

STAFF REPORT: 9/10/25 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: E. THACKERY

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00463

ADDRESS: 4011 TYLER

HISTORIC DISTRICT: RUSSELL WOODS-SULLIVAN

APPLICANT/CONTRACTOR: WEATHERGARD WINDOWS

PROPERTY OWNER: CHARLES AND BEVERLY SMITH

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 8/12/25

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 8/26/25

SCOPE: REPLACE WOOD WINDOWS AND STEEL WINDOWS WITH NEW VINYL WINDOWS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The house at 4011 Tyler is located between Petoskey and Holmur and is a two-story Tudor-style house that retains much of its historic integrity. It was built in 1939, along with its garage. The brick house features cut stone accents, cross gables, and two prominent bays—one featuring a window with leaded glass in a diamond lattice pattern and metal roof, and the other with leaded windows, a centered front door, two leaded glass windows, and a conical roof. The house also has at least two of its original steel windows.



Site visit Photo 1, staff, August 2025. Front of house (north end). The house's prominent chimney is visible on east side.



4011 Tyler, designation photo, 1999.



Site visit, Photo 2, staff, August 2025, west side of house along driveway. Steel windows 1 and 2 and wood double-hung window 3 are visible and proposed for replacement. The historic garage is visible at the rear, and near the entry at the front of the house, a leaded glass window with a crest design is visible.



Site visit, Photo 3, staff, August 2025, east side of house. Wood double-hung window 4 is proposed for window replacement.

PROPOSAL

- Replace two (2) wood windows and two (2) steel windows with four (4) new vinyl double-hung windows.
- Of the four windows proposed for replacement, three (Windows 1, 2, 3) are on the west side of the house (see *Site visit Photo 2*) and one (Window 4) is on the east side (*Site visit Photo 3*).



Window 1 interior, from application.



Window 1 interior detail, from application.



Window 1, exterior, from application.



Window 2, interior, from application.



Window 2, exterior, from application.



Window 3, interior, from application.



Window 3, exterior, from application.



Window 4, interior, from application.



Window 4, exterior, from application.

Proposed Replacement Product: 4 double-hung vinyl windows from WeatherGard.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Russell Woods-Sullivan Local Historic District was established in 1999.
- Staff found no past violations for this house, and the only other past activity staff found was an application for Wallside windows in 2008. That application was denied.



4011 Tyler, Detroit Parcel Viewer.

- This house has at least three different types of character-defining historic windows.
 - The front main window and two windows on the east side have leaded glass in a diamond lattice pattern to help give the house an English appearance.
 - The small leaded windows flanking the front door and featuring a crest in their design (one is seen in *Site visit Photo 2*) also lend English character.
 - The house has at least two steel casement windows with fine muntins that also give it an old English appearance.
- In addition to these window types, the house also has wood double-hung windows. These are of historic age, and one double-hung window was likely on the house's primary façade. The majority of the double-hungs, however, are on the sides and likely on the rear. Wood double-hung windows can certainly be historic, character-defining features on a building, but, in this case, because this house has two different types of leaded windows *and* steel windows all lending English character, the double-hung windows are a less important feature than the other above-mentioned windows.

The wood double-hungs are simple, but they have dimensionality in the way the sashes are progressively contoured toward the glass like a picture frame and in the way the brickmold trim is shaped.

- The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation Standard 6 requires a two-part review for historic window replacement applications subject to review by the Commission. First, 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.
 - Regarding condition, the applicant has provided photos of every window proposed for replacement, but staff could not thoroughly evaluate condition from these photos.
 - Staff can see some paint failure on the exteriors of the wood sashes, despite the aluminum storms, and some paint failure near the bottom center of both wood windows from the interior. Staff can't evaluate wood conditions from these photos, however.
 - Regarding the steel windows, staff sees the uneven surface under the paint on Window 1 in the detailed photo, but staff doesn't see that elsewhere.
 - While more detailed photographs of each window's condition and/or an assessment from a window restoration professional might help provide more complete information for the commission to make their assessment about repairability, staff's current assessment based on available documentation is that these four windows are not beyond feasible repair.
 - If Standard 6's first condition about repair infeasibility could be met, staff identified some concerns regarding appropriateness of the proposed replacements. Specifically, **staff is concerned about the proposed vinyl windows' ability to match the historic windows in design, color, and texture**, as Standard 6 requires.
 - The proposed new windows will likely not be able to match the dimensions of the **wood** sashes' components like rails and stiles because vinyl is not as strong as older wood and as a result, the vinyl windows' structural members would likely be thicker. The existing wood windows are dimensional in the way the wood progressively steps down to meet the glass, both on the interior and the exterior, and in the dimensionality of the brickmold. Both of these elements on vinyl windows are typically flat. Another difference between the existing and the proposed is texture. The texture of the vinyl will cause it to have a plastic finish and sheen. The proposed vinyl color is unknown, but all of the existing windows are painted to blend in with the brick; a light-colored window would detract from the house's character.
 - Vinyl windows will typically look very different from the character-defining **steel** windows now in place. Because steel is so much stronger than vinyl, the whole metal window is comprised of thin muntins, but staff is doubtful that vinyl could match that appearance. Too, there are the issues of window shape and proportionality. These openings are large and square and the steel window with fixed elements and central casement fills the opening elegantly. A double-hung window or two in each square opening will operate very differently and have a very different appearance than the existing steel in the square openings.
- The National Park Service's publication "Replacement Windows that Meet the Standards" describes that in some instances, it is possible to consider a window's placement on a building (and its correspondingly less important role in contributing distinctive historic character to the resource) to help determine whether a proposed replacement is appropriate. Because the existing wood Window

3 is almost at the rear of the house and not very visible from the front and wood Window 4 is toward the rear of the house, right next to another house, and behind a fence/barrier from the sidewalk, it may be possible to argue that considering dimensions, profiles, finish, and placement, a substitute-material, double-hung window for a wood double-hung window specifically for Windows 3 and 4 might be appropriate if the existing windows are truly beyond repair. Vinyl, however, can't be that substitute material, in staff's opinion, even in these specific instances, since vinyl windows lack dimensionality, have a thick and flat appearance, and have a plastic-like sheen. Additionally, the sash color is an important consideration. The vinyl color proposed is unknown, but vinyl windows are typically white. As mentioned, this house's windows have dark sashes, so a light sash color like beige or white would be inappropriate. **It is staff's opinion that if Windows 3 and 4 are beyond repair, because of their location and secondary importance, a non-vinyl substitute material that closely matched wood in design, color, texture, dimensionality, proportions, sheen, and color could be considered by the Standards and Guidelines and the National Park Service guidance.**

- The Secretary of The Interior's Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings state that it is not recommended to remove repairable historic windows and replace them with new windows for perceived improvement in energy performance. They also state that it is not recommended to replace repairable historic windows with new insulated windows or to install incompatible or inefficient replacement window units that are not durable, recyclable, or repairable when existing windows are deteriorated beyond repair. The proposed vinyl windows cannot be repaired or recycled.

ISSUES

- The steel windows proposed for replacement are distinctive, character-defining features of the property.
- The current application does not provide documentation of each window proposed for replacement that demonstrates that they are deteriorated beyond repair.
- The existing historic windows proposed for replacement should therefore be retained and repaired in kind where necessary, as required by the Standards.
- The proposed vinyl replacement windows do not meet Standard 6 for the historic windows (the proposed vinyl does not match the historic windows in terms of design, color, texture, proportions, or operation).
- The proposed windows are vinyl-framed units with vinyl sashes. Because of limits of fabrication and material, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic districts.
 - Vinyl windows and poly-products offer a plasticity and flat/thick appearance that does not adequately match the profile/dimensionality and appearance of historic windows, such as wood and steel.
 - Consumer-grade vinyl windows weather poorly, deteriorate rapidly, and exhibit poor detailing and detracting color/sheen.
 - The framing material, glazing, and seals of vinyl windows break down more quickly in ultraviolet light than higher quality materials, introducing condensation and other degradation to the insulated glass unit in a few years' time.

- Vinyl also lacks rigidity and can expand and contract more than wood and steel during exposure to weather. This can result in discoloration and warping of the frames and failure of window elements.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial – Replacement of windows

Staff recommends that the proposed work would 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 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.*
- 5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.*
- 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.*

and Elements of Design #7

For the following reasons:

- The windows proposed for replacement are distinctive, character-defining features of the property.
- The current application does not provide documentation of each window proposed for replacement that demonstrates that they are deteriorated beyond repair.
- The existing historic windows proposed for replacement should therefore be retained and repaired in kind, where necessary.
- The proposed vinyl windows are not compatible with the building's historic materials, features, and proportions, and, in the case of the proposed vinyl for steel, configuration and operation. Because of limits of fabrication and material, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic districts.
 - Vinyl windows and poly-products offer a plasticity and flat/thick appearance that does not adequately match the profile/dimensionality and appearance of historic windows, such as wood and steel.
 - Consumer-grade vinyl windows weather poorly, deteriorate rapidly, and exhibit poor detailing and detracting color/sheen.
 - The framing material, glazing, and seals of vinyl windows break down more quickly in ultraviolet light than higher quality materials, introducing condensation and other degradation to the insulated glass unit in a few years' time.

- Vinyl also lacks rigidity and can expand and contract more than wood and steel during exposure to weather. This can result in discoloration and warping of the frames and failure of window elements.