

PLEASE REVIEW BEFORE HEARING

Response to HDC Staff Recommendation

Date: November 7, 2025

To: Detroit Historic District Commission

Re: Appeal of Staff Recommendation – Application #HDC2025-00639

Property: 949 Chicago Blvd, Detroit, MI (Boston-Edison Historic District)

Applicant: Andre Williams

Subject: Appeal of Staff Recommendation and Clarification Regarding Rear Wing Rehabilitation

Dear Members of the Historic District Commission,

I respectfully submit this appeal to the staff recommendation of denial regarding the proposed rehabilitation of the rear two-story sunroom at 949 Chicago Blvd. The intent of this letter is to clarify the chronology of the structure's evolution, outline the preservation basis for the work performed, and demonstrate compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Boston-Edison Historic District's Elements of Design.

1. Chronological Context

- The main residence was constructed circa 1916; original stamped 1913 blueprints.
- The rear sunroom/porch was originally open at the ground level.
- By the 1950s, appraisal photographs document a screened-in lower level with a fully enclosed second story.
- The sunroom enclosure, completed well before the district's historic designation, is therefore a pre-designation condition—not an original historic feature of the 1913 design.
- The enclosure had been present for over five decades, forming part of the property's long-standing appearance and functional use.

2. Structural Condition and Rationale for Rehabilitation

By 2017, the sunroom had suffered extensive deterioration, including roof failure, compromised framing, and water infiltration threatening the integrity of the main house. The structure was not feasible for repair in situ. The work undertaken was a stabilization and in-kind reconstruction, not a stylistic alteration or demolition for expansion. Water infiltration had become so significant that the upstairs bedroom closest to the sunroom had

become unsafe, and it was clear that no interior renovation of the main house could occur until this issue was remediated. Key modifications—including a 9/12 pitched roof, slightly adjusted recessed wall line, and window replacements (casement to double-hung)—**were implemented to prevent further deterioration and to bring the rear elevation into architectural alignment with the main structure.** Reconstruction of the sunroom is also in design and architectural alignment with the garage that was recently built as approved by the HDC 23-8476.

3. Consistency with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

#2 – Retain and preserve historic character: The work retains the form, materials, and function of the long-standing rear wing. **It does not alter or remove any 1913 historic materials. In fact, exterior molding from the original building has been salvaged and will be restored to preserve this key historic design feature.**

#3 – Avoid false sense of history: No conjectural features or borrowed stylistic elements were introduced; the design references only this property's historic photos and original plans.

#4 – Preserve changes that acquired significance: The pre-designation sunroom/porch enclosure was preserved through in-kind reconstruction, acknowledging its mid-century evolution.

#5 – Preserve distinctive craftsmanship: Where salvageable elements existed, they were matched in dimension and finish; new materials replicate the original appearance in stucco and trim.

#6 – Repair rather than replace when feasible: Replacement was necessitated by advanced deterioration and structural compromise, supported by photographic and physical evidence.

#9 – Ensure new work is differentiated yet compatible: The pitched roof and proportion adjustments are compatible with the home's primary massing—meeting the standard's intent.

This work therefore constitutes a Rehabilitation under the Secretary's definitions, not a conjectural reconstruction.

4. Compliance with Boston-Edison Elements of Design

- Mass and Scale (Elements 3 & 6): The rebuilt section maintains the same overall footprint and scale relative to the main block.
- Materials and Texture (Element 7): Stucco and lap-siding finishes match historic precedent.
- Window Configuration (Elements 10 & 11): The new double-hung windows match the home's dominant fenestration pattern, improving consistency without mimicking unrelated structures.
- All materials mirror those that were approved as appropriate by the HDC for the construction of the garage – no new materials, textures, or colors have been introduced in the reconstruction of the sunroom.

The resulting design preserves visual continuity, enhances structural performance, and avoids any false sense of historical development.

5. Request for Consideration

Given the documented pre-designation origin, deterioration, and intent to protect the integrity of the main structure, I respectfully request the Commission's consideration and approval of the work at 949 Chicago Blvd. This rehabilitation adheres to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and to the purpose and intent of Detroit's preservation ordinance, Section 21-2-78.

The goal of this project has been, and remains, the long-term preservation of a contributing property within the Boston-Edison Historic District—consistent with both the community's standards and the Commission's mission.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful review.

Respectfully submitted,

Andre Williams
Owner
949 Chicago Blvd
Detroit, MI 48202

Timeline of Ownership & Structural Modifications – 949 Chicago Blvd, Detroit, MI

1. Historic Home Timeline, Ownership & Problem

- Stamped Blueprints 1913 (available upon request)
- Original construction: 1916
- Original design: Included an open rear ground level sunroom area — not enclosed in the original plans.
- Grandparent's ownership:
 - Resided: 1952
 - Land contract executed: 1954
 - Refinanced: 1959 (appraisal photos in staff report from this year show the screened-in sunroom (not enclosed) – see attached
- Enclosure was added between 1959–1969 (actual unknown).
- Alteration occurred before the area was designated historical.
- The sunroom structure experienced a high frequency of gutter failure between 1975 and 1997, necessitating replacement at least three times by my Grandmother (Mary Fanning). This was primarily attributed to poor drainage functionality stemming from the building's low-pitch roof configuration.
- Water issues led to the operational failure of the windows on both levels

2. Historic District & Authorization

- The Historic District designation occurred after the sunroom was enclosed.
- Preliminary authorization granted by HDC (DHDC 23-8476) for repairs and restoration of the main house in HDC Approval August 2023 garage build.
 - **authorization included approval for repairs and replacement to the main house, and it was under this authorization work on the sunroom was undertaken.**
- Documentation and photographs were submitted transparently to HDC.
- Sunroom work was performed as an **emergency** measure to preserve the structural integrity of the main home before further deterioration.
- Work was done in-kind, maintaining materials and appearance consistent with the main house and the newly constructed garage/ADU as approved by the HDC.

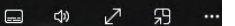
3. Recent Actions & Current Status

- Action taken under the understanding of preliminary authorization granted in DHDC 23-8476.
- Restoration actions addressed urgent structural concerns prior to winter and further decay.
- Supporting materials provided to HDC:
 - 1959 appraisal photographs showing non-enclosed ground level sunroom
 - Photos of video screenshots circa 1958-1965 (see attached)
 - **This timeline document and summary is for review prior to meeting.**
- **NO violations, citations or stop-work orders were issued by BSEED**
- Additional materials are being submitted in advance to ensure adequate time for HDC review and context understanding.

A vintage color photograph of a woman and a young child walking through a garden. The woman is wearing a light-colored dress and carrying a basket, while the child is in a light-colored outfit. They are surrounded by tall grass and flowers, with a house visible in the background.



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Ground-level deterioration



Differential Settlement Due to Freeze-Thaw Cycling



Structural Separation Caused by Differential Settlement



Salvaged Dentil Cornice for Reinstallation



Jacks placed to correct 3-4 inch sag





West elevation: Observed separation at the extension joint resulting from foundation instability

