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**[EXTERNAL] Sandhya Berk's Letter**

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**From** Derek Berk <derekberk@gmail.com>

**Date** Wed 6/11/2025 12:39 PM

**To** Jennifer Ross <rossj@detroitmi.gov>

Dear Members of the Detroit Historic District Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. We're here to respectfully request approval to replace the failing roof on our family home at 141 W. Boston Blvd. using a historically compatible but more affordable material. This request is based on the deteriorated condition of the roof, the cost-prohibitive nature of original tile replacement, and the urgent safety, emotional, and financial impact the current situation is having on our family.

This home has been in our family for **nearly 50 years**. My parents, both dedicated Detroit Public School teachers, raised six children in this house and sent all six of us through college. It's where they lived out their lives and passed peacefully. It is more than just a structure—it is our family's legacy. We made a promise to my wife's mother before she passed that I would care for and protect this home. That's what we're here to do.

## **1. From Patchwork to Crisis**

We started, like many homeowners, with patchwork repairs. But since we've become owners in the last 6 months we've had major water leaks and in this short time we're paid for repairs 3 times which haven't held up. All the roofing contractor have told us the same thing: *"This patching isn't possible anymore. You need a complete replacement."* Then they would walk away. The tiles are so brittle that even just walking on the roof causes breakage. No one is willing to touch it. We are out of options.

Most recently days before the city shut down the patchwork, we were responding to a **severe leak** that was rapidly damaging the interior of our home with water raining into the second floor bedroom. We want to be clear: **we did not intend to circumvent the Historic District Commission**. Our only goal was to protect our home quickly from further water intrusion and worsening structural damage. It no longer made sense to attempt another patch when the ENTIRE ROOF SYSTEM IS FAILING. We are now coming to the Commission in good faith to request approval of a practical and visually compatible solution.

## **2. Danger, Damage, and Daily Fear**

Every time the wind blows, we lose tiles. They fall and shatter—damaging our patio masonry, denting cars, snapping patio umbrellas, crushing flowers, and endangering

anyone walking near the house. We're deeply concerned for the safety of our child. We also worry about the very real legal liability if someone is injured by falling tile. Inside the home, every rainstorm brings water into multiple areas, leading to ceiling stains, rot, and the threat of mold. The roof is no longer just a maintenance issue—it is a safety emergency.

### **3. Unlivable Conditions and Stalled Restoration**

We cannot begin any other repairs—interior or exterior—until our roof is replaced. We're living out of boxes, unable to paint or sand the floors, and can't restore basic comfort in the home. We're stuck in limbo. This process is emotionally exhausting. I'm under so much stress that my wife's hair is literally falling out. This is keeping us up at night. We bought out my siblings so we could make this our permanent home, but right now, it doesn't feel like one. It's hell for our family. We just want the chance to make this house livable, safe, and worthy of the love that's gone into it for generations.

### **4. COVID Setbacks and Missed Opportunities**

Just for context. During the pandemic, when my mother was in her 80s and still living in the home, regular maintenance became impossible. Contractors were unavailable, and small roof issues became larger ones. The situation spiraled, and now we're trying to address years of compounded damage.

### **5. Our Mother's Burden and Documentation of Repairs**

My mother was a **widowed since 2001** and lived in the home on her own for many years. She tried to replace the roof, but the Historic Commission at the time was **adamant that only repairs and patching be done**, rather than allowing a full replacement. The process became too overwhelming for her to manage alone, and the roof continued to deteriorate. We now have a **stack of receipts documenting the constant financial burden she faced**, having paid for **hundreds of patches and repairs** over the years. Despite her persistence and best intentions, the problems only grew worse, and we are now dealing with the full consequences of that long period of temporary fixes.

### **6. Clarification on Submitted Photos**

We also want to respectfully clarify a misunderstanding in the review of our application materials. The Commission's preliminary comments referenced our submitted photos as evidence of *past repairs*. However, these photos were actually submitted to document the **current poor condition and advanced deterioration** of the original tile roof—such as cracked, missing, and crumbling tiles. They were not intended to reflect successful maintenance, but rather to show why repairs are no longer viable.

### **7. Thoughtful, Compatible Material Selection**

Both my husband and I work in the **film and television industry in the Art Department**, with extensive experience in **design, architecture, set dressing, and color matching**. We fully understand the importance of visual consistency and historic integrity. That's why we

**painstakingly researched the most historically appropriate and high-performing roofing alternative** to honor the home's character.

After reviewing numerous options, we selected **CertainTeed Grand Manor in "Sherwood Forest"**—a premium asphalt shingle that offers the closest match in both tone and texture to the original tile roof. In fact, we found it to be even more visually accurate than the premium Ludowici tile samples, which were significantly lighter and wider than our existing tiles. The Grand Manor shingles offer durability, curb appeal, and safety—without the fragility or cost burden of clay or slate.

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## **Conclusion and Request**

This is not just about a roof. It's about honoring a legacy, keeping a family safe, and restoring a home that holds generations of love, sacrifice, and Detroit history. We are committed to doing this the right way—with care, with respect, and with a genuine desire to preserve the spirit and appearance of this historic property. But we cannot do that unless we're allowed to take a practical step forward.

We respectfully ask that you approve our request to replace the roof using **CertainTeed Grand Manor shingles in "Sherwood Forest"**—a historically compatible, safe, and cost-feasible solution. We are open to continued collaboration on any design or material concerns the Commission may have to ensure a result that respects and reflects the home's architectural heritage.

Your approval would allow us to stabilize the house, protect it from further harm, and fulfill the promise I made to my mother: to care for this home, protect its legacy, and pass it on—strong and standing—to the next generation.

Thank you for your time, compassion, and commitment to Detroit's historic communities.

Sincerely,

Derek and Sandhya Berk

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