



SR-2 – ADVISORY STAFF REPORT (03-06-2026)

This advisory report, prepared by staff, represents the opinion and advice of professional staff, and does not represent nor direct the separate review and decision of the Historic District Commission. This report serves as an addendum to SR-1, an objective staff summary of the proposal and property.

ADDRESS: 892 W BOSTON BOULEVARD (EDWARD FISHER RESIDENCE)

MEETING DATE: 03-11-2026

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2026-00039

SCOPE: INSTALL POOL, LANDSCAPING

ADVISORY STAFF REPORT PREPARED BY: E. THACKERY

STAFF OBJECTIONS TO APPROVAL:

This first section describes itemized conclusions/concerns, which, in staff's professional opinion, would prevent the issue of an unconditional Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). "None" means staff has no objections and believes a COA is warranted, with no conditions. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

1. Product size specifications for the proposed replacement gas light fixtures are not provided, preventing their assessment for compatibility.
2. The proposed cleaning product and process for the masonry cleaning and repair is not sufficiently detailed to confirm that proposed is the gentlest approach, or that the proposed mortar will match the historic.
3. The historic curbing on both sides of the drive is not confirmed to be preserved in place.
4. For the rebuilding of the service court wall, a clear photo of the sample replacement material against the existing material is necessary and has not been provided.
5. The proposal to replace pavers with exposed aggregate concrete (with some limestone banding) for the terrace around the south water feature and for the long terrace along the west wall, both at rear, would change the appearance, texture, and materials significantly from the historic landscape plan featuring discrete pavers to a monolithic concrete. The proposed work would alter and destroy historic, character-defining features, including but not limited to the hardscape, terraces, and paths, that are the work of a nationally important landscape architect and that are critical to the retention and preservation of the property's historic character.
6. Similarly, the proposed location of the swimming pool with aggregate concrete surroundings in the center of the historically formal paved plan, and the removal of pavers for an expanded concrete terrace, destroy historic elements and alter features and spaces that characterize the property. The existing elements (including paved terraces and paths) represent distinctive features, finishes, and craftsmanship that characterize this historic property and currently exhibit a high degree of historic integrity.
7. Overall, and contrary to the district's Elements of Design, which note that surviving landscape plans for residences may have significant landscape features, the proposed alterations to the rear yard in their entirety substantially and negatively impact the

original landscape designer's arrangement of pavers, terraces, and paths highlighting features (such as shrubs, trees, fountains, and walls) that were historically organized in formal, geometric ways to integrate the yard with the Italian Renaissance house and its architectural details.

8. No final design is included for the replication of the stone south water feature and for the restoration of the north fountain with the lions base.
9. Not enough information is available concerning the rear landscape alterations. A landscape inventory conducted by a landscape architect or arborist is necessary to assess whether any existing tree or shrub installations are part of the original landscape design. Such original and character-defining design features, where present, must be retained or preserved to maintain the property's historic character.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

This second section expands on the reasoning and analysis leading to staff's conclusions given in the first section above. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

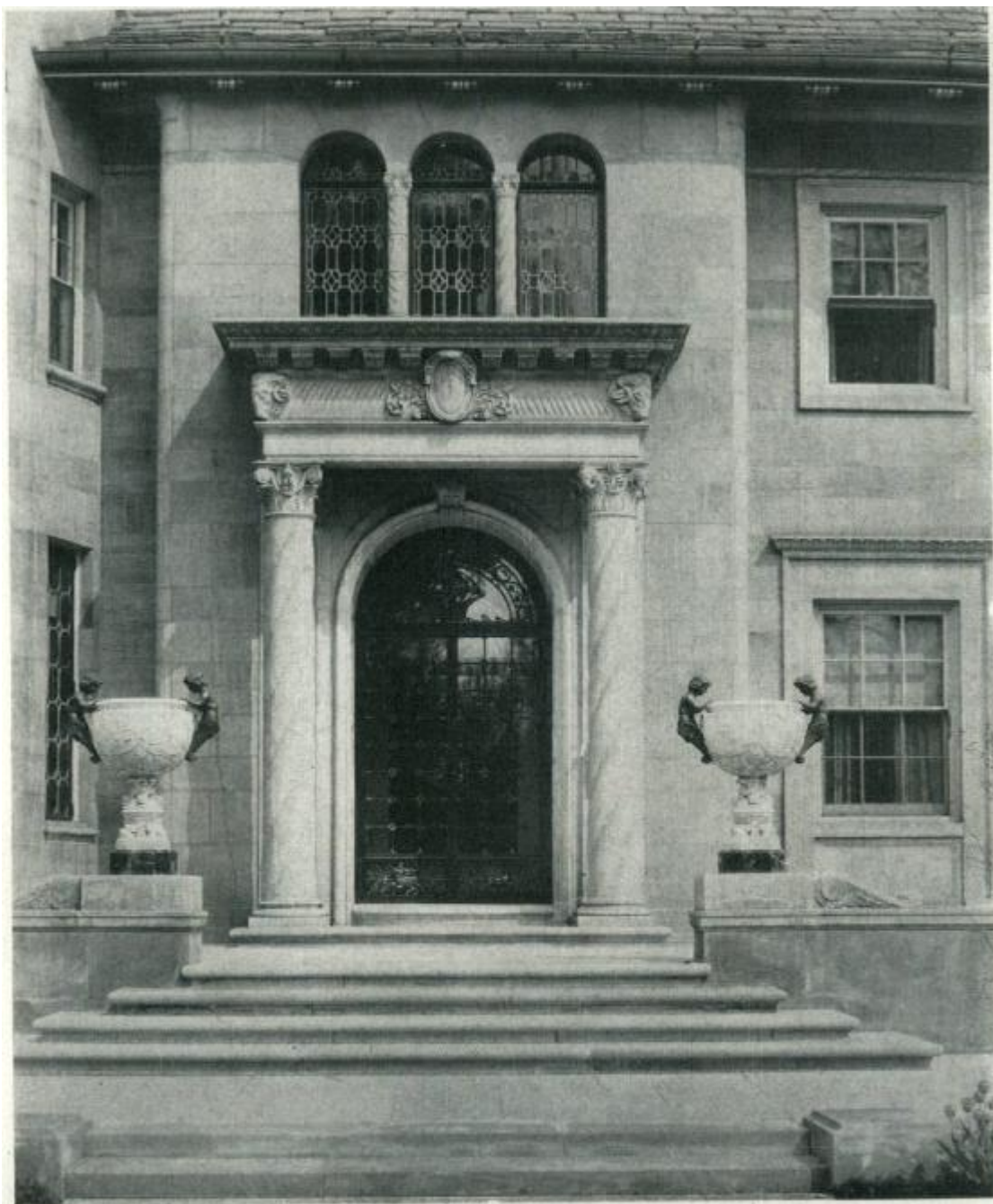
- The design team for this property included architect Richard Marr and landscape architect Bryant Fleming. Fleming (1877-1946) was a prominent landscape architect and remains nationally renowned. He specialized in landscape designs for country estates, and his client list included Andrew Carnegie (Lenox, MA), William Scripps (Orion, MI), Alfred Fisher (Detroit), and Avery Coonley (Riverside, IL), among many others.
 - Fleming was also a co-founder of the landscape architecture program at Cornell University, and he served on the faculty for many years.
 - When he passed away, his obituary was published in the *New York Times*, and The Cultural Landscape Foundation has a dedicated webpage recognizing him as a Pioneer in the field of landscape architecture.
 - He has an entry in the National Park Service's *Pioneers of American Landscape Design II: An Annotated Bibliography* (1995).
 - He was a practicing architect as well, and was retained as both architect and landscape architect for many projects including the Wesson Seyburn residence in Detroit, several estates in Nashville, and lumber baron Robert Carrier's residence in Memphis, TN.
 - Locally, as the landscape architect, he designed many yards and grounds for prominent residents in Detroit and Grosse Pointe, including both Alfred and William Fisher (and Edward Fisher of course), E. H. Butler, and B. E. Taylor, all of Detroit; Henry Burns, Roy D. Chapin, and Roy Chopin, all of Grosse Pointe; and Albert Stahelin of Bloomfield Township.
- The original landscape plans and blueprints for 892 W Boston have not been located by staff (many of Fleming's plans and blueprints are held at Cornell University, but this commission is not among them). However, historic photos included in the application show that the hardscape, terraces, and sightlines that Mr. Fleming planned remain. Some of his plantings may remain as well, but staff could not verify that.
- The Edward Fisher Residence was featured in *The Architectural Record* in February 1926, and the photos from that article show that the property retains a high level of integrity.



RESIDENCE OF EDWARD F. FISHER, ESQ., DETROIT, MICHIGAN

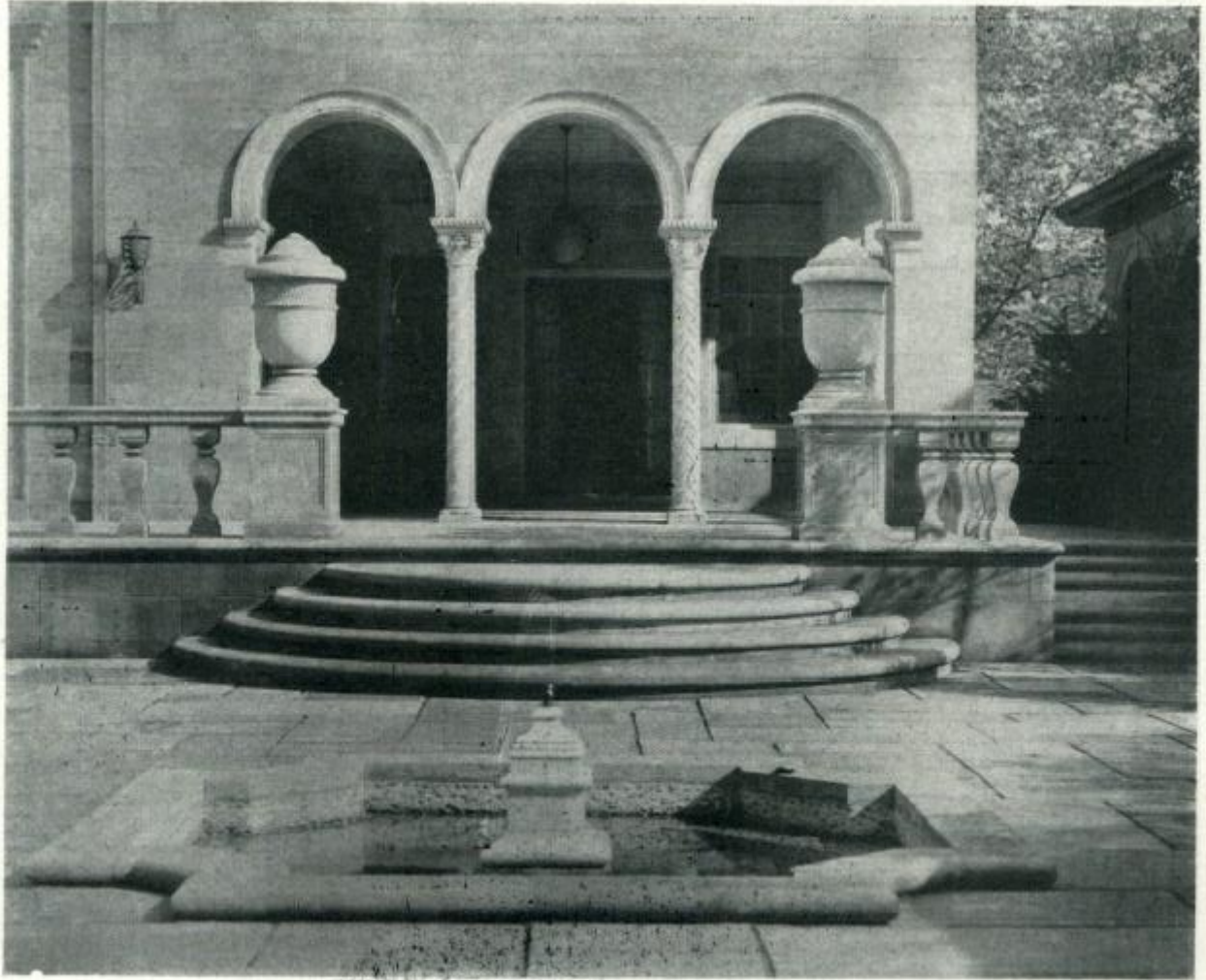
Richard H. Marr, Architect
Bryant Fleming, Landscape Architect

The house, featured in The Architectural Record (February 1926). The house remains the same. The shrubs have changed (evergreens are in their place) and the urns on the front terrace have been replaced.



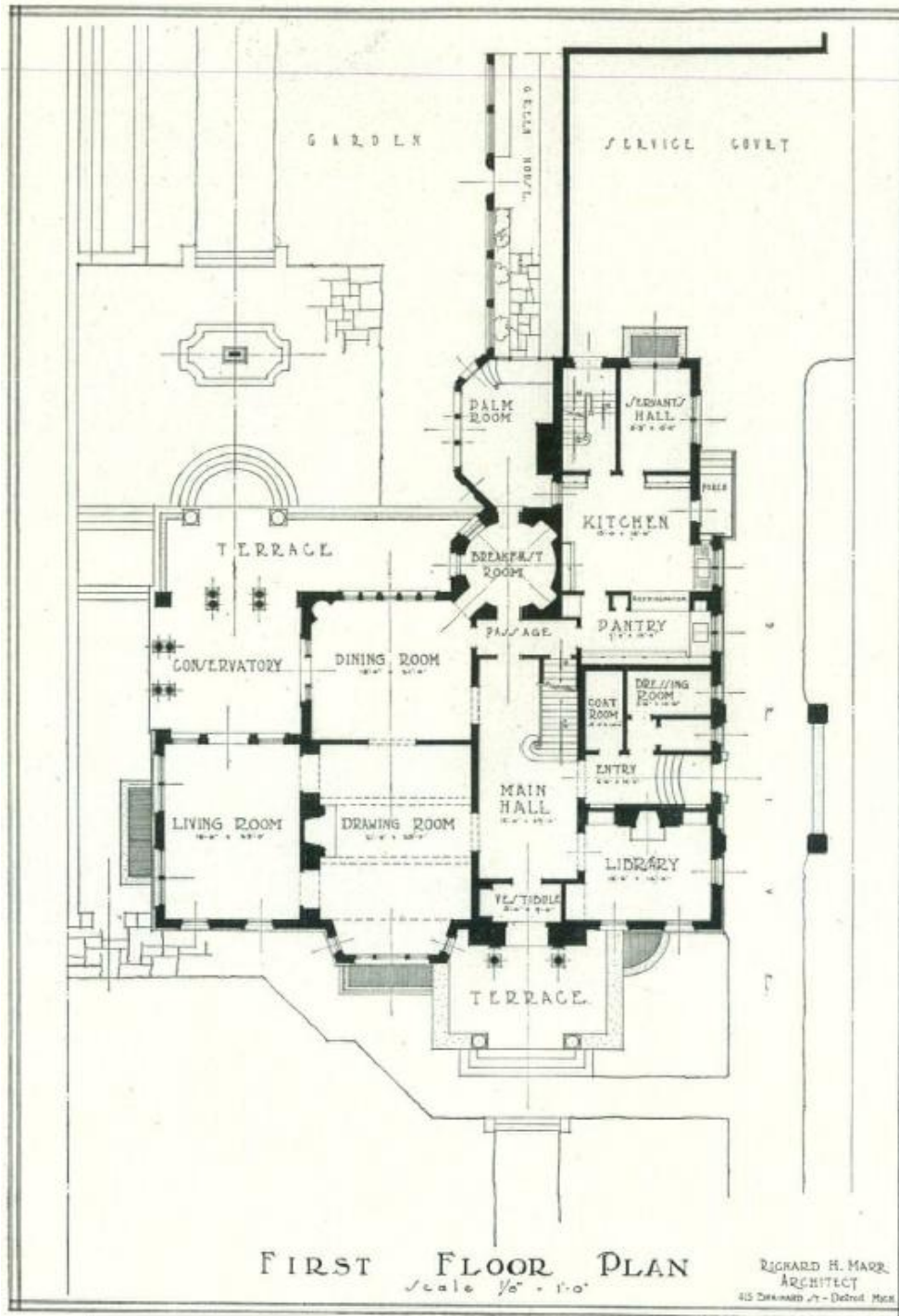
RESIDENCE OF EDWARD F. FISHER, ESQ., DETROIT, MICHIGAN
Richard H. Marr, Architect

The house's entrance and front terrace and steps. All of the features shown remain intact other than these urns, which have been replaced. (The Architectural Record, February 1926)



RESIDENCE OF EDWARD F. FISHER, ESQ., DETROIT, MICHIGAN
Richard H. Marr, Architect

Rear of the house (north end), terrace, and south water feature. The round arches to the sheltered porch just outside the conservatory remain as shown, but doors have been installed between them to enclose the porch. The limestone fountain has been replaced by a more decorative fountain with a sculpture and bowl on a base, but the simpler limestone fountain shown here is proposed to be replicated and reinstalled. The limestone terrace and steps remain, and the pavers have been replaced with pavers. (The Architectural Record, February 1926)



First-floor plan as shown in the February 1926 Architectural Record. The south water feature is shown, and the rear terrace, steps, south water feature, and paved path to the north water feature (north of this plan) create an axis and an intentional view. Shown is a greenhouse that connected the palm room to the garage. That connector has been removed, but staff has not been able to determine when. Also shown is the service court, small kitchen porch, porte-cochere, drive, and front entry walk. These spaces are all included in the proposed scope of work.

- The proposed scope of work includes the following items.
- **Replace front entry walkway**
 - **Proposed:** Remove existing concrete and pavers.
 - Install new exposed aggregate concrete in the same width as existing.

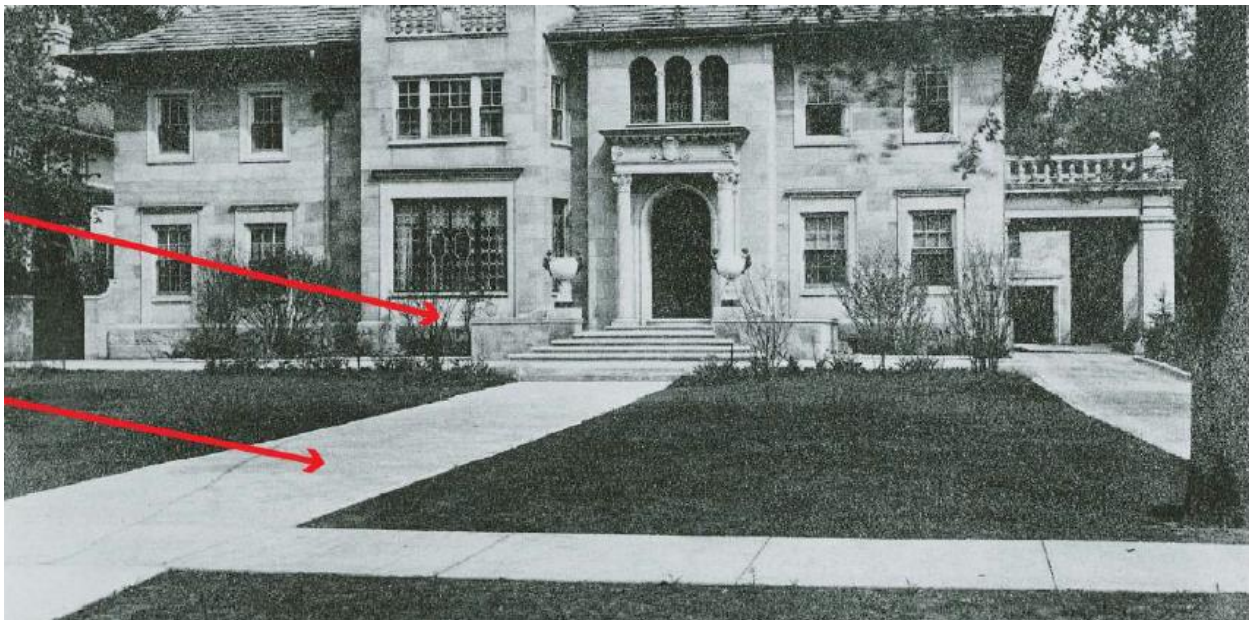


Current Photo



Historical Photo

From applicant's materials. The existing dyed concrete and paver combination is shown on left. In the historic photo to the right, the entry walk looks like concrete, similar to the public sidewalk, but it is difficult to discern the material with certainty. The drive was brick in historic photos.



Detail of historic photo above. The front entry walk appears to have a long crack in it down through the sidewalk, which indicates to staff that it was concrete or stone and not brick pavers like the drive.

- **Staff Response:** Staff finds that the proposed concrete installation on the front entry walk is a restoration of a missing feature, meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.
- **Replace front yard lanterns on poles**
 - **Proposed:** Remove existing gas lanterns (installation date unknown)

- Install new gas light poles and lanterns. The selected product styles were included in the application. The selected poles and lanterns are available in different sizes, however, and the sizes of the selected products were not indicated.
- The lights look of historic age but they are not original. The applicant stated that the existing fixtures could not be restored. Proposed are similar posts and gas lanterns to be installed in the same location as existing.
- **Staff Response:** Staff does not find these existing fixtures to be historic, character-defining features. As long as the replacement fixtures are of an appropriate size, scale, and proportion to the house (as the existing fixtures are), the proposed post and lantern styles are compatible with the historic house, staff finds. The proposed materials are cast aluminum posts and copper lanterns.
- **Clean and restore front yard/entry/courtyard walk flatwork, steps, porch, walls, piers, curb**
 - **Proposed:** Power wash, apply Klenztone masonry cleaner, brush, rinse with powerwasher. No additional details about brush types or cleaning procedures were provided.
 - Broken pieces replaced in kind
 - Replace broken limestone curb with like limestone curb
 - **Staff Response:** The National Park Service's *Preservation Brief 6* discusses the dangers of abrasive cleaning and it notes that water at a high enough pressure can be abrasive. Instead, the *Brief* recommends low-pressure water and a natural (NOT wire) brush to clean masonry and stone. It also notes that masonry and stone can be damaged by chemical cleaners. The Klenztone website describes that this chemical cleaner is available in four formulations and the Klenztone 4 is the gentlest. It also states that a patch test is required. The active ingredients in the cleaner are not identified. *Preservation Brief 6* recommends low-pressure water and soft natural brush cleaning or steam cleaning as gentlest means to clean stone and masonry. It states that chemicals can be used as a third more powerful (but also potentially more dangerous) cleaning option, but must be used with extreme caution because of potential damage to the stone, and chemicals require an inconspicuous test patch. Staff also notes that any mortar that will be used in the repairs must be softer than the stone or masonry and must match color, composition, hardness, and texture of the historic mortar.
- **Remove driveway and service court brick. Lay new base, re-lay bricks between sidewalk and porte-cochere, and widen drive. Replace service court surface with concrete.**
 - **Proposed:** Drive will remain same width at the street as it is currently, and will widen by 3' 4" up the drive toward the porte-cochere
 - Bricks for widening will come from the service court in front of garage
 - Pour new exposed aggregate concrete for the service court
 - Porte-cochere and its gates remain as they are; re-laid bricks will continue to be the surface under the porte-cochere
 - **Staff response:** Currently, the drive remains a consistent width along its length from sidewalk to porte-cochere. Once through the porte-cochere, the driveway begins to widen and by the house's rear wall, the service court reaches from the service court wall east to the property line, and from the kitchen porch steps to the front wall of the garage. There is currently a slight curve to the drive, along the front lawn, and this proposal keeps the curve on the west edge of the drive next to the house and lawn, but eliminates the curve on the east edge of the drive. Flattening this curve allows the driveway to widen 3' 4" from the beginning of that curve to the porte-cochere to 12' 8". Staff estimated the widths of 12 nearby driveways on both sides of W Boston between Hamilton and Third,

and all but four measured between 8 and 10 feet wide. Two were 11' wide, one was 12' wide, and the driveway next to 892 (Berry Gordy's residence) measured 15' wide. (The 1960s house across from Berry Gordy's residence has a very suburban form with a two-car garage and a wide, modern subdivision-type driveway that is atypical for the neighborhood, so it was excluded from this study.) 892 W Boston Boulevard's current driveway width is average for the neighborhood, and widening it to almost 13' makes it the second-widest on this block. It is staff's opinion, however, that the impact of the widening would be lessened by the fact that the drive wouldn't widen beginning at the sidewalk; instead, the new eastern curb would start where it is presently and it would stretch to meet the outer (eastern) edge of the porte-cochere. As long as there are enough salvaged bricks to use for this scope item (or matching bricks could be sourced) and the brick pattern remains the same, staff finds that this work (re-laying bricks and widening the drive) is compatible and meets the Standards. Boston-Edison's Elements of Style Element 13 states that "Straight side driveways leading from the street to rear garages are the norm..." and that "These driveways are paved in asphalt, concrete, or brick." Staff assesses that the brick driveway with its curbs is a very visible, historic feature.

- Staff finds that, behind the house, the historic, character-defining landscape features are the terraces, paths, sightlines, water features and any plantings that Fleming designed. Because those are separated by a historic wall from the service court, and because the service court is not visible from the street, staff finds that the service court is secondary in historic importance to the rear landscape and to the drive south of the porte-cochere. It is true that Fleming designed the service court to be paved with bricks to match the drive, but the service court's paving surface is not visible from the rear character-defining features or from the front of the house. As a result, staff does not find the service court's surface to be character-defining. Staff further finds that paving the service drive in exposed aggregate concrete would be compatible with the house and would meet the Standards, and, as stated directly above, Element of Design 13.

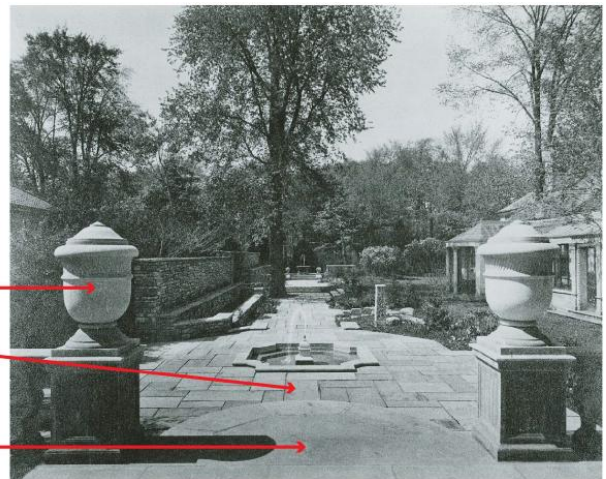


Google street view image from November 2024 that shows the historic brick drive with curbs and slight curve into the porte-cochere. The 2026 staff site visit photos do not show this feature well because of snow cover. The proposed new drive would align with the outer edge of the porte-cochere and follow a straight line south to the sidewalk.

- **Front of house, side porch: replace concrete porch and steps with concrete and repair existing rail.**
 - In an email 2/26/26, applicant explained that the railing will be removed with the concrete cap removal and then reinstalled upon concrete pour.
 - The application describes this side porch as being at the front of the house, but the small side porch is off the kitchen toward the rear of the house on the driveway side.
 - As long as the replacement concrete matches the existing, this like-for-like scope item is maintenance.
- **Rear yard, service court wall: remove, rebuild and reinforce using matching stone.**
 - As long as only material that is beyond repair gets replaced, and as long as the replacement stone is a good visual match and the mortar and joints match the historic, this scope item is maintenance.
- **Install a new metal gate to match the perimeter fence between the service court and the yard**
 - Staff assesses that this addition/alteration will be minor and will be compatible with the historic house and the historic, character-defining features in the yard, meeting the Standards.
- **Rear yard, upper terrace: wash, repoint existing upper terrace patio and steps**
 - Power wash, apply Klenztone masonry cleaner, brush, rinse with powerwasher (no additional details were provided)
 - **Staff response:** Please see the earlier comments about applying *Preservation Brief 6* to this situation. The gentlest means possible to clean the material should be employed to begin. Powerwashing and chemicals can damage historic materials. New mortar must match historic.
- **Rear yard, transition terrace: Remove concrete and brick and replace with exposed aggregate concrete and limestone banding**



Current Photo



Historical Photo

Photos from application materials. Current photo on left and historic photo on right. These views show some of the most important, character-defining elements in this rear yard designed by Fleming, including the terrace and pedestals (still intact), shallow fountain in an octagon border, pavers around the octagon (replacement pavers), west wall, and continued axial path with pavers to north water feature.



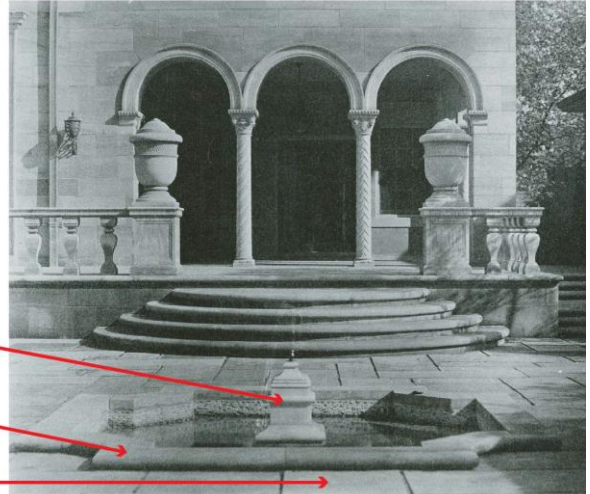
Proposed exposed aggregate concrete (sample) with limestone banding to replace the concrete and brick pavers around the octagon fountain.

Staff response: Staff finds that the terraces with pavers, from the upper terrace to the north water feature and framed by trees, are central design elements in this work by significant and nationally renowned landscape architect Bryant Fleming. Large pavers were planned and installed, and they have since been replaced with smaller pavers and bricks; still, staff finds that the historic, character-defining elements remain and should be preserved. If the existing pavers and bricks are beyond repair, the pavers should be replaced in kind or, more faithful to the Guidelines, restored to their former appearance. Staff does not assess that changing the pavers to exposed aggregate concrete with limestone bands as shown in the sample above meets the Standards. Staff does not find that the proposed matches the existing in size, scale, color, texture, or materials.

- **Rear yard, transition terrace: Remove existing fountain sculpture and bowl from existing fountain and replace with replicated limestone fountain from historic photos.** (South water feature)



Current Photo



Historical Photo

- **Staff response:** The current fountain is not original to Mr. Fleming’s plan, and staff found no information suggesting that the existing sculptural fountain and bowl have acquired significance in their own right. Consequently, staff finds that removing the current fountain and replicating and restoring a missing significant feature to install instead would be encouraged by the Standards (6) and Guidelines.
- **Rear yard, masonry wall along west side: wall will remain. Terrace would greatly expand.**
 - Plant evergreens behind wall, restoring a missing feature, and keep historic statue in its location. These actions meet the Standards and Guidelines.
 - Pavers alongside this wall are to be removed and replaced with exposed aggregate concrete for pool decking and pool. Additionally, the proposed entertainment terrace would be much wider than the historic terraces and path to the north water fountain are.
 - **Staff Response:** Staff recognizes Mr. Fleming’s design with the paver terraces to the north fountain as significant, historic, and character defining, and as a result, removing the long terrace and greatly changing its design does not meet the Standards, specifically Standards 2, 5, and 6.
- **Install contemporary swimming pool in front of west masonry wall.**

**Proposed Pebbletec Interior Pool
Finish – French Gray**



Proposed pool products, from applicant materials.

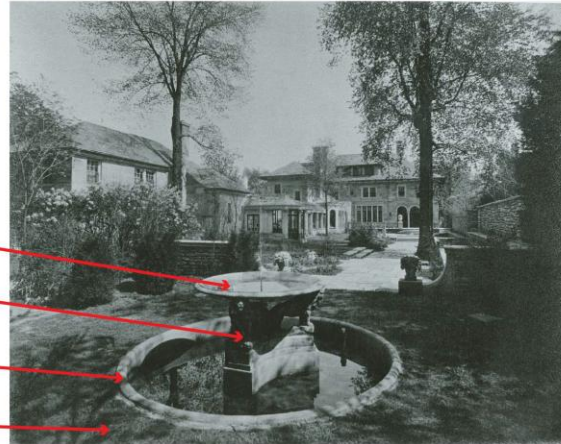
- **Staff response:** Staff finds that the terraces and axial path paved with geometric pavers, along with the west wall of uncut stones, are all significant, historic, character-defining features of this designed landscape and that the landscape features tie the Italian Renaissance house to its site. Mr. Fleming’s use of shrubs and trees, water features, walls, and pavers in formal, geometric ways organize this lot and integrate the yard with the Italian Renaissance house and its architectural details.
- Removing the pavers on this terrace, widening it, and replacing the pavers with concrete and a modern swimming pool would interrupt the axial path the landscape architect designed, and would significantly depart from his plan and diminish the formality and intention of the plan. The result would be the alteration of features and spaces that characterize this property. Consequently, it is staff’s opinion that the modern addition of a swimming pool in the proposed location conflicts with Standards 2, 5, and 6 in this case. Further, the proposed replacement of materials with exposed aggregate concrete would not uphold Elements of Design 7, 8, 10, and 14.

Rear yard, north water feature/fountain with lions base

- Applicant confirmed in an email (2/26/26) that the plan is to retain the lions base as long as the base is structurally stable, and install a new Haddonstone bowl as specified in the application
- In the specifications included with the application, the bowl is shown on a pedestal, but the bowl can and would be purchased separately.



Current Photo



Historical Photo

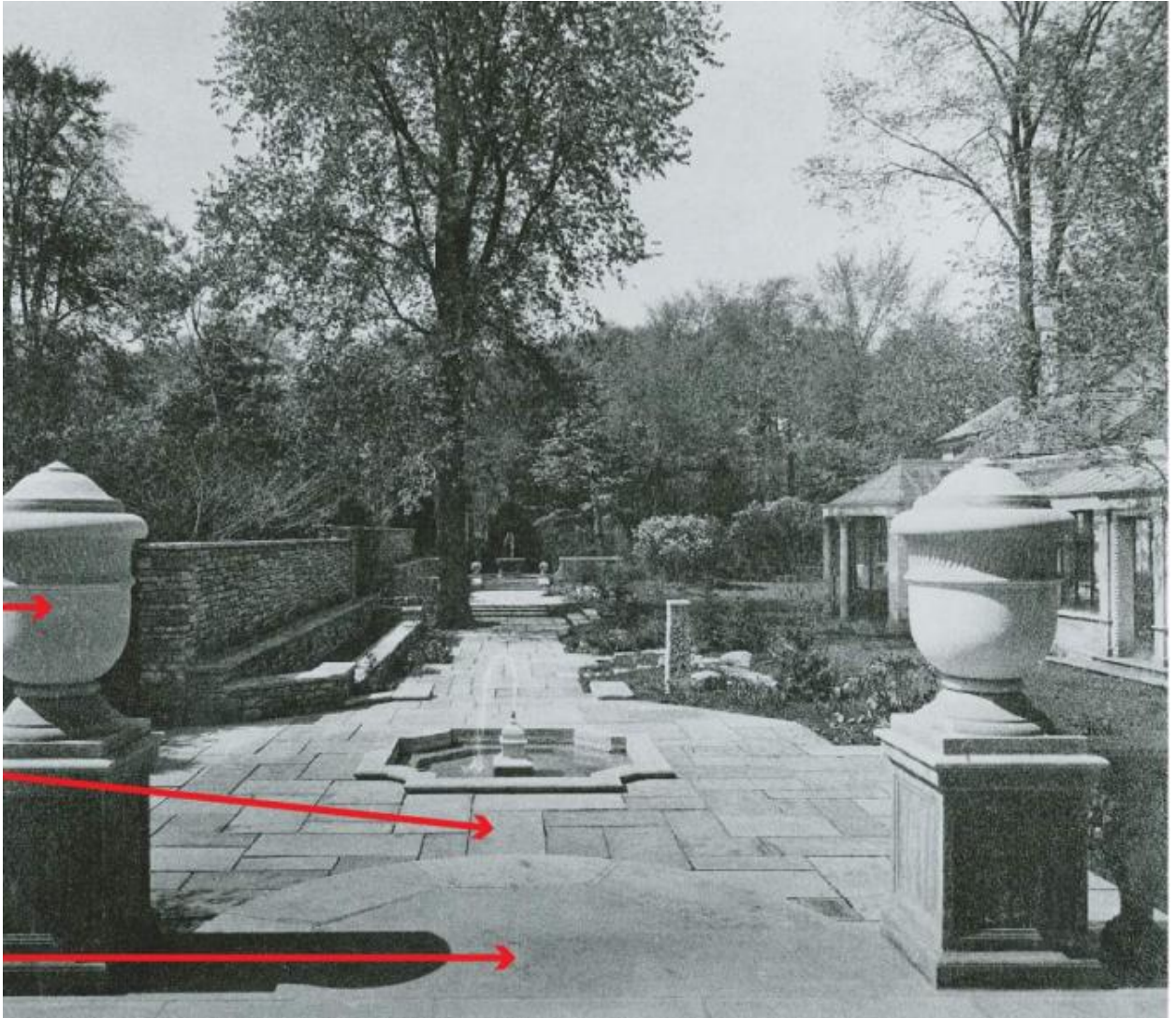


The bowl only (no pedestal) is proposed to replace the current broken bowl on top of the lions base. Then, the plan is to restore the fountain to working order.

- **Staff response:** Restoration of both water features is important to Mr. Fleming’s vision for the space and the design he implemented. The original bowl was shallower and simpler.
- **Repair perimeter fence and limited replacement like for like.**
 - **Staff response:** This would be considered maintenance.
- **Install gas fire bowl on the exposed aggregate concrete terrace near pool.**
 - **Staff Response:** This would be a fairly minor work item. Staff believes that the bowl itself is compatible with the massing, size, and scale of the historic house and yard, but staff notes that its location is proposed to be on the expanded terrace that staff finds does not meet the Standards. (As described at the bottom of page 12, staff finds that removing the pavers on the terrace in front of the west wall, widening the terrace, and replacing the pavers with concrete and a modern swimming pool would interrupt

the significant, axial path the landscape architect designed.)

- **Install new outdoor kitchen.** This, too, would be a fairly minor work item. Staff believes it meets the Standards and Guidelines because it would be differentiated from the historic materials, but it would be compatible in massing, size, and scale with the historic house and yard, as Standard 9 requires.
- **Remove all spruces, maples, and a cottonwood at the rear of the yard. Replace with perimeter evergreen arborvitae.**
 - **Staff response:** An inventory is needed of the trees (and shrubs if any) proposed for removal, cross-referenced with historic photos showing the trees and shrubs that are planted per Mr. Fleming's historic design to ensure that historic landscape features are not lost.
- **Install a crushed stone path between garage and property line.**
 - **Staff response:** This maintenance path would be along the east side of the garage from the service court to the rear property line. It would not be visible from the house or backyard where the historic, character-defining features are because the garage and a bank of evergreens separate the historic features from this narrow path. As a result, staff finds that this proposed path does not impact historic resources and that it meets the Standards and Guidelines because the proposed work would not alter features or spaces that characterize the property, and it would not destroy historic materials that characterize the property.



The historical photo shows the trees at the rear of the lot in Mr. Fleming's design. Also shown are steps up to that higher section of land where the expanded terraces would be. Would the topography be retained or would it all be flattened? It looks slightly lowered in the current photo below. (Applicant's materials)



Applicant's photo shows trees present at the rear of the lot today. Staff does not know whether any of these are historic. An inventory of the trees to be removed cross-referenced with old photos of trees planted per Mr. Fleming's design is necessary.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

This third and final section takes staff's itemized "objections" identified in the first section, and presents them in the form of "conditions" in support of a proposed approval recommendation or "reasons" in support of a proposed denial recommendation, in the form required by Section 21-2-78 of the City Code. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

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

Recommendation 1 of 2, Denial: Replacement of bricks and concrete with exposed aggregate concrete and limestone banding on transition terrace in rear yard; remove pavers, expand terrace in front of west wall in rear yard, and install exposed aggregate concrete; install pool in front of west wall in rear yard

Staff recommends that the proposed work to replace bricks, concrete, and pavers with exposed aggregate concrete on both the transition terrace and the long terrace in front of the west wall in the rear yard; the expansion of the terrace in front of the west wall; and the installation of a swimming pool in front of the west wall in the rear yard 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 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.*
- Elements of Design 7, 8, 10, 13, and 14

For the following reasons:

1. The proposal to replace pavers with exposed aggregate concrete (with some limestone banding) for the terrace around the south water feature and for the long terrace along the west wall, both at rear, would change the appearance, texture, and materials significantly from the historic landscape plan featuring discrete pavers to a monolithic concrete. The proposed work would alter and destroy historic, character-defining features, including but not limited to the hardscape, terraces, and paths, that are the work of a nationally important landscape architect and that are critical to the retention and preservation of the property's historic character.
2. Similarly, the proposed location of the swimming pool with aggregate concrete surroundings in the center of the historically formal paved plan, and the removal of pavers for an expanded concrete terrace, destroy historic elements and alter features and spaces that characterize the property. The existing elements (including paved terraces and paths) represent distinctive features, finishes, and craftsmanship that characterize this historic property and currently exhibit a high degree of historic integrity.
3. Overall, and contrary to the district's Elements of Design, which note that surviving landscape plans for residences may have significant landscape features, the proposed alterations to the rear yard in their entirety substantially and negatively impact the original landscape designer's arrangement of pavers, terraces, and paths highlighting features (such as shrubs, trees, fountains, and walls) that were historically organized in formal, geometric ways to integrate the yard with the Italian Renaissance house and its architectural details.

Recommendation 2 of 2, Certificate of Appropriateness: Remaining work items

Staff recommends that the proposed remaining 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:

1. Product size specifications for the proposed replacement gas light fixtures will be submitted to staff for final review and approval.
2. A detailed plan for masonry and stone repair and cleaning, employing the gentlest possible approach, will be submitted to staff for review and approval.
3. The historic curbing on both sides of the drive must be preserved in place.
4. For the rebuilding of the service court wall, as much historic material will be reused as possible and applicant will provide staff a clear photo of the sample replacement material against the

existing material for staff review and approval.

5. Final designs will be submitted to staff for review and approval for the replication of the stone south water feature and for the restoration of the north fountain with the lions base.
6. A detailed landscape inventory conducted by a landscape architect or arborist will be submitted to staff that assesses whether any existing tree or shrub installations are part of the original landscape design. Such original and character-defining design features, where present, must be retained or preserved to maintain the property's historic character.