

STAFF REPORT: JULY 9, 2025 MEETING

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-0311

ADDRESS: 305 ELIOT

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BRUSH PARK

APPLICANT: KIEL BLASEN, SMOLYANOV HOME IMPROVEMENT

PROPERTY OWNER: CHARLES & MARGARET SQUIRES

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JUNE 16, 2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JUNE 25, 2025

PREPARED BY: A. DYE

SCOPE: REPLACE SLATE DORMER SIDING (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The house at 305 Eliot, erected in 1899, was built for Clifford Elliot, a wholesale grocery executive. The façade and front third of the east and west side walls are clad with a hard-baked glazed golden brick. The rear section of the side walls are recessed slightly and are clad, along with the rear wall, in dark red brick. The 2-1/2 story house sits on a tall, raised foundation that is comprised of rusticated stone blocks that are wider than tall. The base has a horizontal pattern which is echoed in the alternating stone and brick coursing at the first and second floors.

The asymmetrical massing of the façade includes a centrally placed front door, rounded two-story bay and 2-1/2 story box bay. The box bay is topped with a Flemish gable – a parapet wall that covers the extended dormer's gable roof. The parapet's half-round window opening matches the shape of the recessed front entry and the decorative stone and brickwork is echoed in the detailed wood above the single dormer, creating an inverted triangle pattern/placement of distinctive character-defining features.



View, looking northeast from Eliot, of the façade and west side wall. HDC staff photo, June 25, 2025.



East side wall. Staff photo, June 25, 2025.

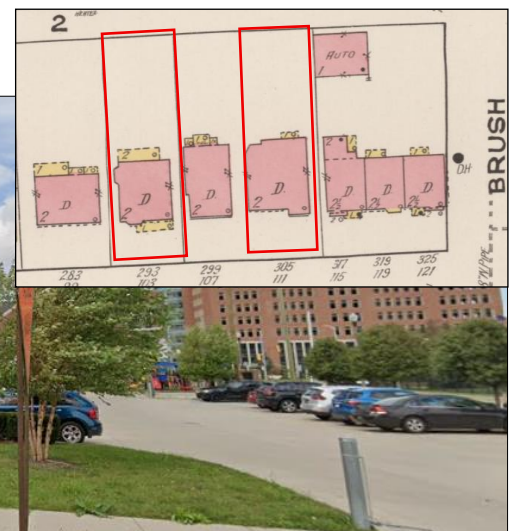
The dwelling's three chimneys (two at the east wall, one at the west wall) have multiple corbels, and the east-facing dormers have flared hip roofs. The rear addition was erected circa 1994 (HDC94-094).

PROPOSAL

- The applicant's scope of work states: "remove existing asphalt shingles from all sides of all four dormers and replace with new underlayment and new composite slate tiles".

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Brush Park Historic District was enacted on February 8, 1980.
- Only two of the dwellings shown on the excerpt of the 1921 Sanborn remain.



Above: Google street view, looking north, 293 (l) and 305 (r) Eliot are visible. Above right: Sanborn map - Vol. 3, 1921, image 35. 293 and 305 Eliot, outlined in red, are the remaining historic structures on the north side of Eliot between John R and Brush.

- In 2002 HDC staff issued a COA (HDC#02-140) for the repair of the dormers (slate removed, wood replaced, flashing installed, slate shingles reinstalled).
 - The photos below were submitted as part of a 2025 application for the installation of a new asphalt shingle roof (HDC2025-00701). The applicant confirmed at that time that no work was to occur at the dormers, i.e., that the existing historic slate shingles at the dormer sidewalls would not be removed. HDC staff issued a COA for the installation of asphalt shingles at the main roof surface on December 16, 2024.



Photos of slate on façade dormer walls from application HDC2025-00701.



Staff photo of existing condition at façade dormer walls. June 25, 2025.



Photo of slate tiles on east dormer walls, prior to removal, from application HDC2025-00701.



Staff photo of existing conditions at east dormer walls. June 25, 2025.

- On December 19, 2024, HDC staff received the permit application for the project from the Detroit Building Safety, Engineering, and Environmental Department (BSEED) and, upon their review of the included documents, noted that a detailed scope had been included which specifically stated that the slate would be removed from the dormers. Staff flagged the work item and noted that it could not be administratively approved. The applicant subsequently revealed that the work had already been completed/that the slate had been removed from the dormers and replaced with asphalt shingles, despite the fact that their staff-issued COA only allowed for the replacement of the asphalt shingles at the main roof. Staff therefore docketed the project on the Commission's May 14, 2025 regular meeting agenda for review.
- The Commission reviewed the application for the unapproved work, which included the replacement of the historic slate shingles at the dormer sidewalls with asphalt shingles at the May 2025 regular meeting (HDC2025-00126). The Commission issued a Notice of Denial for the proposal.
- It is staff's opinion that the dormers and its slate tile wall cladding are distinctive character-defining features of the dwelling. As stated in the May 2025 staff report, "The dormer sidewalls are highly visible as they crown the

building and project vertically from the roof surface.”

- Staff would like to remind the Commission that, as the historic slate tiles were removed without approval, the current Commission review is to determine if the removal of the historic slate tiles and installation of composite slate tiles meets the Standards; this application is not for the comparison of composite slate tiles with the asphalt shingle roofing applied to dormer walls.
- The slate tiles were removed without HDC approval; the scope of work that would meet the requirements of the historic ordinance (Section 21-2-59(e)) is the installation of new slate tiles with a matching dimension, pattern and surface color/finish as the historic slate tiles.
- Additionally, the removal of the slate tiles without an assessment of their repairability and installation of a different product (in this case asphalt shingles) does not meet the following Secretary of the Interior 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 property shall be preserved.*
 - 6) *Deteriorated 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.”*
 - 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.*

as well as the following Elements of Design:

- 8) Relationship of textures. *The most common relationship of textures in the district is the low-relief pattern of mortar joints in brick contrasted to the smoother or rougher surfaces of stone or wood trim. Slate, wood, or tile roofs contribute particular textural values where they exist, especially in the case of slates or shingles of other than rectangular shape.*
- 10) Relationship of architectural detail. *On the buildings of the Victorian period, elaborate detail in wood, stone, or sheet metal was common; areas treated include porches, window and door surrounds, cornices, dormers, and other areas. Later buildings are generally simpler but include less elaborate detail in similar areas.*
- 19) Degree of complexity with the façades. *The older houses in the district are generally characterized by a high degree of complexity within the façades, with bay windows, towers, porches, window and door hoods, elaborate cornices, and other devices used to decorate the buildings. Newer houses in the northern end of the district and older houses in the southern end tend to be somewhat simpler than the high Victorian structures between them; later apartments and commercial buildings tend to have more classical decorative elements of a simpler kind.*

- The proposed product, DaVinci composite slate tiles, is fabricated from virgin resin. According to DaVinci’s website, “DaVinci Single-Width Slate roofing tiles are constructed of a composite material made of pure virgin resins, UV and thermal stabilizers as well as a highly-specialized fire retardant.”
- Manufactured products have a limited range of profiled edges and surfaces, so it is possible a repeating pattern will be noticeable. Comparing a plastic product with natural slate offers concern over the surface sheen of the composite material, as well as not knowing how the composite product will age, which can further affect its surface finish; or not affect it, making the material always look “new” and a natural patina not being established.
- New slate, as well as salvaged slate, is readily available. The installation of natural slate matching the overall design, dimension and qualities of the historic slate can be approved at a staff level.
- A plasticized product is not consistent with the general characteristics of a late 19th century masonry-clad house and is not an adequate replacement material for the historic character-defining slate tiles and their prominent placement on the façade and east side wall of the house.

ISSUES

- A plasticized tile product is not consistent with the general characteristics of a wall cladding material for a late 19th century house.
 - Manufactured products have a limited range of profiled edges, so it is possible a repeating pattern will be noticeable.
 - It is not known how the composite material will react long term to the elements, unlike natural slate, affecting, or not affecting its surface finish. The resin material will always look “new”, and a natural patina will not be developed.
- As the slate tiles were distinctive character-defining features of the historic dormers and were removed without HDC approval, the installation of new or reclaimed historic slate tiles with an identical dimension, pattern, color and surface finish as the historic slate tiles is reasonably available and technically feasible.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the Brush Park Historic District’s Elements of Design, specifically:

- 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 property shall be preserved.*
- 6) *Deteriorated 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.”*
- 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.*

as well as the Elements of Design, 8, 10 and 19

For the following reasons;

- A plasticized tile product is not consistent with the general characteristics of a wall cladding material for a late 19th century house.
 - Manufactured products have a limited range of profiled edges, so it is possible a repeating pattern will be noticeable.
 - It is not known how the composite material will react long term to the elements, unlike natural slate, affecting, or not affecting its surface finish. The resin material will always look “new”, and a natural patina will not be developed.
- As the slate tiles were distinctive character-defining features of the historic dormers and were removed without HDC approval, the installation of new or salvaged natural slate tiles with an identical dimension, pattern, color and surface finish as the historic slate tiles is reasonably available and technically feasible.