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April 27, 2023

Detroit Historic District Commission
2 Woodward Ave., Suite 808
Detroit, Mich. 48226

Dear Members of the Detroit Historic District Commission:

My husband, Karl, and I are coming before you to discuss two matters relating to our home at 7840 Van Dyke Place in the West Village of Detroit. But first, we'd like to provide a little bit of context.

We purchased this house almost ten years ago, in June 2013. When we took possession, this house had been vacant for nearly a decade and stood open to the elements thanks to numerous broken windows. The yard was overgrown, and it looked more like a lost cause than someone's future home.

The previous owners of this property held it briefly, hoping to be able to oversee a full renovation and make this house their home. They went before the Historic District Commission in July 2012 and got permission to move forward with their dreams. Unfortunately, as many people can relate, they were not able to put together the funds to move forward. It was unfortunate for them but fortuitous for us.

We hired Calvin Garfield of Maxwell Construction to do the work, and together we came before this honorable body in October 2013 to get permission for a few variations on that original project proposal. For example, we determined the rear "bumpout" was original and were able to save it rather than demolish it, as the previous owners had intended. (And had been approved by the HDC.) We also collaborated with staff to select the roof shingles, the cedar shingles for the dormers, the fencing, paint color for the doors and soffits and other details.

It was a long process, but we finally wrapped up renovation Spring 2015. Well, phase one, at least. We always knew that we'd need to come back here to address our garage, which was already sinking and buckling when we bought the property, and the screened back porch, which was demolished during renovation. (With permission.)

For the past year we've been meeting with an architect to draw up plans for the garage and the screened back porch, with the hope of coming before you this spring for those projects.

Instead, we're here for different reasons. In early April, we received a "notice of work observed" letter questioning our windows, the cedar shake shingles on our dormers, the paint treatment, and the "garage removal." It was definitely upsetting to get such a letter nearly a decade after we embarked on this project. A project that we've been so careful about in both our restoration and in our commitment to working through the process with the HDC. I've written publicly about my support for historic districts and the importance of their work in holding our past and future together. So this felt, honestly, like an attack on all that we had done, especially coming out of the blue so many years later.

But the staff and I were able to clarify that we had permission for our windows – historic, wood 6-over-1s from Kelly – and that the paint color on our doors was approved by staff because we chose one of the pre-approved colors for our type of house. That leaves two outstanding issues. I will address each below.

Garage Removal

On the morning of September 21, 2018, I woke up and looked out the window to discover something was amiss. My first thought was: Who stole our roof? The entire roof of our garage had fallen into the structure, like a collapsed soufflé. By the end of the day, one of the walls was starting to come down.

At that time, the city was actively issuing blight tickets in our neighborhood, and we were advised to address the issue before we received one. Additionally, we didn't want our neighbor, Cynthia, to look down on the eyesore. So we quickly called contractors and had what remained of the structure removed.

Honestly, we didn't think we needed to contact the HDC before starting the work because we thought we had already secured permission. We were under the impression that the garage demolition was a part of our October 2013 proposal to the commission. We weren't able to provide architectural drawings for a new garage at that time, but we thought we had requested permission to remove it so that we were all-set when we were ready

We were in error and should have checked in with the HDC before moving forward. But we thought we were doing the right thing, at the time, by immediately and aggressively addressing any potential blight.

I have attached a photo of what the garage looked like when we purchased the property and on the morning of the roof cave-in.

Shingles & Cedar Shake on the Dormers and East Elevation Bump Out

When we bought the house, the roof was in desperate need of replacement, as were the cladding on the dormers, which were then covered in several layers of poorly installed asphalt shingles. Our contractor, Mr. Garfield, met with Jennifer Ross to discuss our project, including the use of asphalt shingles on the roof and determining the best option for re-cladding the dormers. For the shingles, a dark gray or brown shingle was deemed acceptable by Ms. Ross. Additionally, she suggested that

cedar shake would be the most historically accurate for the dormers, and Mr. Garfield agreed. So we moved forward with a dark grey shingle and the cedar shake.

Additionally, Mr. Garfield determined that we could save a “bumpout” on the east elevation, which the previous owners had gotten HDC approval to remove. But rather than covering it with asphalt shingles, we proposed to clad it in the matching cedar shake.

To our understanding the shingles and the cedar shake on the dormers and the bumpout were all approved by staff in 2013 as part of our shingle selection. We know this from an email that Mr. Garfield sent to use, dated July 5, 2013. (It is Exhibit Six at the end of this letter.) Regardless, we ask that you issue explicit approval today.

I have attached photographs of the cedar shake today and the house as it was when we bought it.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We hope to be before you soon for better reasons: moving forward on, finally, rebuilding the porch and garage.

Best,

Amy Haimerl and Karl Kaebnick
7840 Van Dyke Place

Exhibit One: Garage in June 2013



Exhibit Two: Garage On September 21, 2018



Exhibit Three: Dormer with Asphalt Shingle, 2013



Exhibit Four: Cedar Shake Being Installed on Dormers, 2013



Exhibit Five: Cedar Shake on Dormers, 2023



Exhibit Seven: Cedar Shake on Bump Out



Exhibit Six: Email from Cal Garfield

From: **Treadstone Ltd.** <treadstoneltd@yahoo.com>

Date: Fri, Jul 5, 2013 at 2:24 PM

Subject: Historic District Commission Approvals.

To: Amy Haimerl <amy.haimerl@gmail.com>, Karl Kaebnick <karl.kaebnick@gmail.com>

Amy and Karl,

Good news. We had a lengthy and productive meeting with Jennifer Ross of the Historic District Commission this morning with good result. She gave us staff approval "go ahead" for several items that will not require any review or approval from the whole commission. These are as follows:

1. We are approved for window color.

2. We are approved for basket weave panels.
3. We are approved for keeping the wing (the "bump out").
4. We are approved for new asphalt shingles that are either "brown" or "grey" (the existing shingle is a type of brown while the document slide they have on the house has a medium grey shingle). This means we are free to select from a range of browns and greys, thereby going in the direction of either wood or slate. We are not free, without application to the commission, to go to "extreme" interpretations of these colors. So, black and white are out with respect to "grey" as dark brown or really light "yellowish" would be for brown.
5. The document photo shows asphalt shingles on the sides of the dormers, but Jennifer agreed that these would not have been original to the house when first constructed. Jennifer opined that the dormer sides would probably have been cedar shingles, slate or perhaps even a clay tile. I suggested that cedar made the most sense as (1) slate would only have been used on the sides if it was also used on the roof; and (2) the rest of the neighborhood is predominantly cedar, not slate (no clay tile).
6. We are approved for removing the existing exterior lath and stucco and the one story porch per the original plan.

Now, the not-so-good news.

(7) The commission only meets once a month. The next available opening isn't until 11 September. I've asked to be put on the schedule, and that we be moved up to any opening that might be created by a cancellation. While it's possible that we could wait until September to get approval on the brick, we can't wait for a decision on roof related issues. I was hoping/planning to install cedar shingles on the dormer sides, and "correct" the framing defects existent at the wing which would include (a) extending the eaves detailing and (b) building a pitched roof to match the dormers. If we're to make those changes, we need to do it at the beginning of the roof repair/replacement, not added on later. Jennifer agreed that these corrections made complete sense and would not likely be opposed by the commission, but said she isn't authorized to make that approval on her own. Worst case scenario: we make the changes and face a fine later if opposed by the commission. Jennifer's comment was "Just do a good job, and you're probably going to be just fine."

(8) The commission wants us to include your long-term plan for a deck/porch as part of our submission for brick. You can leave this alone now, but you can't proceed without specific approval. So, if you know what you want to do, we should get it approved now and you could build it whenever you want to later without having to go back to the commission again.