

STAFF REPORT: FEBRUARY 11, 2026 MEETING

PREPARED BY: E. THACKERY

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2026-00019

ADDRESS: 1656 W BOSTON BLVD

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON HISTORIC DISTRICT

APPLICANT: ELISE DECHARD

PROPERTY OWNER: LAVETTE AND STEVE SORENSON

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 1/19/26

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 1/27/26

SCOPE: DEMOLISH GARAGE*, ERECT GARAGE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

1656 W Boston Boulevard is located between Rosa Parks Boulevard and Woodrow Wilson Street, west of the John C. Lodge Freeway (M-10). The property is on the north side of W Boston Boulevard and the lot is 50 feet wide and 175 feet deep. The Colonial Revival-style house on this lot is square with two and a half stories, a hipped roof, two dormers, brick cladding, shutters, and a centered half-circle porch with four columns, two pilasters, and dentil molding. A brick two-car garage with white doors once stood in the northwest corner of the lot but was removed by late 2015.



1656 W Boston Blvd (the subject property) is to the right and its driveway (shared with 1666 W Boston) is on the left. The garage at 1666 is just visible, but 1656 no longer has its garage. The proposed garage would be visible at the end of the driveway. (Staff photo, January 2026)



1656 W Boston Blvd outlined in yellow from Detroit Parcel Viewer, City of Detroit. The driveway, concrete slab, and non-historic shed are visible in the northwest corner of the lot.



Applicant-provided photo of backyard and existing fence, received via email January 27, 2026.

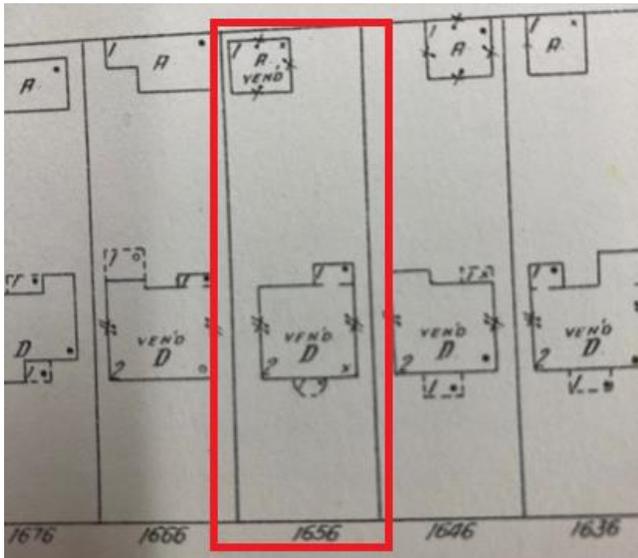
PROPOSAL

Based on staff review of the submitted documents, the following work is proposed:

- Remove non-historic shed and relocate existing raised beds.
 - Partial demolition of existing non-historic wood privacy fencing along alley.
 - Expansion of existing concrete driveway.
 - Build new three-car garage: slab on grade, CMU base course, wood framed walls, truss framed hipped roof, 30' wide, 22' deep, and 13' 7 5/8" tall at ridge. The carriage-style doors are actually overhead doors.
 - Install a new gate/ fence door to alley.
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- There was a brick garage in the same location as is proposed but it was demolished about 2015. Staff found no approval for the demolition. The current owners purchased the property in 2025 and were invited to include the demolition in their scope of work. They seek a Certificate of Appropriateness for the demolition of a garage, which was completed without HDC approval in about 2015.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

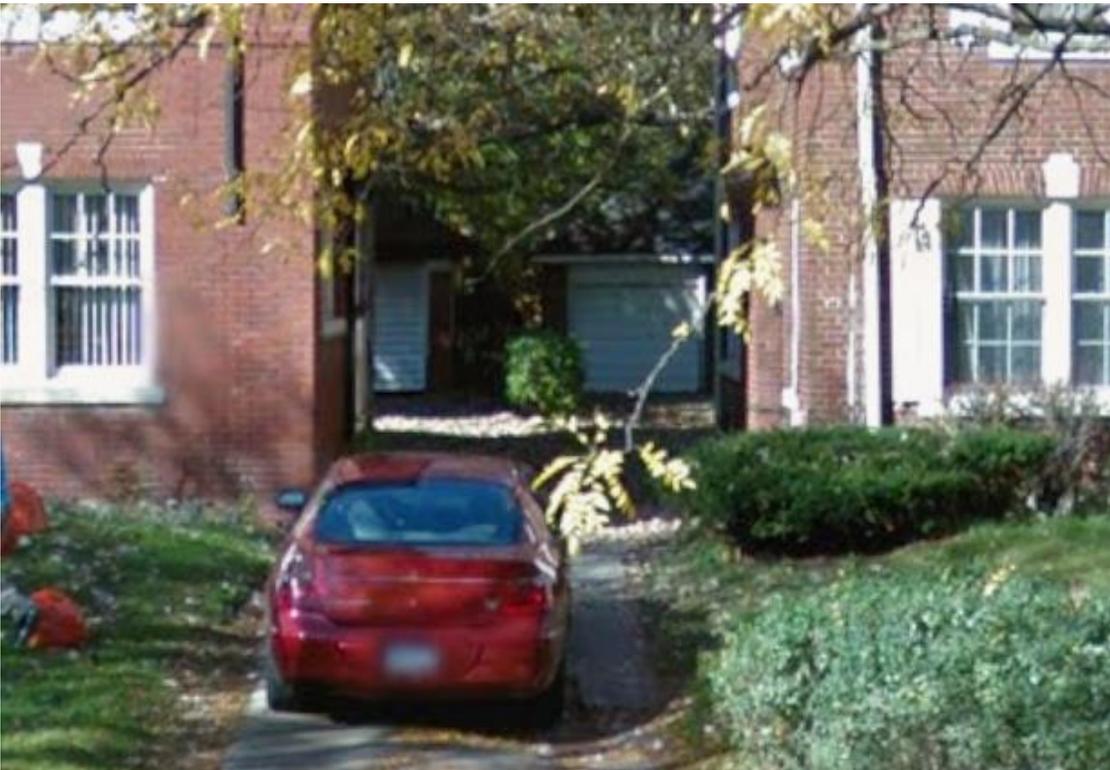
- The Boston-Edison Local Historic District was designated in 1974.
- A local designation report from HDAB does not exist for this district, but the National Register district nomination establishes a period of significance for this district from 1900 to 1930. The nomination notes that this particular three-block stretch was developed between 1916 and 1919.
- This house contributes to the district. It has a high level of integrity and its historic, character-defining features include: the brick cladding; the large, tapering chimney on the side of the house; the exposed rafter tails showing some Craftsman influence; the shutters; the flat arches with keystones; and the front half-round portico with columns. A certificate of appropriateness was issued in 2008 for basement glass block windows and 48 window replacements throughout the house, but if any historic windows remain, they would be historic, character-defining features as well.
- Research regarding the house's fence:
 - There is a non-historic wood fence in the house's backyard.
 - It is a stockade fence, which is not approvable by the City's Historic District Fence and Hedge Guidelines.
 - Staff finds no approval for the fence.
 - Proposed is the partial demolition of the fence and adding a gate to the alley. Because the non-historic fence was not approved and does not follow the fence guidelines, staff recommends that partial demolition of the fence is appropriate, but expanding or adding a feature (like a gate) to the fence is not appropriate.
- Research regarding the house's garage:
 - The City does not have historic permit records for this house or garage on file in BSEED.
 - A brick-veneered garage appears on a 1970 PDD Sanborn map (*see below*), although the garage may have been built much earlier.
 - A brick garage with white doors was visible on Google Street View images and on ConnectExplorer until about 2015 (*see below*).
 - Staff notes that the HDC does not have a COA on file for the garage's demolition. Staff therefore reached out to the applicant to note that the current application would be considered incomplete unless the demolition of the garage was added to the current scope. (The new garage cannot be built at the location of the old garage without a legal/HDC-approved removal of the previous structure.) The applicant is therefore seeking after-the-fact approval for the removal of the property's garage. Staff acknowledges that the current owners purchased the property in 2025 and that the unapproved garage demolition was completed by a previous owner, and also that existing violations remain with the property until legally addressed.



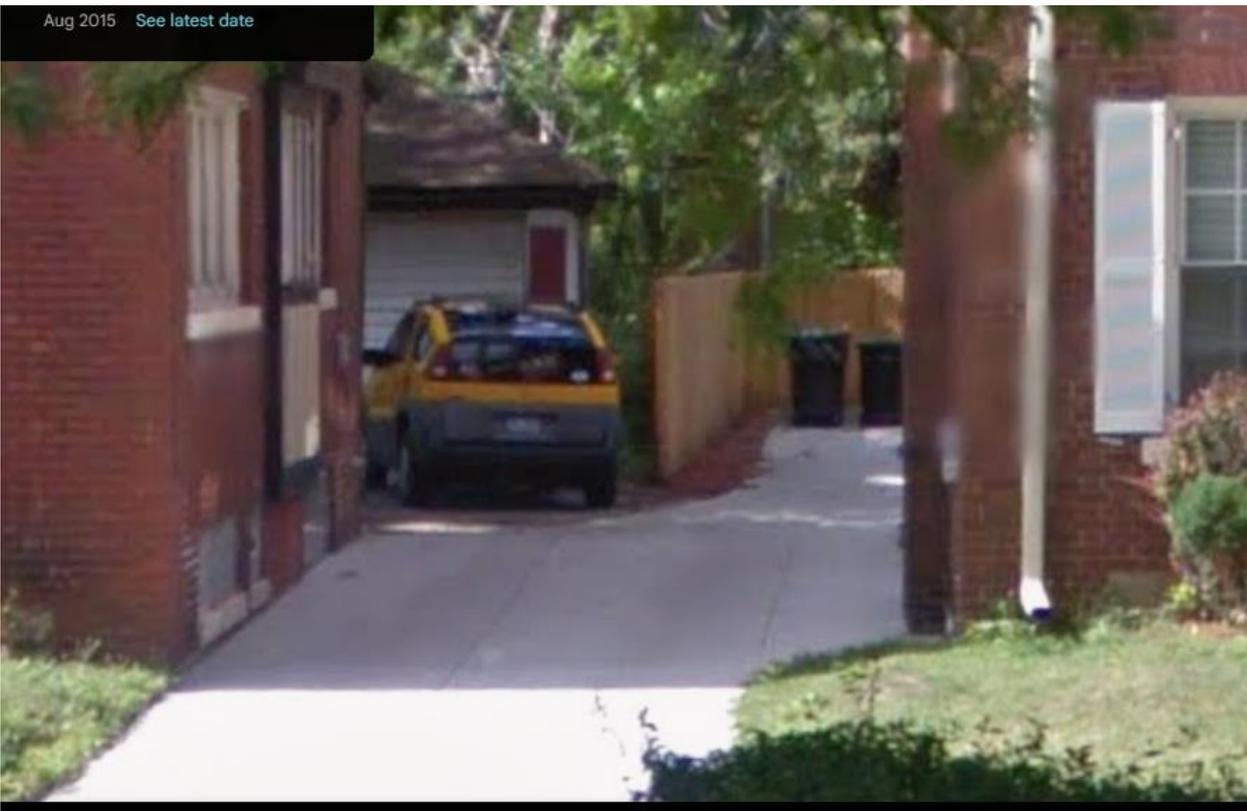
1656 W Boston Blvd outlined in red, Sanborn Map, 1970. The garage is shown veneered in brick, like the house. (PDD)



1656 W Boston Blvd, ConnectExplorer, April-May 2011 on left and April-May 2014 on right. In 2011, the garage with white doors is quite visible, but in 2014, the garage is barely visible through the trees.

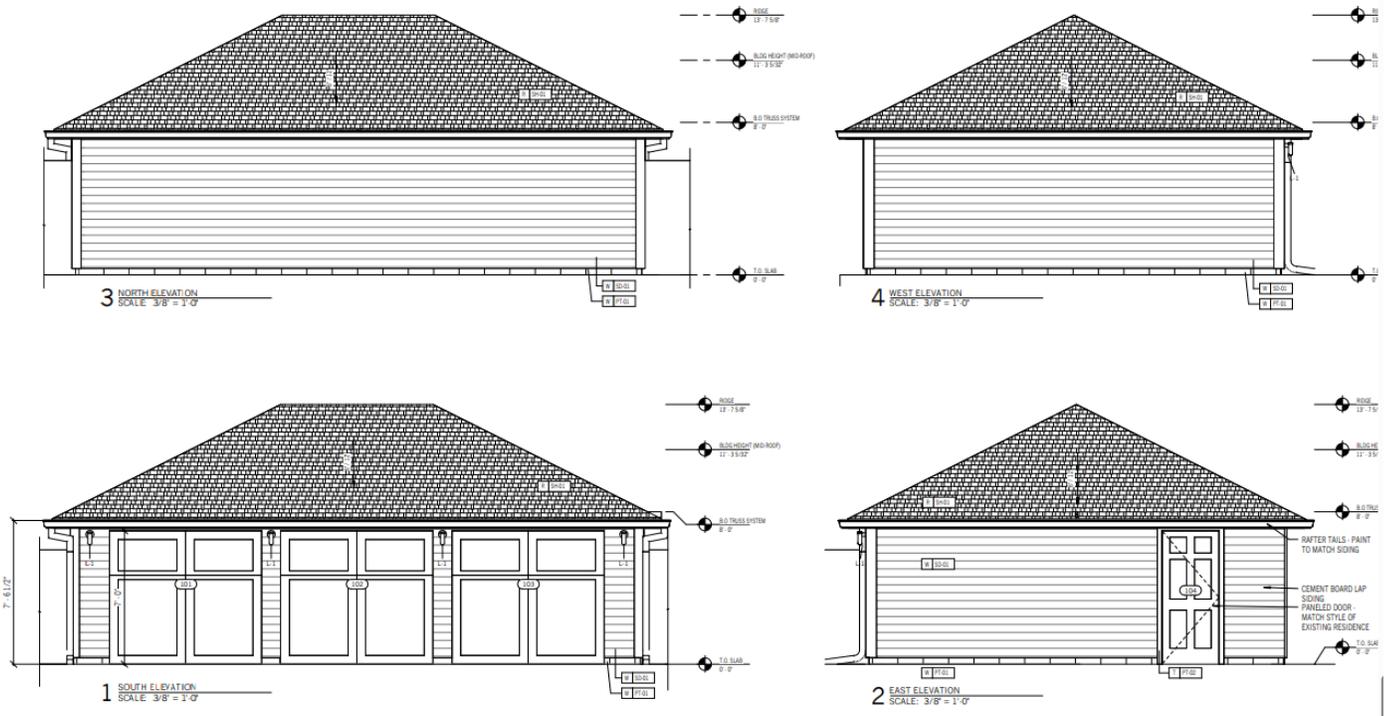


Google Street View, October 2014. The garages at 1666 W Boston and 1656 W Boston are side by side and visible in October 2014.



Google Street View, August 2015. The garage at 1656 W Boston Blvd (on the right) has been removed.

- With respect to the former garage’s removal, the applicant has noted that the current owners purchased the property in 2025 and are unaware of the garage’s appearance at the time of the unapproved demolition.
- Staff has no photographic documentation of the garage prior to its demolition beyond the above images. As such, staff cannot opine on the garage’s condition at the time of its demolition, nor can staff recommend that the resource contributed to the historic district. Furthermore, the contributing status of the garage is not provided in the National Register of Historic Places nomination, and there is no final designation report available from HDAB for this district.



The proposed garage to be built at the rear of the lot in the northwest corner, to have Arctic White Hardie lap siding and grayish accents and roof. (From applicant materials)

- Research and analysis regarding applicable Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, and the District’s Elements of Design:
 - **Standard 9** states that “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.”
 - The proposed new construction would not destroy historic materials, it would be differentiated from the old by its new proposed cementitious siding material and the proposed lighting fixtures, and staff believes it would be compatible with the historic house’s massing (the house is about 38’ wide and appears about that deep, as it is roughly a square, while the proposed garage is 30’ wide and 22’ deep). Staff also believes it would be compatible in size and scale (the house is 2.5 stories tall, whereas the proposed garage is one 8-foot-tall story plus a hipped roof), and architectural features in that the proposed garage is a simple design and its hipped roof complements the house.

- When a feature like an outbuilding is missing, the **Guidelines** recommend that the new design should either be based on historic documentation to re-create the missing feature, or the new proposed design should be compatible with the historic character of the building and site. They also state that the new work should be compatible with the historic character of the setting in terms of size, scale, design, material, color, and texture. The Guidelines do not recommend creating a false historical appearance or introducing a new building or site feature that is out of scale or of an otherwise inappropriate design. This proposed design is seeking to be compatible and not a re-creation of a historic feature.
- To gauge compatibility, staff looked at existing garages on the same block of W Boston. Most of the garages have doors that face W Boston, but a couple face the alley, and the corner houses at the opposite ends of the block face their respective side streets (the garage behind 1600 faces Woodrow Wilson and the garage behind 1756 faces Rose Parks Blvd). *See the map and the analysis in the table below.*
- Applicable Boston-Edison **Elements of Style** include:
 - *(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.”
 - *(13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments. (b)* “Straight side driveways leading from the street to rear garages are the norm, although access to garages is also off the alley, especially in areas of the district that were developed earlier. On corner lots, garages and driveways often face the side streets. These driveways are paved in asphalt, concrete, or brick.”
 - *(20) Orientation, vistas, overviews.* “Garages are frequently oriented either toward an alley and/or the front drive or toward a side street in the case of corner lots. Almost all garages are detached and are at the rear of the lot.”

Determining Compatibility of the Proposed Garage

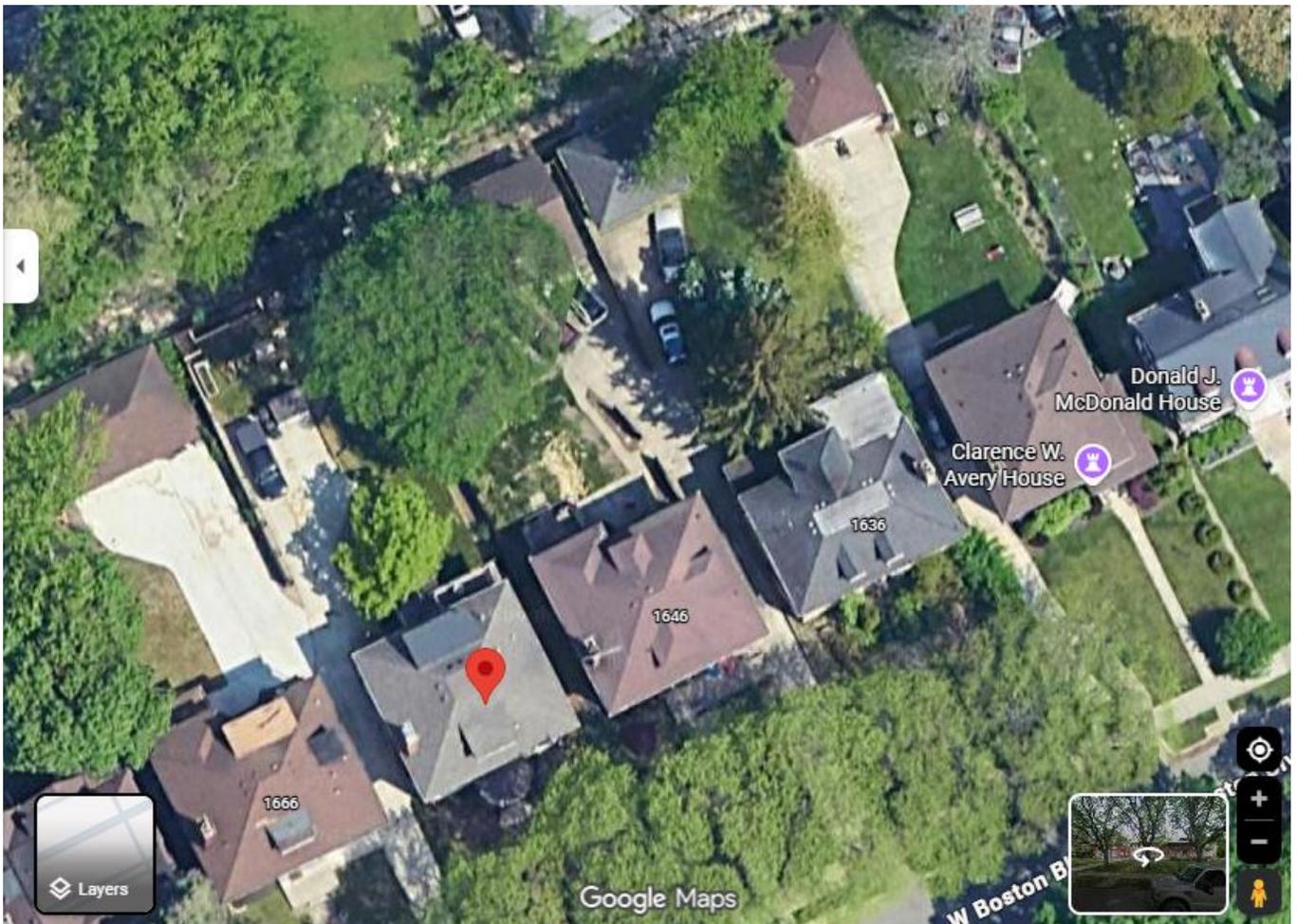


Post-1976 Sanborn map (12th Street had been named Rosa Parks Blvd on this map) that shows the houses and their garages between 1600 and 1756 W Boston Blvd. There is a standard, square garage seen at several of the addresses, including 1746, 1736, 1706, 1656, 1646, 1636, 1626, and 1616, and there are some larger variations as well, including those garages at 1756, 1676, 1666, and 1600. A range of garage sizes, subordinate to the main residences, has historically been present.

Staff also looked at present-day (2026) Google Map Views to look at current garage sizes and compare to the proposed garage.

<i>Address</i>	<i>Garage Size/Description</i>	<i>Other Notes</i>
1600 W Boston Blvd	Slightly deeper than a square historic garage and about 1/3 wider.	Garage faces Woodrow Wilson St. and matches Tudor style of house.
1616	Northeast corner has a historic garage that appears to be about the size of a two-car garage.	Garage has wood siding painted white.
1626	Square historic garage.	Wood siding.
1636	Square historic garage.	House is brick with some stucco and garage is stucco with historic wood doors.
1646	Roughly the same width as the square historic garages, but slightly deeper.	Rectangular with gabled roof, brick with paneled wood door, similar to house materials and style.
1656	Subject property —proposed garage is about as deep as a historic square garage but	Cementitious lap siding proposed.

	about 50% wider.	
1666	Roughly the same depth as the square historic garages, but twice as wide.	In 2022 Google Street View, front of garage is faced with brick and has white doors and white trim to match house. Site visit documents a stucco garage here.
1676	Size is hard to estimate.	Historic stucco garage.
1686	About the same size as a square historic garage.	Historic wood-sided garage.
1694	Same depth as square historic garage, but a few feet wider.	Brick Tudor house, with matching brick garage.
1706	Size is hard to estimate; seems similar to 1694's garage.	Brick Colonial Revival house, matching brick garage.
1716	--	Brick, stucco, half-timbering house. No garage visible on Google Street View. At site visit, there are three brick garages and then the buff brick garage, so this house may not have a garage.
1726	Same depth as a square historic garage, but about 20% wider.	Brick Colonial Revival house with matching garage.
1736	Square historic garage.	Buff brick Craftsman house with masonry "stitching" on bay window. Matching buff brick garage.
1746	Same width as a historic square garage, and about 10% deeper.	At site visit in 2026, brick house, but next visible garage from alley is buff brick, so this house may not have a garage.
1756	Same depth as a square historic garage, and about 30% wider.	Garage faces Rosa Parks Blvd. Brick Tudor home with brick garage with Tudor detailing.



Sample Google Map image (2026) that shows the historic garages at 1626, 1636, and 1646 W Boston, and the larger garage at 1666 that has historically been larger than the average garages on the block.

In conclusion, staff believes that the proposed garage generally meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. The proposed new building is, in staff’s opinion, compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features (including the proposed hipped roof). The new design should be compatible with the house and district in size, scale, design, material, color, and texture. Staff thinks that the new proposed building is compatible with the house and district in size, scale, design, material, and color (mainly). It is staff’s opinion that the proposed garage’s siding is compatible with this house because the alley exhibits a variety of garage materials, including wood siding that the cementitious siding echoes. As the Elements of Design state, wood clapboard siding is rare in this district, but that assessment was likely looking at houses and not outbuildings. There are a few historic wood-sided garages on this block; as a result, staff finds that this lap-sided proposed garage is compatible, and that the cementitious siding is a contemporary material, achieving differentiation. Regarding color, staff notes that the proposed Arctic White is not a bright, stark white, meeting the requirements of the color system for a Colonial Revival house (Color System C). However, staff does not see that the proposed gray accent color is in the color system. C:1 Light Bluish Gray is in the approved color system, but the color proposed as an accent color seems to staff not to match Light Bluish Gray. Staff understands that this color is not being proposed for the house itself, but because so many of the garages in the district relate in color and material to the main houses, having a color scheme within the approved system C seems appropriate to staff.

ISSUES

- It seems to staff that the gray proposed as an accent color on the new garage is not within Color System C.
- Because the non-historic fence was not approved and does not follow the fence guidelines, staff recommends that partial demolition of the fence is appropriate, but expanding or adding a feature (like a gate) to the fence is not appropriate.

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 Boston-Edison Historic District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that:

- a color palette within Color System C will be proposed for the new garage, subject to staff review and approval,
- the non-approved stockade fence, if demolished or removed, would not be able to be reinstalled in the future, and
- a gate will not be added to the stockade fence.