

STAFF REPORT: 8/13/2025 MEETING

PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

ADDRESS: 4291 CORTLAND & 4510 CORTLAND

APPLICATION NO: HDC2025-00486 (4291 CORTLAND) & HDC2025-00485 (4510 CORTLAND)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: RUSSELL WOODS-SULLIVAN

APPLICANT/OWNER: TAMMY DANIELS/ DETROIT LAND BANK AUTHORITY (DLBA)

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 7/24/3035

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATIONS: 7/21/2025

SCOPE: REPLACE HANDRAILS/GUARDRAILS, ALTER PORCH STEPS/WINGWALLS, REPLACE WINDOW

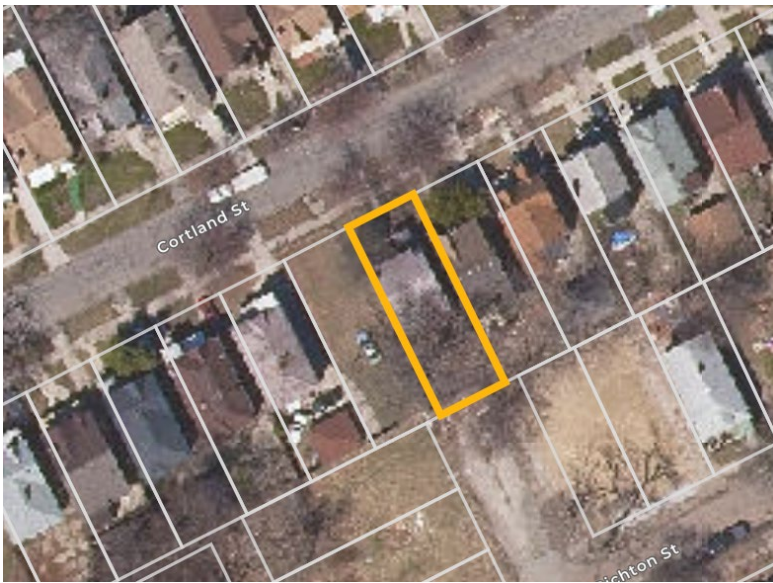
EXISTING CONDITIONS

4291 Cortland

The building located at 4291 Cortland is a Dutch Colonial Revival-style, single-family dwelling that was erected ca. 1920. The building's side-gabled gambrel roof features a large, shed-roof dormer at the front facade, attic story. Exterior walls are primarily clad with brick while wood shake is located at the front dormer and the side wall gable ends. Windows are double-hung and casement, leaded glass units. A full-width porch is located at the building's front façade. Metal railings which measure 36" in height were recently installed at the front porch and dormer by contractors of the Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) without HDC approval. This railing replaced a historic-age metal railing of a lower, approximately 24", height.



Staff photo of 4291 Cortland, taken by HDC staff on 7/25/2025



4291 Cortland, outlined in yellow, Detroit Parcel Viewer

4510 Cortland

Erected ca. 1920; the building located at 4510 Cortland is a two-story, single-family dwelling that is located in the Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District. The building features a side-gabled roof with a front-gabled dormer at the façade. A full-width, brick and concrete porch which extends the length of the building's façade includes 36"-high aluminum guardrails/handrails at the first and second stories; these were railings recently installed by contractors of the DLBA without HDC approval. Windows are wood, double-hung and casement units. The building's exterior walls are primarily clad with brick, while wood shake is present in the gable ends at the side walls.





4510 Cortland, outlined in yellow, Detroit Parcel Viewer

PROPOSAL

The DLBA recently undertook a rehabilitation of the two subject properties which included work items that were completed without HDC approval. The applicant is therefore seeking the Commission's "after-the-fact" approval of work completed outside of the staff-issued COAs for the projects. Specifically, the current applications include the following items which have been completed without HDC approval:

4291 Cortland

- Remove historic-age, decorative iron railing at front porch and dormer
- Install 36"-high decorative metal railing at front dormer and porch

4510 Cortland

- Install 36"-high metal railing at front porch, first and second stories
- Replace the original brick front porch steps and wingwalls with a new concrete steps and brick wingwalls
- Replace an historic wood casement window, wood brickmould, and mullion at the front façade's attic story gable end with a new aluminum clad wood casement window, trim, and mullion

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District was designated in 1999. See the below designation photos of the subject properties, taken in 1999:





4510 Cortland, designation photo taken in 1999 by HDAB. Yellow arrows indicate historic iron railing, green arrow indicates historic window in gable end, and red arrow indicates historic brick front porch steps and wingwalls

- Note that at the time of designation, both houses had distinctive, character-defining iron railings at the front porches which measured approximately 24” in height (see above photos). 4510 Cortland also retained its historic-age brick front porch steps and the gable end window at the front façade’s attic story
- The photos below indicate the condition of the properties prior to the recent DLBA initiated rehabilitation





4291 Cortland, photo by staff in 2019 showing remaining iron railing at front porch, first story



4291 Cortland, photo by staff in 2019 showing remaining iron railing at front façade, second story dormer



4510 Cortland, photo taken in 2019 by staff. Note that porch railing is no longer extant at either first or second story. Also, the front porch brick steps and wingwalls remain and the casement windows and trim in the attic story/gable end at the façade are extant (yellow arrow)



4510 Cortland, Google Streetview image dating from 2013. Note that the historic railing is not extant and the house appears to be vacant



4510 Cortland, Google Streetview image dating from 2011. Note that the historic railing is extant at the time (yellow arrows)

- Per the above photos:
 - The distinctive character-defining historic iron railings at **4291 Cortland** were extant at the time of the recent DLBA initiated rehabilitation
 - The distinctive character-defining historic iron railings at **4510 Cortland** *were not* extant at the time of the recent DLBA initiated rehabilitation. A review of Google Streetview images indicated that the railings were removed between 2011 and 2013.
 - The distinctive character-defining brick front porch steps and the front façade’s attic story, gable end historic casement windows, mullion, and brickmould were present in 2019.

4291 Cortland

- In 2021, HDC staff issued a COA (HDC#2020-7132) for the rehabilitation of **4291 Cortland** to the DLBA, which approved the following with respect to the railing at the front porch and dormer:
 - The extant portion of the porch’s historic metal railing at the first story was to be retained, repaired, and painted black. New railing which replicated the original would be installed where railing was missing.
 - The historic railing at the roof dormer was proposed to be retained and “...elevated to a height appropriate to BSEED code.”

Staff notes that the railing scope *was not* completed according to the above-referenced staff issued COA. Rather, the original 24”-high railings were removed at both the first and attic stories and replaced with the current 36”-high metal railings. The new railing generally presents a style that is similar to the historic railing. However, the historic railing that was

deconstructed and reconstructed with the original brick to the original dimensions. Matching brick would be used if new brick was necessary. This approach was in keeping with the

Standards. Staff notes that the porch scope *was not* completed according to the 2019 COA. Rather, the DLBA rehabilitation resulted in the replacement of the historic brick steps with concrete steps. Also, the wingwalls were constructed of new brick which is uniform in color. The new wingwalls also appear to be wider than the original elements. It is staff's opinion that the brick front porch steps and wingwalls were a distinctive, character-defining feature of the property. While conducting her field study for this report, staff did note that full brick front porch steps and wingwalls were rare within the property's near vicinity. As the steps and wingwalls were distinctive, character-defining feature of the property, per the Standards, they should have been retained and repaired. If repair was not achievable, ie, the existing brick could not be salvaged, then a new porch should have been built to match the historic in dimension, using brick that matched the existing in color, dimension, and texture. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission deny this work item because the current steps do not conform to the Standards.



4510 Cortland, appearance in 2020. Photo by applicant. Note the distinctive brickwork at the porch steps and wingwalls



4510 Cortland, photo by staff on 7/25/2025. Note that the wingwalls appear to be wider than the original and the brick does not display the same variation in size, texture, and color as the original. Also, the steps are now concrete.

- In 2022, the DLBA noted that the west side casement window at **4510 Cortland's** attic story, gable end at the front façade was no longer extant. HDC staff therefore issued a COA (HDC#2022-7743) to install a new aluminum-clad, wood casement sash within the west side window opening at the attic story, gable end while retaining the existing historic wood brickmould and mullion. Also, the remaining historic casement in the east opening was to be retained and repaired. However, the recent DLBA rehabilitation replaced the remaining historic wood casement window, brickmould and mullion without HDC approval. It is staff's opinion that the work does not meet the Standards because the historic, character-defining wood brickmould, mullion and remaining window appeared to be in good condition prior to their removal. Also, while the new windows are made of wood and match the original in operation and light configuration, the brickmould and mullion are thinner and narrower than the original. As a result, the new window unit appears inappropriately flatter than the original and, as the current brickmould is thinner and narrower, the unit appears to be set more deeply into the opening versus the original (see the below photos)



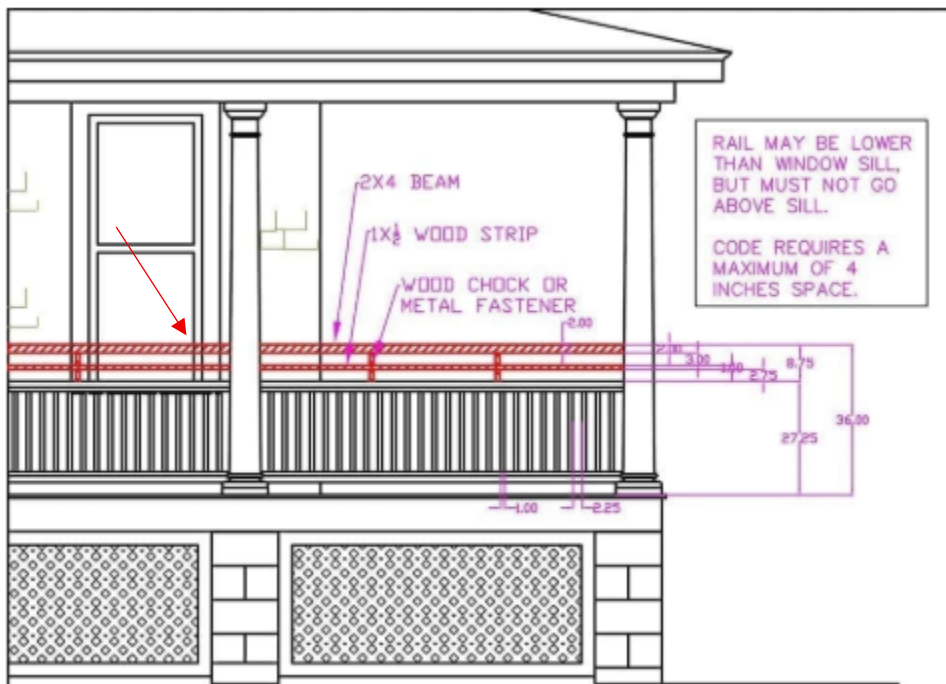
Current aluminum-clad wood replacement windows, brickmould, and mullion.



Window, brickmould, and mullion as they appeared in 2020 (yellow arrow). Note that the casement on the left (west) was missing at the time, while the casement window at the right (east) was still extant. Staff approved the installation of a new casement window in the opening to the left to replace the missing casement window, while maintaining the existing historic casement window to the right, the brickmould and the mullion. The recent DLBA rehabilitation did not conform to the staff issued COA as it resulted in the unapproved removal of the remaining historic window to the right.

4291 Cortland & 4510 Cortland

- The applicant noted that the new porch railing at both properties was installed at the current height in order to meet the building code. However, staff does note that the Michigan rehabilitation code establishes that extant railing at historic structures can remain in the configuration in which they were originally installed. Also, the historic railing could have been maintained or replicated at its original height and booster rails installed above (per the below drawing) to achieve the desired 36" height.



Drawing depicts a 24"-high porch railing with booster rail (red arrow) installed above [Porch Railing Height, Building code vs curb appeal](#)

ISSUES

- The historic, character-defining railing that was removed without HDC approval at **4291 Cortland** could have been repaired. If the railing needed to be replaced, it should have been

matched as required by the Standards. The current railing is not an adequate match to the original due to its height

- The historic character-defining railing that was removed from **4510 Cortland**'s porch without HDC approval ca. 2013 should have been matched as required by the Standards. The current railing is not an adequate match to the original due to its height and style.
- The new railing which was installed at both **4921 Cortland and 4510 Cortland** is inappropriately high as historic porch railing is typically lower than the sill of the window beyond. The existing railing therefore presents an appearance that is incongruous with the buildings' historic character.
- The historic brick front porch steps at **4510 Cortland** were a distinctive character-defining feature of the property. As they were highly deteriorated, they should have been rebuilt to match the original in dimension, material, design, and texture. The new porch and wingwalls are not an adequate match to the historic as the steps are concrete, the wingwalls appear wider than the original, and the color, texture, dimension, and design of the original brickwork has not been replicated.
- The historic, character-defining wood brickmould, mullion and remaining window at **4510 Cortland** front façade, attic story gable end which were removed and replaced without HDC

approval appeared to be in good condition prior to their removal. As such, the elements should have been retained and repaired in kind as required by the Standards. Also, new the brickmould and mullion are thinner and narrower than the original. As a result, the new window unit appears inappropriately flatter than the original narrower and appears to be set more deeply into the opening versus the original

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial – Replace historic front porch railings with 36”- high metal railing at 4291 Cortland and 4510 Cortland; replace brick steps and wings at front porch of 4510 Cortland; and replace historic wood casement window, brickmould, and mullion at front façade attic story gable end at 4510 Cortland

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

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

For the following reasons:

- The historic, character-defining railing that was removed without HDC approval from **4291 Cortland**'s front porch and dormer could have been repaired. If the railing needed to be replaced, it should have been matched. The current railing is not an adequate match to the original due to its height
 - The historic character-defining railing that was removed from **4510 Cortland**'s front porch without HDC approval ca. 2013 should have been matched. The current railing is not an adequate match to the original due to its height and style.
 - The new railing which was installed at both **4921 Cortland and 4510 Cortland** is inappropriately high as historic porch railing is typically lower than the sill of the window beyond. The existing railing therefore presents an appearance that is incongruous with the buildings' historic character.
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- The historic brick front porch steps at **4510 Cortland** were a distinctive character-defining feature of the property. As they were highly deteriorated, they should have been rebuilt to match the original in dimension, material, design, and texture. The new porch and wingwalls are not an adequate match to the historic as the steps are concrete, the wingwalls appear wider than the original, and the color, texture, dimension, and design of the original brickwork has not been replicated.
 - The historic, character-defining wood brickmould, mullion and remaining window at **4510 Cortland** front façade, attic story gable end which were removed and replaced without HDC approval appeared to be in good condition prior to their removal. As such, the elements should have been retained and repaired in kind. Also, the new brickmould and mullion are thinner and narrower than the original. As a result, the new window unit appears inappropriately flatter than the original narrower and appears to be set more deeply into the opening versus the original.