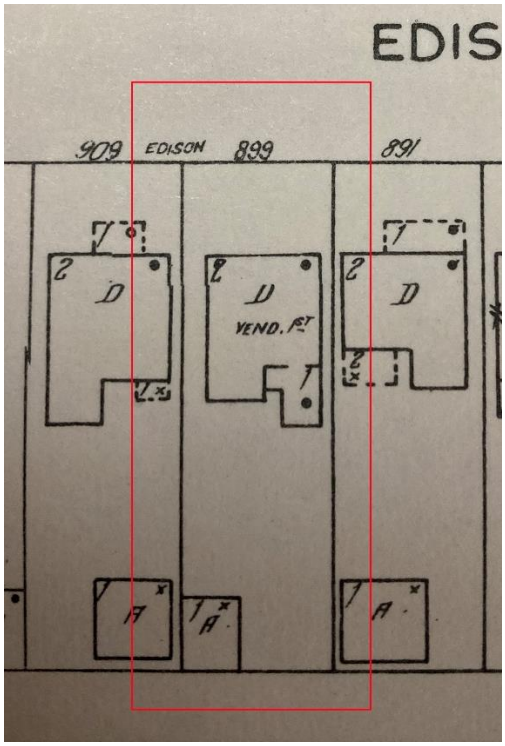
STAFF REPORT: DECEMBER 10, 2025 MEETING **PREPARED BY**: E. THACKERY
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00495
ADDRESS: 899 EDISON STREET
HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON HISTORIC DISTRICT
APPLICANT: MATTHEW LORUSSO
PROPERTY OWNER: MATTHEW LORUSSO
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11/05/25
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 11/24/25

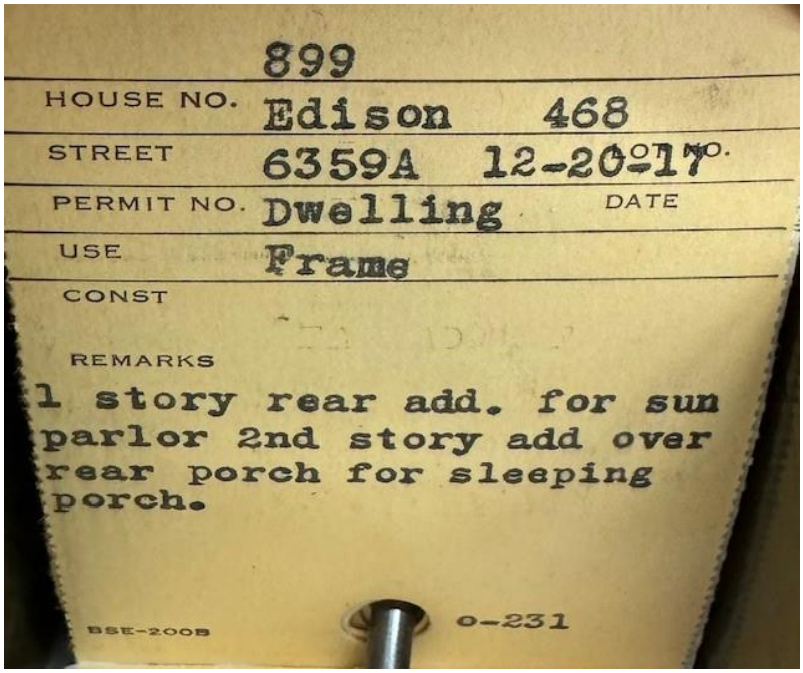
SCOPE: DEMOLISH TWO-STORY REAR WING, ERECT TWO-STORY REAR WING

EXISTING CONDITIONS
899 Edison is a two-story, single-family house that was built in 1913 in the Tudor Revival style. The house has stucco and half-timbering at the second floor and brick cladding at the first floor, and it retains many of its historic windows. At the rear, the house has a one-story sunroom addition that was permitted in December 1917. The December 1917 permit card also indicates that a second-story sleeping porch was added above the original rear porch at that time. The second-floor sleeping porch addition retains its stucco and historic windows around all three sides, whereas non-historic materials enclose the rear porch at the first floor. The house's one-story sunroom addition is located to the east of the two-story wing, abutting it, and it retains its historic windows. An undated Sanborn map that PDD has on file shows 899 Edison with both the two-story and one-story rear wings.


Current condition, staff photo taken 11/24/25.

899 Edison, designation photo, 1974





Left: 899 Edison, undated PDD Sanborn map shows the two-story rear wing to the south as part of the house and the one-story rear wing immediately to the east at the house's southeast corner.
Right: 899 Edison permit card for the 1917 plans for a one-story addition of a sun parlor and a second-story addition of a sleeping porch. (BSEED)

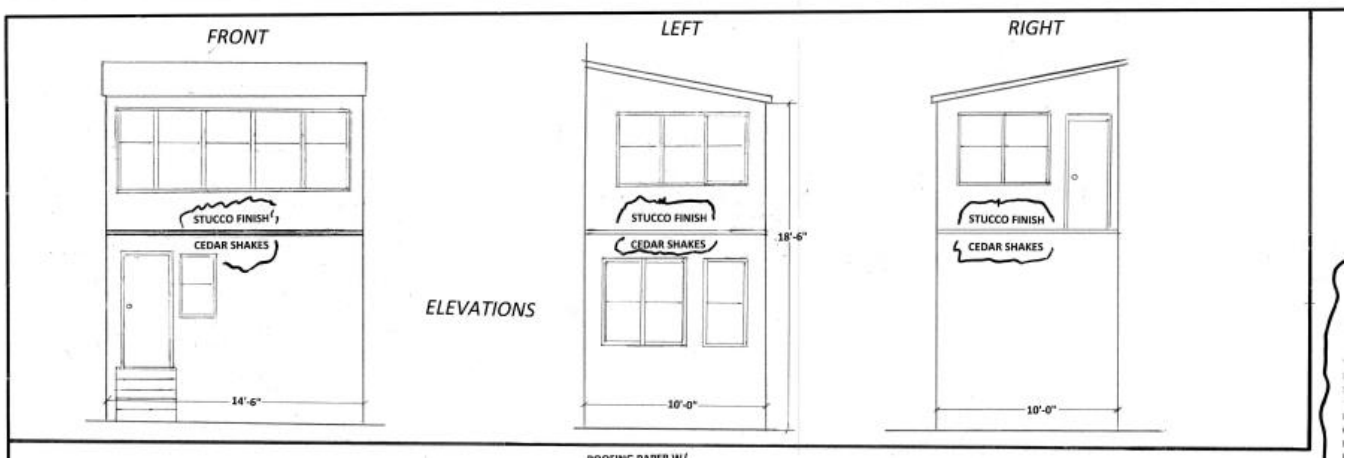
899 Edison, two-story rear wing at the southwest corner and the one-story rear wing at the southeast corner, ConnectExplorer, March-April 2024.

899 Edison, two-story rear wing at the southwest corner and the one-story rear wing at the southeast corner, ConnectExplorer, March-April 2024.

PROPOSAL

- Demolish historic two-story rear wing
- Install new footings
- Build new two-story rear wing, maintaining the dimensions of the existing structure, adding insulation. The windows, new back door, and second-story door are all proposed to be in the same locations as current.
- On the new rear addition's first floor, cedar shingle siding is proposed, with a line of flared or projecting shingles at the top of the first-floor transition from siding to stucco, to direct water away from the lower siding. (The application refers to this as a kick board). The windows and door are proposed to be located where the current openings are.
- The second story of the new rear wing is proposed to mimic the existing design with five windows across the south, facing the yard, three windows overlooking the driveway, and two windows and a door on the east side.
- The existing historic, second-floor windows are proposed to be reused and the new door specifications are included in the original application for work. First-floor proposed windows are unclear; sashes with between-the-glass grids were proposed, and staff indicated to the applicant that those windows would likely not meet the Standards, but different window product specifications were not received.
- The 1917 roof is flat and there is a wide overhang. The new rear wing would have a shed roof and the overhang would be eliminated.

899 Edison, rear two-story wing to be demolished and rebuilt. Historic windows are to be preserved and reused. A new steel door is proposed to replace the existing steel door. The adjacent one-story rear wing to the east (sun parlor) is just visible to the right. (Photo from applicant's materials.)



Proposed elevations for the new construction, from applicant's materials.

Steel Exterior Door: 1/2 View 9-Light
1-Panel Plank

Steel door proposed for the back and side doors. The back door is to be installed on the south wall of the new addition and the second-story side door is to be installed on the east side of the new addition to access the roof of the one-story wing. (A door is currently in place in that location.)

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Local Historic District was designated in 1974.
- Building permit records show that the house was built in 1913 and that in December 1917, two additions were permitted: the rear second-story addition for use as a sleeping porch, and a first-floor addition to the east of the current two-story wing for use as a sun parlor.
- Staff was unable to find historic photos of the rear of the house or records to document when the first-floor rear porch was enclosed. The first floor has been sided in non-historic shingle-style siding.
- Because the two-story rear wing includes the original porch (enclosed and clad at the exterior with shingle-style non-historic siding) and the 1917/1918 second-story sleeping porch addition that used the same materials and details (stucco, same windows, first-floor brick piers may be visible underneath the non-historic shingle-style siding), scale, and proportion as the original house, staff considers this rear wing a

historic, character-defining feature of the house at 899 Edison. In addition, it is significant because it represents a movement in residential architecture toward maximizing outdoor spaces, with sleeping porches featuring expansive windows for fresh air. (A *Brownstoner* online article, as well as other sources, ties the early twentieth-century fresh air movement to health benefits based in treatments for tuberculosis.)

Demolition Considerations

- The *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, Standard 6, requires *deteriorated historic features to 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.*

- In their application materials, the applicant has included a letter from a professional engineer stating that the two-story rear wing is not structurally safe and a new structure, including new foundation piers, should be built.

- Staff notes, per guidance issued by the State Historic Preservation Office, that local Commissions rely on "a thorough, unbiased structural assessment report prepared by a licensed engineer. Reports should be prepared by engineers experienced in historic preservation as historic building systems are often quite different from their modern counterparts." The author of this letter, Barnabas Mosley, is a Michigan licensed professional engineer. Structural engineers are qualified to conduct structural analysis in structures like this one. However, Mr. Mosley has not provided his specific credentials in historic preservation, and staff could not find a website for Mosley Services, Inc.

- A principal reason to rely on assessments from licensed professionals experienced in historic preservation is recognizing that older buildings are not subject to modern code requirements and can legally remain in service for their current use based on their original structural or architectural systems, absent evidence of decay, deterioration, or catastrophic events (e.g., fire, pest, or water damage) that have compromised the historic systems so as to make the building unsafe. The focus is on current level of decay, not the design of the original structure. Historic buildings, in particular, have additional code exemptions and safeguards open to the AHJ (authority having jurisdiction), outlined in Chapter 12 of the Michigan Rehabilitation Code for Existing Buildings, which is the applicable code here.

- In looking at the rear wing's current level of deterioration, Mr. Mosley's letter states:
    - the "six-inch by eight-inch timbers holding the structure up on the piers (8) have seriously rotted away and are no longer affected.
    - Without exception, all the floor and ceiling joists have warped from front to rear.
    - The outer rear wall has sagged more than eight inches as indicated by the shape of the side window."

  Because this rear two-story wing is a historic, character-defining feature of the house, the Commission's high standard, per the National Park Service's Guidelines, is that the structure must be reasonably beyond repair in order to approve its demolition. Staff does not have enough information from this brief letter to determine whether it is either technically and/or financially infeasible to retain and repair the structure. Staff would like to review a more thorough report with photos and test results included, and staff does not understand the "side window" reference from the engineer's letter. A cost estimate for repairing the rear wing compared with demolishing and rebuilding could help to determine the economic feasibility of repair, but such an estimate has not been provided.

New Construction Considerations

- If the Commission finds that the historic two-story rear wing is beyond reasonable repair, per the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* Standard 6, "*…the new feature shall match the old in design,*

color, texture, and other visual qualities, and, where possible, materials" in order for the project to meet the threshold for the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

- In this case, the rebuilt rear wing is proposed to duplicate the existing. The historic windows are proposed to be preserved and reused and their mullions and trim are proposed to be duplicated. The stucco is also proposed to match the existing.
- However, it is staff's opinion that the submitted elevation drawings are not sufficiently detailed to fully understand complete construction details. They also don't show how windows will sit within the wall planes and how window trim will look when finished. Staff shared an example with the applicant of more detailed architectural drawings, but more detailed drawings for this proposal were not provided.
- The character-defining deep eave of the historic addition is proposed to be eliminated in the new construction.
- Roof product specifications were not provided.
- Color selections for the new rear two-story wing were not provided.
- The layout of the proposed cedar siding (even or staggered) was not provided.
- No exterior lighting was included in the proposal.
- The plan for steps and handrails from the first floor to grade was not provided.

- The first-floor porch's historic appearance is unknown at this time because its exterior walls have been obscured by the non-historic siding. The removal of that siding may reveal features that better indicate its historic appearance. Photos included in the applicant's materials seem to indicate that the first-floor porch is a simple, unfinished room with framing for windows (*see photo below*). Currently, the south wall includes a steel door and a non-historic window. Those features do not have historic significance, and neither they nor their placement would need to be replicated according to Standard 6, unless the room's framing and historic features indicate that a door and window were indeed on this south wall in these locations. The current proposal replicates all window and door openings as they currently are.

First floor of the rear enclosed porch at 899 Edison. Shown is the west wall. From applicant's materials.

- Boston-Edison's Elements of Design that are relevant to this project include:
  - *(1) "Height. Virtually all of the houses in the district have two full stories plus an attic or a finished third floor within the roof, which are generally called 2½-story houses;* ***additions to existing buildings shall be related to the existing structure."*** (emphasis added)

    If the commission finds that the rear two-story wing is beyond repair, staff finds that the proposed replacement meets this design element. The proposed new construction would not be taller than the house's main historic volume.

  - *(3)"Proportion of openings within the façade. Windows openings are virtually always taller than wide; however, several windows are sometimes grouped into a combination that is wider than tall. Window openings are always subdivided. The most common window type is double-hung with sashes that are generally further subdivided by muntins or leaded glass. Façades have approximately 15 percent to 35*

percent of their area glazed. Sun porches, with a very high proportion of window openings subdivided by mullions and muntins, are common."

If the commission finds that the historic rear two-story wing is beyond repair, staff finds that the historic windows proposed to be reused at the second floor meet this design element. They are subdivided with muntins in both top and bottom sashes, and the windows on the second-floor sleeping porch are assembled together in long stretches with wood mullions between to maximize access to light and fresh air. The proposal is not clear as to how first-floor windows would appear in the new addition. Compatible windows at the first floor would also have muntins that would appear to divide the lights and have dimension when viewed from the exterior.

- *(6)"Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections. In those examples derived from Classical precedents, entrances and porches, if any, tend to be centered on the front façade. Other examples display more freedom with entrance and porch placement. Porches and permanently enclosed sun porches are often placed at the side and, sometimes, at the rear of the building."*

  If the commission finds that the rear two-story wing is beyond repair, staff finds that the new proposed addition meets this design element. With the extensive use of windows, the second floor retains its character as a permanently enclosed porch, or a sleeping porch in this case.

- *(7)"Relationship of materials. The majority of houses are faced with brick, while many are partially or totally stucco. There are some stone buildings, sometimes combined with stucco; clapboard is rare and is extremely rare as the sole material. Roofing includes slate, tile, and asphalt shingles. Wood shingle roofs were once common and have generally been replaced with asphalt. Wood shake does not exist and there is no known evidence that it was ever used in the district. 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."*

  The proposed stucco and the reuse of historic wood windows meet this design element. Proposed at the first floor is wood shingle siding. This design element does not mention wood shingles as siding. The historic house is brick at the first floor, and this house does not currently include any wood siding. Wood-sided walls, however, are sometimes seen on Tudor-style houses, especially on secondary walls. Houses next to and near this house have more Craftsman influences, and wood shingle siding in those instances is often featured.

- Overall, if the commission finds that the rear two-story wing is beyond repair, staff finds that the proposal to replicate the existing to be largely in line with the Standards, Guidelines, and Elements of Design. However, as noted above, the submitted elevation drawings are not sufficiently detailed to fully understand complete construction details. In addition, the deep overhang at the roof above the second floor is a character-defining feature, and if the rear addition is being replicated according to Standard 6, that overhang should be replicated as well.

ISSUES

Proposed Demolition

- The proposed demolition is of a historic structure. While the second-story addition is indeed an addition, it is historic age as it followed the original construction by only approximately five years, and it used similar wood windows and stucco to match the original house.
- Additionally, this rear wing reflects a period in architectural design and homebuilding that valued fresh air and sunlight, as evidenced by the booming popularity of sleeping porches in the early twentieth century.
- The provided engineer's letter states that the engineer believes the foundation and structure to be deteriorated beyond repair; additional information or photos to support that opinion would be helpful to better indicate if it is either technically and/or economically infeasible to retain and repair the wing.

Historic buildings often are supported while their foundations are repaired and stabilized, and the submitted materials did not clearly articulate why this kind of work would not be possible in this case, in staff's opinion.

Proposed New Construction

- The proposed new construction's plans are not sufficiently detailed to fully understand exactly how the finished new addition would look.
- Staff is unclear if it is feasible to install the existing historic windows at the new wing's second story per the proposal. If their preservation and reuse is not feasible, product specifications for new windows would need to be approved by the Commission. Product specifications for the first-floor windows are needed as well.
- The design for the new addition eliminates the deep overhang of the historic eaves. If the historic feature (the two-story rear wing including the rear porch and the sleeping porch) is being replicated according to Standard 6, the historic, character-defining deep eaves should be replicated as well.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial

Staff recommends that the proposed demolition and proposed new construction will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Boston-Edison Historic District's Elements of Design, specifically:

- Standard 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.*
- Standard 4: *Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.*
- Standard 5*: Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.*
- Standard 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.*
- Standard 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.*
- Standard 10: *New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

For the following reasons:

- The materials submitted did not provide sufficient evidence that the historic rear addition was deteriorated beyond repair.
- With respect to the proposed new addition:

- The new design eliminates the deep eave which is a character-defining feature of the historic addition.
- The submitted drawings are not sufficiently detailed to fully understand complete construction details of the new proposed new addition. Therefore, it is has not been clearly established the proposed new wing would adequately match the existing.