

**SUMMARY OF PETITIONER'S APPEAL AND REPSONSE TO DETROIT HISTORIC  
COMMISSION'S DENIAL**

1. The Notice of Denial issued by the Detroit Historic District Commission lacks context surrounding the condition of house in the present day. The existing house has seen major changes, modifications, alterations, and failed rehabilitations which have *not* been in alignment with the Secretary of the Interior Standards. Many of these changes have adversely affected the overall appearance of the Queen Anne style architecture in general. In particular, the loss of the front porch, the loss of the front door entry assembly, the deterioration of the side porch, the addition of a non-historic rear porch, and the installation of vinyl windows have all affected the Queen Anne appearance of 264 Watson. (See Exhibit P-2 and P-4)
  
2. The owners/petitioners are requesting latitude on how the unique features of the Queen Anne style are re-integrated onto the house. There are many reasons why the owners believe this is justified. First, it is justified because the Brush Park Historic District was created in 1971. All of the above modifications were made to 264 Watson, after the establishment of the Brush Park Historic District. With the loss of such major, architectural elements on house's exterior, with or without the approval or knowledge of the historic commission, there is no exact information on how the house once and/or originally appeared. We do not have records or detailed information regarding the appearance of the front porch or the front door entry for the original house. Only visual cues remain, such as:
  - a. The elements of the side porch, e.g. handrails, posts
  - b. Photos showing a transom above the front door instead of the large door which exists now

3. Furthermore, the wrap-around porch is a very typical element of Queen Anne style houses. While it is not mandatory for a Queen Anne style house to have a wrap-around porch, it is more common than not. Many houses of this era – in this neighborhood and other neighborhoods of the same era – have houses with wrap-around porches. (See Exhibit P-3 and P-5)
4. The owners are asking for a small, simple addition to the existing house, done in a *historically sensitive* manner. The owners are *not* asking to install an inappropriate architectural element or style onto the house – only a historically appropriate porch, designed with the elements inspired by the existing side porch. The owners want to celebrate the Queen Anne style in all its wonderfully eclectic and decorative design. The reason that the owners are considering this alteration to the original design of the house is because the house was so radically altered by:
  - a. The removal of the front porch;
  - b. The inappropriate construction on the rear of the house;
  - c. The painting of the historic red brick;
  - d. The painting of the original limestone;
  - e. The installation of vinyl windows
5. Additionally, the surrounding context of the neighborhood, and in particular, this block of Watson Street, is important to consider when analyzing the owners' request. Watson Street was once a densely packed urban environment of houses of varying styles when the neighborhood was established. Back in the 1920s, the street was maintained in a dense, residential configuration. During the decades following World War II, the neighborhood began a precipitous decline to such an extent that only four houses remain of what is believed to have originally been around 25 distinct, residential homes. All of the houses remaining have had alterations and modifications

over the course of their existence. Moreover, the City of Detroit has created a park directly adjacent to the western property boundary of the house, which dramatically alters the original appearance of the historic neighborhood. And on top of that, multi-family apartment and condominium developments have been planned and approved by the City of Detroit. 264 Watson is being held to a higher standard than any of these other homes in the neighborhood.

6. Far too often, the City of Detroit has permitted these historic homes to be demolished as the easy, expeditious way of removing blight. It has been far too easy in the past to say, "Let's just knock it down." The owners have chosen to go through the more difficult and arduous route of preservation and restoration – even if that means confining the family's needs to the footprint of the existing house. The only exception to that is the request for the wrap-around porch.
7. Moreover, the owners would be remiss to not address the issue of climate change in the context of the house and the property. We live in a radically different world than when the house was constructed. While today we have air conditioning to facilitate the cooling of the house interior, the use of more passive elements – such as porches – are a highly effective and less energy consuming solution than simply retreating indoors and turning on the air conditioning. The owners love the placement of the house on the property, which provides both useable front and rear areas for recreation within the property bounds.
8. The owners hope to have a family some day. The owners view this proposed addition as an outdoor gathering space, with the ability to have meals outside, as it would be directly connected to the kitchen. In a time of social isolation, misinformation, and

less community involvement, the owners view this space as a way to directly engage with neighbors and the community at large. Instead of isolating outdoor time to the backyard, the owners see the addition as a way to easily and informally engage with neighbors and passersby. The petitioners hope to be active members of Brush Park and Detroit as a whole. Porches are a wonderful way to gather and socialize with others in the neighborhood.

9. The Owners are humbled and honored to be able to care for and restore this house. Every decision and every request is being made with the utmost respect for the history of the house, and for the City of Detroit. For these reasons, the Owners are dedicated to putting in the hard work to preserve the appearance of the house rather than leave it as is. They are committed to removing the paint on the masonry, putting in wood windows, and putting on a roof with the appearance of the historic period. The Owners also intend to follow the same preservation and restoration route on the interior of the house, where the historic elements remain.
10. Lastly, the Owners wish to clarify a point regarding the vinyl windows cited in the Notice of Denial. During the public hearing with the Detroit Historic Commission, the Owners agreed with the Historic Commission's findings that the existing vinyl windows – even though they were installed and part of the house when it was purchased in 2024 – should be removed and replaced with historically appropriate wood windows. We understand this work was done by others without the Historic Commission's approval. While this removal and replacement of the existing vinyl windows will require considerable expense, the Owners agreed in the course of the public hearing that they would be agreeable to replacing the vinyl windows.

## Standards for Rehabilitation with Comments related to the Property

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces and spatial relationships. **We are in compliance with this requirement.**
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided. **This historic character of the property has been dramatically and forever altered prior to the purchase of the house by the new owners.**
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken. **With the existing side porch so damaged in the present condition that it needs to be taken apart and it is already had major changes made to it, the home owners are simply want to put a larger porch back instead of the smaller porch that remains..**
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved. **This house has lost historic elements that should have been preserved. We are proposing to retain the portion of the existing side porch elements and reuse them in the larger porch.**
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved. **The proposed porch addition will use the same materials and techniques in its construction.**
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used. **For the paint removal, this is exactly what we are doing, gentle means which don't damage the underlying masonry**
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken. **Does not apply to this property**
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment. **Previous owners have already removed the majority of the original historic elements related to the porches. We are not proposing to destroy historic features and remove them, simply enlarge the existing porch while reusing all the elements that remain.**
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will 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. **This would be the case. If the porch were removed at a future date, the remaining house would still retain its essential character.**

The Queen Anne style, popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (especially around 1880-1910), is known for its eclectic and decorative approach to design. The style is a subset of the broader Victorian architecture and is often associated with a sense of ornate beauty and variety. Here are the key elements that make Queen Anne houses unique:

### **1. Irregular Rooflines**

- One of the most defining features is the roof, which is usually asymmetrical and often includes a mix of gables, turrets, and dormers. These varied rooflines create a dynamic, almost sculptural silhouette.

### **2. Towers and Turrets**

- Queen Anne homes often feature a prominent, rounded or polygonal tower, usually at the corner of the house. These can vary in height and shape and may be capped with a conical or octagonal roof. The tower adds a whimsical, castle-like quality to the design.

### **3. Decorative Trim and Ornamentation**

- The style is known for its rich detailing, including intricate woodwork, patterned shingles, and ornamental brackets. The trim around windows, doors, and corners often includes decorative patterns like scrollwork, floral motifs, or other geometric designs.

### **4. Asymmetrical Facade**

- The layout and facade are deliberately irregular. There's no emphasis on symmetry, which was quite a departure from the more classical, symmetrical designs that preceded the Queen Anne style.

### **5. Varied Textures and Materials**

- Queen Anne houses frequently combine different materials, such as brick, stone, wood, and stucco. The use of textured shingles (like fish-scale or diamond-shaped patterns) on the upper floors is also typical.
- The variety of materials gives a rich, layered look that adds to the visual interest.

### **6. Large Porches**

- The front porch is often a prominent feature, with wide, wraparound designs that may extend across one or more sides of the house. The porch is typically supported by decorative columns, and sometimes features intricate railings or spindles.

### **7. Bay Windows**

- Large, multi-pane, and often protruding bay windows are common, helping to break up the facade and provide a more complex form. These windows may have decorative window treatments or stained glass.

## **8. Stained Glass and Leaded Glass**

- Many Queen Anne homes feature decorative stained glass or leaded glass windows, often with floral or geometric patterns, especially in transoms or sidelights next to the door.

## **9. Exaggerated Ornamentation**

- The Queen Anne style embraces embellishments like spindle work (vertical, turned wood details), scrollwork, and often intricate detailing on the eaves, gables, and even along the walls.

## **10. Large, Expansive Design**

- Queen Anne homes are often large, with sprawling floor plans that include multiple stories and wings. The floor plans tend to be complex and irregular, often with spaces like grand entryways or multiple living areas.

## **11. Colorful Exteriors**

- While not universal, many Queen Anne houses are painted in bold, contrasting colors, using different shades for the trim, shingles, and body of the house. This color scheme helps to highlight the architectural details.

In summary, Queen Anne houses are marked by their asymmetry, ornate detailing, and eclectic use of materials. They tend to convey a sense of playful elegance, with a focus on intricate craftsmanship and artistic flourishes. The style was a reaction against the simpler, more restrained designs of earlier periods, embracing an almost whimsical approach to design.

### **Bibliography Information:**

Here are some sources that provide detailed information on the Queen Anne architectural style, its origins, and key elements:

### **Books:**

1. **"American Victorian Architecture"** by Gerald L. Foster
  - This book offers an overview of Victorian architecture, including the Queen Anne style, exploring the various architectural elements and historical context behind the designs.

2. **"Victorian Homes: A Pictorial History of America's Most Beautiful Houses"** by Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins
  - This work provides an extensive look at Victorian homes, including the Queen Anne style, with a wealth of visual references and analysis of architectural features.
3. **"The Queen Anne House"** by P. A. C. (Patricia Ann) L. Meckel
  - This book delves specifically into the Queen Anne style, discussing its evolution, key features, and examples of prominent houses built in this style.
4. **"A Field Guide to American Houses"** by Virginia Savage McAlester
  - A highly regarded resource for understanding different American house styles, including Queen Anne, with clear explanations of architectural details and variations in design.
5. **"The Architecture of the American Summer: The Dune Houses of Northern Michigan"** by Robert M. Schaeffer
  - Although focused on summer homes in Michigan, this book discusses how the Queen Anne style influenced American residential architecture, especially in the late 19th century.

### Articles:

1. **"The Queen Anne Style: Its Origins and Characteristics"** – *Architectural Digest*
  - This article offers a deep dive into the origins of the Queen Anne style, breaking down its key characteristics and its place within the broader Victorian movement.
2. **"The Queen Anne Revival and the American House"** – *National Trust for Historic Preservation*
  - This article examines the rise of the Queen Anne style in America, particularly its revival during the late 19th century, and its impact on residential design.
3. **"Understanding the Queen Anne Style"** – *Old House Journal*
  - A comprehensive guide to identifying Queen Anne houses and understanding the key elements that define the style.

### Websites:

1. **The National Park Service (NPS)** - *Architecture of the Victorian Era*
  - The NPS has a number of resources and historical context surrounding the Queen Anne style as part of their documentation of historic American buildings: [National Park Service](#).
2. **The Victorian Society in America**
  - Offers information on the history, preservation, and significance of Victorian-era architecture, including Queen Anne homes: [Victorian Society in America](#).
3. **Historic New England**
  - This site includes resources about the architectural styles prevalent in New England, including the Queen Anne style: [Historic New England](#).

These sources should provide you with a comprehensive overview of the Queen Anne architectural style.



January 27, 2024

City of Detroit Historic Commission  
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City of Detroit Law Department  
2 Woodward Avenue, Suite 500  
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RE: Existing Porch Condition

To Whom It May Concern:

Please find attached a summary of the existing side porch located at 264 Watson Street, Detroit, Michigan. I have included a set of detailed photographs with identifying notes documenting the existing conditions of the present porch.

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In summary, I have noted the following:

1. The porch floor and supporting structure are not original. They are constructed of 2x, exterior grade lumber with 5/4 deck boards. The porch steps are also new and of the same construction.
2. I have serious concerns regarding the framing for the porch floor for the following reasons
  - a. Joist hangers were not used
  - b. Toe nailing of structural members are not an approved method of construction, the toe nailing has left nails exposed to the elements causing them to rust.
  - c. Additional "supports" were glued to the masonry to support the deck flooring structure.
  - d. It is unclear how the two sides of the porch framing are attached to the brick masonry
  - e. The supporting brick masonry corner pier is made of new brick and mortar and it is not plumb. It is not clear what foundation, if any is supporting this member.
3. What appear to be "original" posts and pilasters supporting the porch roof contain both new wood members simply nailed together and some "turned" portions of the columns constructed using a lathe. It is unclear how both pilasters are attached to the brick masonry wall and spray foam has been placed behind one of them.
4. The handrail and corner newel contain new 1x boards with spindles that may or may not be original.
5. The fascia surrounding the porch roof face is missing elements with some being replaced with new 1x boards. Some elements are missing exposing the porch roof members to moisture and decay. The full extent can only be determined by removing the porch roof underlayment to expose the structure.

*continued*

6. There are a number of "brackets" supporting the protruding fascia which may be original but many are missing based on the spacing of the brackets remaining.

7. It appears water has entered the roof as ceiling boards are showing buckling and damage.

8. There is evidence that the flashing at the roof membrane to the brick was either installed improperly or inadequate as separation can be seen.

As a licensed architect, in my professional opinion, this structure has a number of major and minor deficiencies, when view together make the porch structurally unsound as a whole. To fix these deficiencies requires the entire porch to be disassembled and rebuilt to proper building codes.

The structural issues, coupled with the very evident new construction members and techniques, the porch floor, and structure, the handrails, and the other miscellaneous elements makes it quite clear little of the original porch remains.

Please see the attached photos with commentary which explain this summary in greater detail.

Sincerely

John P. Biggar, PA, AIA, NCARB

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The pilaster is separating from the wall and is not attached properly to support the roof above



These steps are not original or historic. They are painted, pressure treated, exterior grade 2x members



The new post cap and ornament are not original

The new top/cap rail of the porch rail is not original. These are standard 1x members

These bricks are not original to the house, these are standard common bricks available today. They are mortared together with high strength grout which is used in today's masonry construction.





This fascia board is not original to the porch

The corner post has a number of wood pieces tacked together to create a "cover." We are unclear what is actually supporting the corner post beneath these applied

Some of the exposed tails on the roof members have decay and rot

The mercury vapor light is not original





These are typical, modern 5/4 deck boards that have been painted, these are not original.

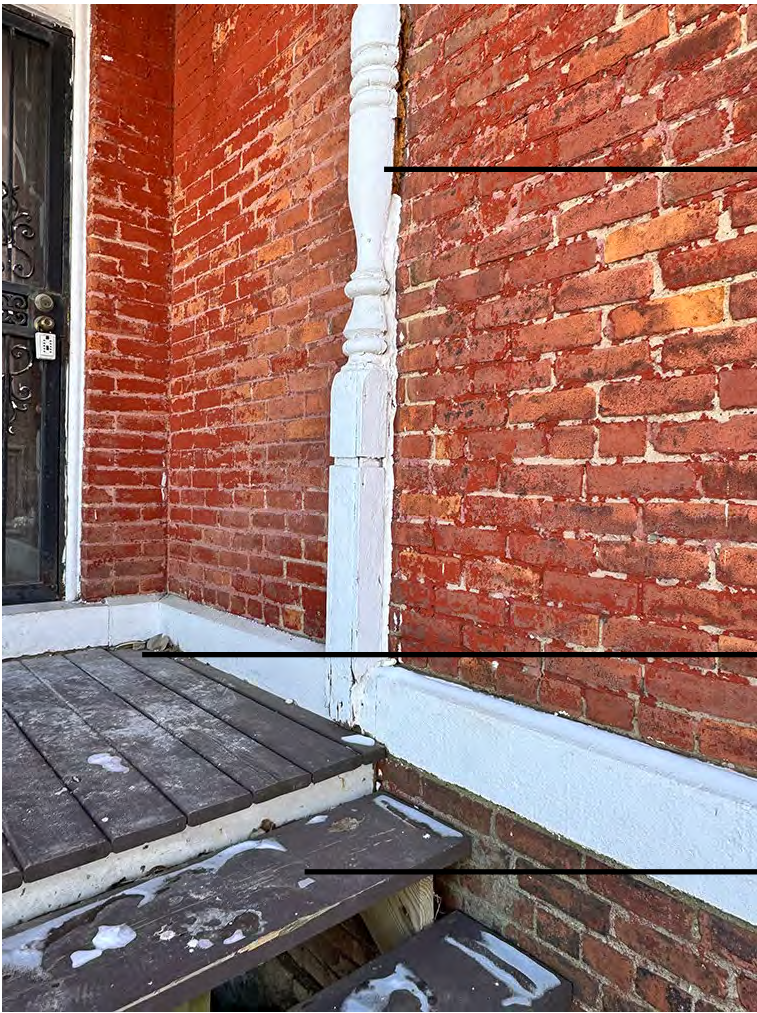
This is a modern, exterior grade 2x that has been painted white

The masonry pier, besides being constructed of new brick and using modern high-strength grout has a significant lean, it is not plumb. It is unclear if this has a proper frost depth foundation.

It is not clear if the spindles are original or new

The bottom portion of the corner post is made with modern 1x members nailed together. We are not clear on the structural soundness and integrity of the corner post





The pilaster is separating from the wall and is not attached properly to support the roof above

These are typical, modern 5/4 deck boards that have been painted, these are not original.

These steps are not original or historic. They are painted, pressure treated, exterior grade 2x members. You will note the steps are unequal riser height

The brackets may or may not be original, certainly a number of them are now missing

The decorative members between the posts have significant separation and gaps between them. We are not clear that they are structurally attached together in a code compliant manner

The porch ceiling has a number of buckled boards indicating water has been absorbed





Separation and deterioration of the fascia boards remaining, some parts of the fascia are missing. Improper drip edge for the roof causing moisture to destroy the fascia board

The porch structure is modern, exterior grade 2x members. No joist hangers were used as required. It is unclear how the "rim board" is attached to the brick masonry.







Structural “supports” have been “sil-  
iconed” or “construction adhesive”  
to the brick masonry. No where  
close to meeting simple structural  
requirements or building code.

Nails were “toe-nailed”, usually un-  
successfully with much of the nail  
exposed to the surface causing the  
rust shown.





This is the front porch for reference, showing the same techniques used on the rebuilt side porch which is now in place, 2x structural members, 5/4 deck boards, 2x top cap rail

While there is some commonality between the front facade and the side porch, for example, the same brackets are used to support the protruding fascia, all of the structural construction and their individual structural members have been removed or altered significantly on both porches





EXHIBIT P-5



EXHIBIT P-5



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