

STAFF REPORT: OCTOBER 8, 2025 MEETING

PREPARED BY: E. THACKERY

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00129

ADDRESS: 863 IROQUOIS (A.K.A. MARTIN S. SMITH II HOUSE)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: INDIAN VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

VIOLATION NUMBER: 1051

APPLICANT: ALTON G SMITH

PROPERTY OWNER: SMITH & BALL, LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 9/03/2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 9/23/25

SCOPE: REPAIR/REPLACE LIMITED TRIM AND STUCCO, REPLACE FRONT PORCH COLUMN, REPLACE RIBBON DRIVE (WORK STARTED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

863 Iroquois is the Martin S. Smith II House and was built in 1895. It may be the oldest house standing in Indian Village. It was designed by the architecture firm Rogers and MacFarlane (principals James S. Rogers and Walter MacFarlane). The firm was founded in 1885 and designed many prominent Detroit buildings, including several other houses in Indian Village. 863 Iroquois is a side-gabled 2.5-story house with pedimented dormers, dentil soffit brackets, dentil crown molding above the prominent frieze board, and, on the primary façade, two second-story bay windows and a recessed porch featuring double arches and a central column. The house is clad in stucco and has many ornately detailed windows on its north and south sides. It features both Colonial Revival and Italian Renaissance elements.

The house was purchased in March 2025, and some exterior work began without permits. Reported work included window work, a porch column removal, and wood corner boards on the primary façade being replaced with vinyl. A Stop Work Order was requested in July 2025. Applicants applied for approval for a new roof, gutters, and downspouts and a Certificate of Appropriateness was issued for this limited work (specifically excepting work on eaves and dormers) in May 2025.

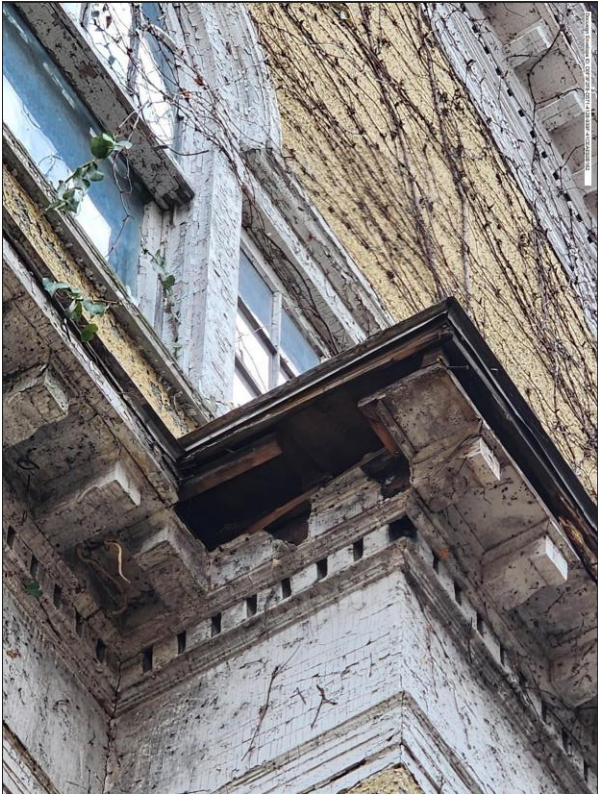


863 Iroquois, front (east) façade, September 2025, staff photo. Column is missing and vinyl corner boards have been installed.



863 Iroquois, Detroit Parcel Viewer. It appears that the dormers are roofed in copper. The roof work permitted in May specifically excluded work on the dormers.

The first application for work (HDC2025-00129_Property Owner, available on this property's webpage for the October meeting) was signed by the applicant April 27, 2025. It proposed a comprehensive scope for the entire exterior, but the scope of work changed over time as staff worked with the applicant to confirm details and means and methods. For example, on May 5, 2025, the applicant removed exterior doors, all windows, and back porches from the original scope. The pictures below are from the April application.



Applicant photos of wood trim conditions, April 2025. Ornate trim detailing is evident, along with missing and damaged pieces.



Sample stucco repair needed, applicant photo, April 2025.



Northeast corner of house, deteriorated corner board visible. Wood pilasters, column, and guardrail are all visible, April 2025, applicant's photo. In Applicant's Cycle 3 response on May 5, applicant described that the porch's column, corner boards, and trim would be replicated in wood exactly. Applicant clarified on September 3 (Cycle 4 application materials) that the porch's wood pilasters will be retained and preserved but the corner boards have been replaced.



Applicant's photo, April 2025. Porch column half removed, base is in poor condition. Newel post visible to support the handrail for the steps.



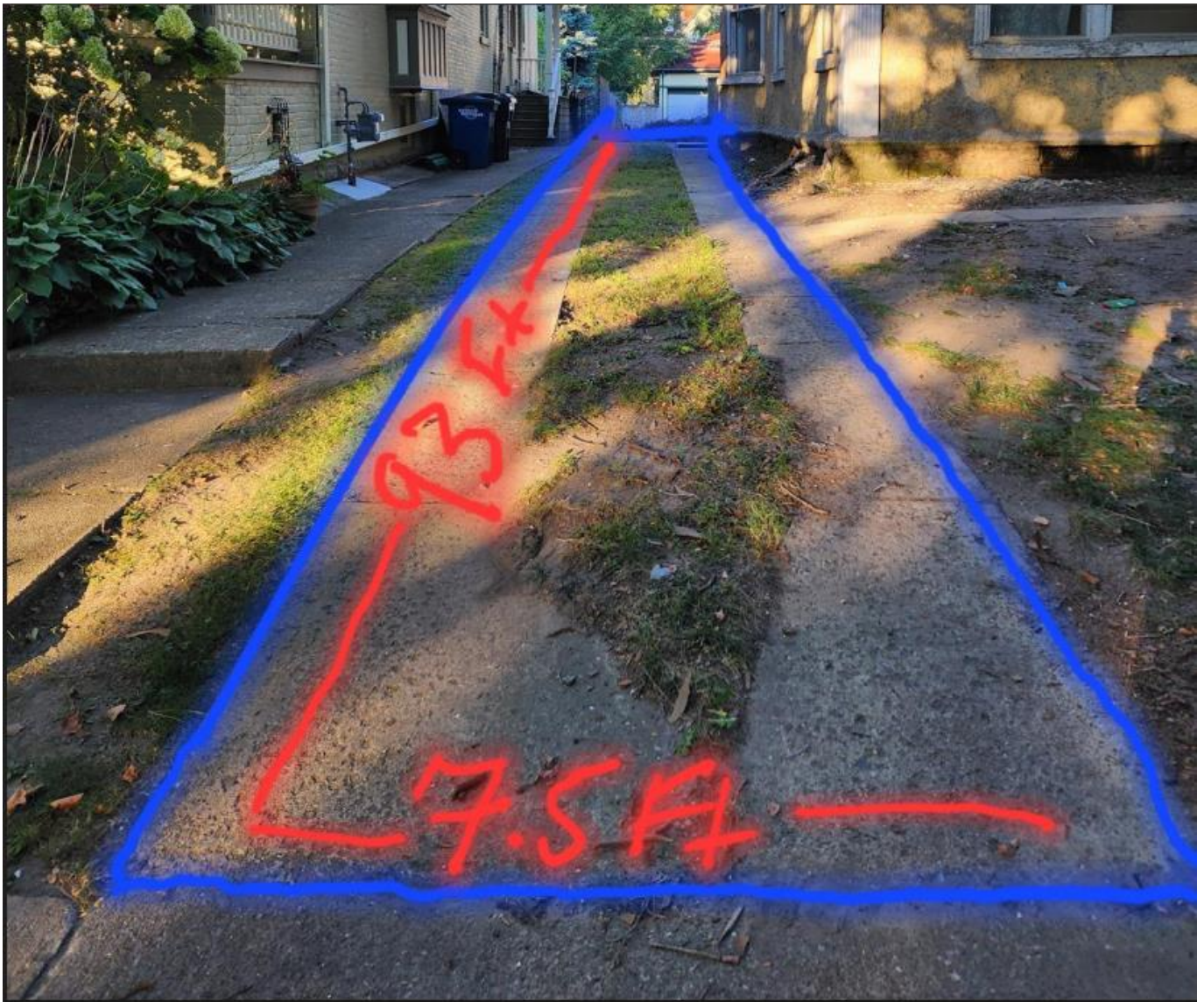
Applicant's photo, April 2025. Southeast corner corner board, partially removed. The elaborate trim details and ornate windows are visible here on the house's south side.



Applicant's April 2025 photos of the walkway and driveway where concrete removal and new concrete installation are proposed. The limestone front porch steps were initially included in the April scope of work, and then the applicant indicated in a later clarification (May 5 2025, Cycle 3) that they would instead be preserved.



Applicant's photo, May 2025 from Cycle 3 materials, clarifying proposed walkway only in concrete.



Applicant photo of new proposed driveway location, from September 2025 Cycle 4 materials. Driveway currently is a ribbon drive, and it is proposed to become a solid, full-width concrete drive.



Applicant's photo, September 2025, some like-for-like wood trim repairs are visible.



Applicant's photo, September 2025, from Cycle 4 application materials. Some like-for-like wood trim repairs are visible, as well as some of the house's highly detailed windows mentioned previously.



East (front) end of house, with south side barely visible, trim repairs in cornice complete, vinyl corner boards installed, some stucco repairs have been started, and porch column is missing, staff photo, September 2025.



Staff photo, September 2025, more of the south side is visible, along with the ribbon drive. Copper roofs on dormers are visible.



Staff photo, September 2025, east end and some of the north side visible.



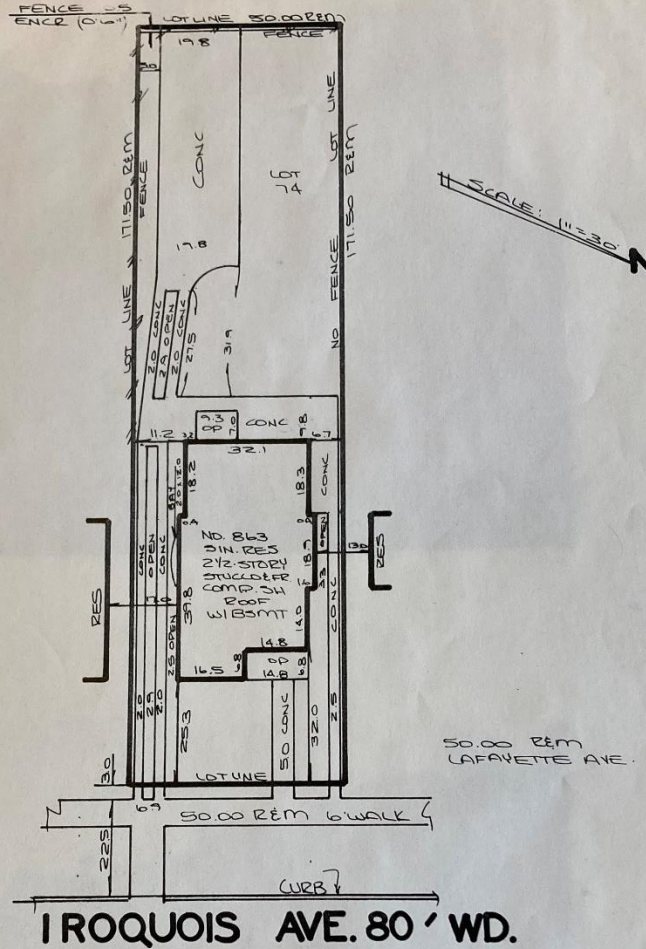
Staff photo, September 2025, northeast corner with vinyl corner board and north side visible.



863 Iroquois, designation slide, c. 1971. Ribbon drive and quoins at northeast corner are visible.

MORTGAGE SURVEY

P.A. 20' WD.



SURVEY NO: 80214

DATE: 4-26-79

PURCHASER:

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lot #74, Park Subdivision, of that part of the Cook Farm, Private Claims 27 & 180, lying between Jefferson and St. Paul Avenues, City of Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan. Rec'd. L. 19, P. 59 Plats, W C R.

WE HEREBY CERTIFY that we have surveyed the property herein described; that the buildings and improvements are located as shown. photographs were taken and prints attached hereto: **NOTE:** This survey is for Mortgage Purposes only and should not be used to establish the property lines for the construction of improvements or the erection of fences.

CERTIFIED TO ALL TITLE COMPANYS:

Burton Abstract
Trans America
Pioneer National
Philip F. Greco
Philip R. Seaver
Certified Abstract
Stewart Bell

Great Lakes
Wayne County
Tri County
Interstate
American
Heritage
Guardian

Lawyers
Detroit
Chicago
Paragon
Loftis
Omega
First



Edward J. Sabatini

Photo of Mortgage Survey from PDD files dated April 26, 1979. Ribbon driveway shown.



Photo from 1979 that accompanied the mortgage survey, PDD files. Notice the quoining at the front corners, material unknown. Porch guardrails and handrails for steps are black metal.



Photo from 1979 that accompanied the mortgage survey, PDD files. Notice the quoining at the front corners, material unknown. Porch guardrails and handrails for steps are black metal.



863 Iroquois, slide from PDD file, April 1980. Ribbon drive and quoins at northeast corner evident, but they are missing from the southeast corner.

PROPOSAL

- Repair wood trim, including soffits, fascia, frieze board, and replace corner boards (vinyl) and porch column (wood, tapered and fluted), paint all wood trim to match existing
- Stucco repairs to match historic texture, paint to match existing
- Install front porch rail (wood), replicated from side railing
- Remove ribbon drive, replace with full-width concrete drive
- Remove front walkway, replace with concrete walk—width shown to be the same as existing

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Indian Village Local Historic District was designated in 1971.
- Photos of this house from 1971 and 1979 show the front corner quoins, porch details, and ribbon drive.
- It appears from photos that the southeast corner quoins disappeared by 1980, but staff has no record of the removal/alteration of the quoins in HDC approval records.
- There is no final report from the Historic Designation Advisory Board and the National Register nomination from 1972 is sparse, but there are Elements of Design in the City's local historic district ordinance for the district. The relevant Elements of Design for this house and/or the proposed projects in this application include the Elements below (emphasis added).
 - 7. Relationship of materials. The majority of the buildings are faced with brick, while **many are partially or totally stucco**. There are some stone buildings; clapboard is rare, and almost never

the sole material. Wood shingle is occasionally used as a wall covering, usually at the second floor level, and never as the sole material. Roofing includes slate, tile, and wooden and asphalt shingles. Stone trim is common. Wood is almost universally used for window frames and other functional trim, and is used in many examples for all trim. Because of the existence of several subdivisions and their related deed restrictions, the exterior textures and materials may vary from block to block in the district.

- 9. Relationship of colors. Natural brick colors (red, yellow, brown, buff) predominate in wall surfaces. Natural stone colors also exist. **Where stucco or concrete exists, it is usually left in its natural state, or painted in a shade of cream. Roofs are in natural colors (tile and slate colors, wood colors) and asphalt shingles are predominantly within this same dark color range.** Paint colors often relate to style. **The classically inspired buildings, particularly Neo-Georgian, generally have woodwork painted white, cream or in the range of those colors, including putty. Doors and shutters are frequently dark green or black.**
- 10. Relationship of architectural details. These generally relate to style. **Neo-Georgian buildings display classic details, mostly in wood, and sometimes in stone. Areas commonly, but not always, treated are porches, shutters, window frames, cornices, and dormer windows. Details on Mediterranean style or vernacular buildings are often done in stone, brick, tile, and sometimes in stucco. They include arched windows, door openings, and porches.** Buildings of Medieval inspiration tend to have details in the form of carved wood or carved stone ornament on window frames, door frames, and eaves. Queen Anne or Late Victorian style buildings tend to have details in wood, stone, or molded brick commonly embellishing cornices, window frames and door frames. In general, the various styles are rich in architectural details.
- 13. Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatment. **The typical treatment of individual properties is a flat front lawn area in grass turf, often subdivided by a walk leading to the front entrance, and sometimes with a walk at the side leading to the rear. Materials for such walks are concrete, brick, or stone, or combinations of those materials. Straight side driveways leading from the street to rear garages exist, but alley-facing garages are common, particularly in the southern portion of the district. Where alley-facing garages are common, the lack of driveways lends a unity to the succession of front lawns. Driveway materials include concrete, brick and gravel. ...The street right-of-way of 80 feet combined with a pavement width of between 24 and 29 feet creates wide tree lawns or berm areas, which adds to the generous ambience of the urban landscape of the district. Street pavements are now asphalt; cut stone curbs still exist in portions of the district. Alleys are frequently paved with brick, particularly where alley-facing garages are common....**

▪ Based on a staff review of these Elements:

- The corner boards and all trim on the house should be wood. The proposed wood porch column is appropriate. If the applicant or a future owner wanted to restore the quoining detail from the 1970s (and likely before), that feature could be recreated in stone or wood imitating stone—the Elements of Design would allow for either material for that restored detail. Vinyl, however, is not mentioned and is inappropriate and incompatible with the district.
- The existing color scheme of pale yellow stucco and white woodwork would be considered acceptable by these guidelines. These guidelines would recommend a darker shade on the asphalt roof than light gray—something that looks closer to tile, slate, or wood colors and that is within the dark color range.
- Regarding the proposed driveway expansion, the Elements of Design state, “...Straight side driveways leading from the street to rear garages exist, but alley-facing garages are common, particularly in the southern portion of the district. Where alley-facing garages are common, the lack of driveways lends a unity to the succession of front lawns.” This house is in the

southern portion of the district on a short block. It is true that none of the immediate neighbors around this house has a driveway at the front of the house onto Iroquois. Immediately across the street is a greenspace that is landscaped and lush. The lack of driveways does add “a sense of unity to the succession of front lawns,” as the Elements state, and the lush green all around feels intended for a pedestrian to enjoy. That said, a driveway is currently on site. The applicant is not applying to create a new driveway—they are proposing to alter the driveway that exists. The ribbon allows for some greenery or grass to soften the effect of the driveway. It doesn’t appear that grass is growing in this location now, but when green grass is grown on either side of the concrete strips and between them, it is an effective way to soften the impact of the driveway on the landscape. A screenshot from Google Street View in September 2013 illustrates this point.



2013 Google Street View of 863 Iroquois and its ribbon driveway. The greenery between the ribbons softens the effect of the driveway and makes it appear more like walking paths to the rear of the house, which are common features in Indian Village.

The next block to the north has a mixture of expansive side yards without driveways and driveways, and none are ribbon drives. Maintaining a planting bed alongside the house so the driveway is not concrete right up against the house helps soften the effect of a full concrete drive, as shown at 1037 Iroquois, from Google Street View July 2022 below.



1037 Iroquois retains a planting bed alongside the house that softens the effect of the driveway. 863 Iroquois's lot is narrower, of course, so a planting bed that could support sizable shrubs like this would not be possible. (Google Street View, July 2022)

The block further to the north of 1037 (two blocks north of 863) includes 1438 and 1450 Iroquois. 1438 has a narrower planting bed along its driveway, more similar to 863 Iroquois. Even that small strip of planting bed along the house and side door helps to soften somewhat the effect of the full-width drive, as shown below.



A house on the next block to the north, 1438 Iroquois (to the right of this photo) has retained a small planting bed along the driveway and it softens the effect of the drive somewhat; the house at 863 has a similar planting strip right next to the house. (Google Street View, May 2019)



1450 Iroquois, up two blocks from 863 and next door to 1438 above, shows evidence of a ribbon drive, but without any greenery between the strips. (Google Street View, May 2019.)

The applicant's marked-up photo from September showing the driveway at 863 Iroquois shows a strip of green remaining on either side of the concrete ribbons, eliminating only the green strip between. However, as 1438 Iroquois shows, above, the solid concrete drive looks different from the street than the narrow ribbons. The green strips on either side would soften the effect of the drive, but that center island of green between the concrete ribbons is probably the most effective at breaking up the driveway and softening its effect. A ribbon drive has been present at 863 Iroquois since the time of designation, and probably for many years prior to designation. A building permit application on file in the Planning Department sought to replace the concrete ribbon drive with the same in 1981. If it needed to be replaced in 1981, it very likely was on this site in this form since cars (and garages) became commonplace in the 1920s. As such, it seems to staff that the ribbon drive at 863 Iroquois is a historic feature of the site and should be preserved. It appears to be a somewhat unique condition in the immediate neighborhood worthy of preservation.

- Considering the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, all of the work proposed, except removing the ribbon drive and using vinyl, would meet the Standards and Guidelines. Repairing wood trim and stucco in kind are repairs, and replacing the column and front walkway in kind if the original is deteriorated beyond repair meets the Standards. We know that the current porch railing is not historic (black metal was shown in 1979), but it is compatible with the materials of the house and height of the windows. Continuing the existing railing on the side across the front of the porch, at the existing height, appears to staff to meet the Standards and Guidelines. A more detailed, measured drawing would help to confirm that.
 - Regarding the ribbon drive, the Standards and Guidelines call for a historic feature of a site to be preserved, and staff believes the ribbon drive is a historic feature for this site since it was present on this site at the time of designation and likely long before that (since it had to be replaced in 1981). A ribbon driveway is characteristic of "first-generation" driveways added to properties and is historically significant in understanding changes to the resource during the period of significance.
 - Regarding the vinyl pilasters being proposed as corner boards, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation require that the corner boards that had been in place should have been repaired if possible, and if repair was not possible, they should have been replaced in kind as close as possible in design, color, texture, and, if possible, materials. (An alternative approach the Standards and Guidelines would allow could have been that the quoining at the corners shown in 1979 photos could have been restored, but that is not the submitted proposal.) The submitted proposal is to use vinyl trim to replace the wood. The trim that had been in place was compatible with the pilasters and column on the front porch and was a continuous 23 feet from top to bottom (see photo below), with fluting from the decorative cap to the decorative base. The proposed (installed) material is not compatible with wood because of its texture and sheen. The proposed (installed) design is not compatible because instead of continuous fluting from cap to base, the proposed is two pieces of trim instead of one, so there is a cap and base on top of a cap and base. That is not an adequate in-kind replacement of the material that was there. The vinyl is incompatible with this historic house and does not meet the Standards (1) because of its incompatible texture and sheen, (2) because the limits in available sizes of the material necessitates a historically incorrect installation and design, and (3) because vinyl is not a traditional material contemporary with the period of significance.



Applicant's photo of previous corner boards with continuous fluting from cap to base (left, from Cycle 4 materials), compared with the vinyl trim now installed that has the fluting interrupted by an extra base and cap midway (right, staff's September photo). The vinyl's sheen and texture are also incompatible, and it appears to meet the stucco differently than the wood trim had previously. There appears to be an extra seamed band of trim over the nearby stucco that was not there before.

ISSUES

- The proposed (installed) vinyl corner board trim is incompatible with the historic house and its period of significance and does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation because of its material, texture, sheen, design, and installation. Further, it diminishes the historic character of the house. The installed vinyl trim also does not meet the Elements of Design for the district.
- A dimensioned drawing for the porch railing (and handrail if there will be one) would help ensure compatibility and compatible proportions.
- The proposed removal of the concrete ribbon drive and installation of a solid drive does not meet the Standards because the ribbon drive is a historic feature of 863 Iroquois and should be preserved. The driveway interrupted by greenery/grass also better satisfies the district's Elements of Design by intimating walking paths to the rear of the property, and those walking paths are a feature of the district.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Indian Village Historic District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that:

- The vinyl corner board trim pieces at the northeast and southeast corners of the house will be removed and replaced with trim that is compatible for the house and meets the Standards. The applicant will submit a replacement corner board proposal to staff for review and approval before the certificate of appropriateness is issued.
- A dimensioned drawing of the porch guardrail and handrail for the steps (if one is proposed) will be submitted to staff for review and approval before the certificate of appropriateness is issued.
- The ribbon driveway will be retained. The concrete may be replaced, but the driveway's form as two ribbons of concrete with dirt between and on either side to support grass must be retained. An updated site plan and quote/contract for the work will be submitted to staff before the certificate of appropriateness is issued.