, the rear as the west, and the two sides as north (toward Kercheval) and south (toward E Lafayette).

The house's north side has a variety of window types and configurations, another non-historic Craftsman-style door, and the second floor covered in white vinyl siding. Along the house's north side is a driveway, and at the end of this drive, near the northwest corner of the house, is the one-story addition previously mentioned. (See *Staff Photo 2* below.) The addition is currently covered in white vinyl lap siding and the windows on that addition have varying types, configurations, and sizes. A fence is also visible on this side of the house.



Photo 2 from site visit 6/23/25, staff. House's north side. Vinyl siding, a variety of windows, a non-historic door, an unpainted fence, and the one-story addition extending from the rear corner of the house are all visible.

On the historic house's south side, a variety of window types and configurations is visible, along with a two-story, vinyl-wrapped addition at the house's rear corner. White vinyl siding also covers the house's second floor, and the chimney and fireplace are also visible. See *Staff Photo 3* below.



Photo 3, site visit 6/23/25, staff. Side of the historic house opposite the driveway, or the house's south side for the purposes of this report.

1725 Seyburn has several additions that are not visible from the sidewalk.



Photo 4, provided by applicant. 1725 Seyburn, north side, original historic house volume and one-story addition toward the northwest corner of the house, currently sided with white vinyl siding and exhibiting a variety of window types, materials, and configurations. The siding and the window replacements are included in this application.



Photo 5, provided by applicant. 1725 Seyburn, rear (west) end, currently sided with white vinyl siding and exhibiting a variety of window types, materials, and configurations. The vinyl siding and the two replacement windows visible here on the one-story addition are included in this application.



Photo 6, provided by applicant. 1725 Seyburn, south side of the long, one-story addition attached to the house's northwest corner. The two new sliding windows shown are included in the application. The white vinyl siding and the porch shown are both included in the application, but a replacement exterior door visible here is not included in the application.

PROPOSAL

With this submission, the applicant is seeking the commission's "after-the-fact" approval of exterior work items which were completed without a certificate of appropriateness, to include the following items:

- 1. Replace historic wood windows and associated trim with new vinyl units
 - Original windows: Painted wood, single-pane, double-hung sash
 - New windows: Pella vinyl windows
 - * Front (Top Floor): 4 windows, 30"x55", double-hung
 - * Back Elevation: Multiple, 35"x60", double-hung
 - * Side Elevation: 2 windows, 28"x28", sliding
 - Installed in original openings with new trim as needed.
- 2. Porch and Concrete Work:
 - At front porch, new concrete steps poured and partial sidewalk restored
 - At front porch, install new address plate
 - Rear porch rebuilt with new wood railings and steps
- 3. Siding
 - Install vinyl siding at gable ends, dormers, rear two-story bay, and northwest and southwest additions

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The West Village Local Historic District was enacted in 1983.
- This Craftsman house is a historic, contributing house to the district and was built in 1912 according to the City's permit records.
- Additions: City permit records show that 1725 Seyburn was built in 1912, and over the years owners added: a dormer window "in 3rd floor" in 1916 (staff suspects this was on the rear of the house), a garage in 1926, a new addition to the dining room "to be used as sun parlor" in 1919, a bathroom on the second floor in 1938, and an addition in 1946 that included a "bedroom, dressing room, cold room, and bath." Also in 1946, a permit was issued to "convert open 2nd floor porch to closed-in sunroom." Staff was unable to locate file photos of the additions and the rear of the house, but applicant photos document the current conditions (see *photos 4, 5, and 6* above). Staff suspects that the 1946 multi-room addition is the one-story addition off the house's northwest corner.
- As of the latest Google streetviews from May 2019 (*photos 7 and 8* below), the house still had a high degree of integrity, with its original wood shake shingles covering the sides of the dormers and the entire second floor, and with its historic windows visible. A painted wood dog-ear picket fence was also visible in 2019. However, in May 2025, staff was made aware of a number of exterior alterations to the building which had been undertaken without historic district commission approval.



Photo 7, 1725 Seyburn, May 2019, Google streetview. Conditions prior to the recent unapproved work. Note wood windows and wood shake siding at gable ends and dormers.



Photo 8, 1725 Seyburn, May 2019, Google streetview, more detailed view. Conditions prior to the recent unapproved work. Note wood windows and wood shake siding at gable ends and dormers.

- Please note that the recently completed exterior work/violations are as follows:
 - The dormers on the **front of the house** (east elevation) originally had six-over-one wood windows; they now have vinyl one-over-ones in a reduced size for the original openings. The sides of the dormers were historically clad in shake siding that provided natural texture and dimension; they now have white vinyl siding.
 - The front door is not visible in the 2019 pictures, but a new Craftsman-style door was installed at some point.
 - Along the driveway side (**north side**) of the house, the side door and the door into the one-story addition are visible in the 2019 screenshots; they appear to staff to be from the mid-twentieth century. **The side door into the house was replaced at some point.** Two large basement windows are visible in both 2019 and 2025, and their appearance is the same in both photos. In both 2019 and 2025, on this side of the house, four smaller windows and three larger double-hungs are visible. The small window in the peak of the gable--a historic Craftsman-style window for attic ventilation--remains in place. The small window on the second floor and the small window just below it (just below the shake siding in 2019) are difficult to see in both 2019 and 2025, but they appear to be similar if not the same in both images. (Staff notes that **a metal ventilation pipe** over the small second-story window appears in the 2025 picture but not in 2019.) The historic small first-floor window toward the front of the house remains in place. Turning to the larger double-hung windows, **the second-floor historic six-over-one window was replaced recently.** The six-over-one toward the rear of the house remains, and it appears to staff that the centered window

between the first and second floors also remains in place. **The character-defining second-story wood shingles have been covered with white vinyl lap siding, and staff observes that not only does the vinyl siding change the house's character, proportions, and texture, but it gives the centered window between both floors a very recessed appearance.**



Figure 2. To summarize the changes on the facades, staff marked up Staff Photo 2 to show elements on these two facades that have changed between 2019 and 2025.

- On the house's **south side**, two second-floor new replacement windows are identifiable by the visible new wood and manufacturer stickers, two historic windows flank the fireplace, and the ribbon of three windows set higher in the brick wall appears to have storm windows installed, making the sashes difficult to see clearly from the sidewalk. Similarly, the small window above the tripartite window also has a storm, making it difficult for staff to determine whether that small second-story window is historic. There are basement windows along the base of this wall, but they're difficult to see from the sidewalk. At the rear corner of this side of the house, a rear two-story addition is visible and at least some historic windows are visible in the addition. The house's second floor and the addition have both been covered in white vinyl lap siding. See *Photo 3* above and *Figure 3* below.



Photo 9, July 2009, Google streetview of house's south side. Many available Google streetviews from May 2019 back to July 2009 have a lot of shrubbery blocking this view. This is the only Google streetview staff could find that showed the historic windows and siding on this side of the house.



Figure 3. Staff marked up Photo 3 of the house's south side from June 2025 to show the new elements staff can see plainly from the sidewalk, marked with red triangles. Those recent changes include the two new windows where six-over-ones used to be, and the white vinyl siding installed over the historic gray wood siding on the house. It is currently unknown what material covered the rear addition before the white vinyl. The addition on the north side had gray siding, so it's possible that this part of the addition had gray siding also.

- The following outlines staff's assessment of the appropriateness of the recently completed unapproved exterior work which has been submitted to the commission for review:

Window Replacement

- Window replacement applications have two equal parts subject to the review by the Commission: First, as stated in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation Standard 6, the condition of the existing windows must be understood. Only after confirmation that the windows have deteriorated beyond repair should the Commission consider whether the selected replacement windows are appropriate for the structure and window locations.
- Historic windows are almost always character-defining features of a resource. The historic windows at 1725 Seyburn are no exception.
- In this case, windows were removed before the historic district commission could assess their conditions.
- Even if the windows could be assessed for their repairability, Standard 6 states, "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." The old windows were wood six-over-ones,

whereas the proposed replacement windows are vinyl one-over-ones. Because the proposed windows do not match the old windows' design or materials, they do not meet this Standard.

Front and Rear Porches

- The approach to the front porch and the front porch steps were covered with green indoor-outdoor carpet in 2019 in the Google streetview photos, so their condition cannot be ascertained.
- However, staff does not see that the completed concrete work at the front of the house negatively impacted the house's historic materials or character-defining features. It appears to staff that the front porch floor, steps, and approach were all concrete and that the concrete replacements for the partial approach and steps match the old, meeting Standard 6.
- The applicant noted in their revised description of work that they installed a new address plate on a brick column. Staff is not clear as to what material was used for the plaque, but if it's a painted wood plaque with metal letters that was installed in the mortar joints, staff believes that that specific work would meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation 9 and 10. Standard 9 states that exterior alterations will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property and that the new work will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment. Standard 10 states that new construction will be undertaken in a way that allows for the work to be removed without impairing the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment. As long as the conditions that staff mentioned above are met (wood plaque, installed in mortar joints), staff believes the new address plate on one of the house's front porch pillars meets the Standards for Rehabilitation.



Photo 10, provided by applicant. Photo appears to show lap siding installed on the ceiling of the front porch. Also pictured is the replacement front door and new address plate installed on the brick column.

- In their application, the applicant included a photo of the front entry (reproduced above, *Photo 10*) that shows lap siding on the ceiling of the front porch. Staff is unsure as to what the historic material was (or is) under that installed modern siding, but historic porches would typically have wood porch ceilings—often beadboard. Staff does not believe that this application of lap siding is appropriate for the historic resource, but more information is needed regarding what the historic material is (underneath) or was (if it was removed) on the front porch’s ceiling in order to apply the Standards.
- The applicant refers to rebuilding the side porch. It appears to staff that the applicant is referring to the porch on the rear of the house, as shown in *Photo 11* below. The rear porch, as completed without historic district commission approval, appears to have been built of pressure-treated wood decking, post, and steps, with pressure-treated wood fencing serving as the guardrail. Staff does not believe that this work meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standard 9. Standard 9 states that new work “will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.” It is staff’s opinion that the completed rear porch work is not compatible with the house’s historic materials or features. Typically, even simple, rear porches in the district would have painted wood surfaces, some simple trim detailing where the post meets the porch surface and porch ceiling, stairs with closed risers, porch skirting, and a simple coordinating guardrail and handrail that is sympathetic to the house’s historic materials and features.



Photo 11. Applicant’s photo (cropped) from the Cycle 1 application.

Installation of Vinyl Siding

- This house’s wood shingles on the second story and on the sides of the dormers are historic, character-defining features of this bungalow. They are so character defining that West Village’s

Elements of Design mention the arrangement of a masonry first floor and a wood shingled second story, and they state that replacement siding diminishes historic character: "...some later replacement siding exists in the district, but much of such siding changes the visual relationship of the siding to the building. Masonry is used on the first story only on some houses, and wood shingles exist on some second stories." (Detroit City Code, Sec. 21-2-132)

- The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation Standard 6 requires that, "Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. 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."
 - The distinctive wood shingles were covered with white vinyl lap siding without historic district commission approval. The condition of the shingles was not assessed, so it is not known if the material was deteriorated beyond repair. Regardless, the material currently covering the shingles does not match the old in design, color, texture, or materials. Staff believes that the vinyl lap siding over the historic wood shingles fails to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. It is not known whether historic material is under the vinyl siding. If it is, the inappropriate vinyl siding should be removed and the remaining historic siding should be assessed for repairability. If it remains but cannot be repaired, it should be replaced in kind so that the replacement matches the old. If there is no historic cladding remaining beneath, then the historic siding which was present until recently should be replicated.
- Finally, there is some additional completed work that staff had noticed from applicant-provided pictures that has not been included on this application. One of these issues is the newer Craftsman-style front and side doors; staff noticed these and invited the applicant to revise their scope of work to include these. The applicant included a photo of these newer doors with their revised application (the front door shown in this report as *Photo 10* here), but did not explicitly include them in their scope of work. While compiling this staff report, staff also noticed that the fence just north of the house was a painted gray, wood, dog-ear picket fence in 2019, and is now a modern horizontal unpainted fence. The existing fence does not appear to staff to be compatible with the house's architectural style, but it is not included in this application.

ISSUES

- WINDOWS – The vinyl windows proposed to replace some of the historic, character-defining wood windows on this home, including the home's prominent dormer windows, do not meet the Standards. They do not match the old in design, texture, or materials.
- REAR PORCH – Because of its materials and design, it is staff's opinion that the completed rear porch work is not compatible with the house's historic materials or features.
- VINYL SIDING – The house historically had wood shake shingles on its entire second floor, including on the dormers. Wood shingles may have been on the additions as well. That siding with its texture and dimension was a character-defining feature of the house. The new, much flatter and more uniform vinyl, covers up and destroys that character.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation # 1 OF 2 – Denial – Replace wood windows with vinyl units, Install vinyl siding, build rear porch

Staff recommends that the replacement of wood windows with vinyl units, the installation of vinyl siding, and the erection of a new rear porch as proposed will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the West Village Historic District's Elements of Design, specifically, Standards #:

2: The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

6: Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. 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. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

WINDOWS

- The historic windows on the dwelling are distinctive character-defining features; the house is not highly decorated and the evenly spaced, consistently proportioned six-over-ones with divided lights on the front and sides of the house provide rhythm and interest. The historic windows are an important architectural component of the structure.
- The conditions of the historic windows have not been assessed for repairability.
- The proposed/installed replacement windows are not adequate matches to the historic windows. They do not match the design of the original—for example, six-over-ones became one-over-ones, and six-over-sixes and sliders were also introduced to the mix. Historic window openings have been reduced in many cases, changing proportions of the historic house. In addition, vinyl is not an adequate substitute material for historic wood. Because vinyl is not as strong as wood, its structural members have to be much thicker than wood structural members in the same size window, changing the house's proportions, and its texture is different as well.
- The documentation provided does not make it entirely clear which windows were replaced recently, which (if any) had been replaced over time and were no longer original, and which historic windows will remain in place.

SIDING

- The historic wood shingle siding on the dwelling is a distinctive character-defining feature; the house is not highly decorated and the shingle siding on the historic house's second floor, as well as on the dormers, provides texture, dimension, and interest. The historic siding is an important architectural component of the structure. It should have therefore been retained and repaired. If the siding was deteriorated beyond repair, it should have been replaced in kind.
- The conditions of the historic siding have not been assessed for repairability prior to its removal or covering with the current vinyl siding
- The proposed/installed replacement vinyl siding is not an adequate match to the historic shingle cladding. The vinyl does not match the design of the original wood siding—for example, the shingles have a surface texture and the bottom of each row is varied and not straight across in neat, straight rows, lending an irregular, varied texture to the upper story and dormer sides, whereas the installed vinyl siding appears uniform and monolithic, especially on the sides of the house. The wood shingle cladding provides texture, whereas the vinyl siding has a flat appearance. Additionally, the bright white color of the vinyl is different from the quiet earth tones the historic shingle siding would have been.

REAR PORCH

- The proposed/installed porch is not compatible with the house's historic materials or features. Specifically, the use of the fencing as porch guardrail and the pressure-treated post extending to the ground instead of to

a porch deck surface are not appropriate the house's Craftsman character, both in terms of materials and design.

Recommendation # 2 OF 2 – Certificate of Appropriateness – concrete work and address plaque

Staff recommends that the remaining work items will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the West Village Historic District's Elements of Design