

COMMENTS BY WILLIAM M. WORDEN ON PROPOSED INDIAN VILLAGE HOUSE

Indian Village Element 1, Height. The house clearly meets the height requirement, but does so with a central block only, so the portion of the house that meets the element is smaller than nearby historic houses.

Indian Village Element 2, Proportion of front façade. The façade is very wide, but its high center with lower wings in no way provides sufficient bulk to meet the element.

Indian Village Element 3. Met

Indian Village Element 4. Rhythm of solids to voids. Agree with staff assessment.

Indian Village Element 5. Rhythm of spacing: Agree with staff assessment.

Indian Village Element 6. Met

Indian Village Element 7. Relationship of materials. “Clapboard is rare” in the elements strongly suggests that clapboard is not appropriate. The staff’s assessment of the proposed artificial siding is correct, but the use of any form of clapboard is highly questionable. There only seven fully clapboard houses in the district, and that results in a percentage of about .019%, which can hardly be considered typical or common. In addition, there is a serious concern that approval of clapboard for this house, while probably innocuous in and of itself, creates a precedent that would almost certainly require the commission to approve clapboard houses in the future. (The commission is a quasi-judicial body and sets precedent for itself.) It would dramatically change the appearance of the district, especially at its north end, if all the vacant lots were built up with clapboard houses. As prices in the district have risen, new construction becomes more practical for those who do not wish to over-invest. Presently, avoidance of over-investing in a new house is difficult, and clapboard makes the house cheaper. That means that until the prices of existing houses rise to meet the cost of high-quality new construction, something that is likely years away, clapboard will remain a choice for economy if it is permitted.

It is worth noting that two early clapboard houses dating from the 1890s were very early covered in stucco, apparently to make them blend better with a district that was almost all masonry. Indeed, one of the clapboard houses shown by the staff in a photo would still be stucco today, save for a disastrous fire.

Indian Village Element 8. Relationship of textures. The use of clapboard, real or not, and asphalt roofing provides very little textural contrast compared to historic examples; this is because the proposal uses a very limited range of materials.

Indian Village Element 9. Relationship of colors. Met.

Indian Village Element 10. Relationship of architectural details. Given the size of illustrations in the staff report, it is difficult to see what details are intended. On the basis of images available, there is too little detail, as in the cornices, for example.

Indian Village Element 11. Relationship of roof shapes. General agreement with staff assessment, but... “Dormers are common,” state the elements of design. Surely what is common should be present, even if only one? The lack of any dormers will mark this house as a later insertion, as is the case in Berry Sub where the new houses erected after designation fail to blend, among other reasons because they lack this virtually universal feature of late 19th and early 20th century houses. The staff has offered eight photos of Indian Village houses in its discussion of this element and the only one of the eight without a front dormer is an inappropriate modern building built before designation.

Indian Village Element 12. Walls of continuity. Met.

Indian Village Element 13. Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments. Not met for lack of information. It has been stated that the tree to be removed for the driveway is an American Elm. If that is so, it is a rare survivor of the plague that destroyed the district’s wonderful rows of elms. A way should be found to spare it, since healthy American elms are rare and those that have survived might be material for disease-resisting hybrids.

Indian Village Element 14. Relationship of open space to structures. One could argue that the placement of a large pad for the garage at the side of the house creates an open space that does not relate to the house in an appropriate manner.

Indian Village Element 15. Scale of facades and façade elements. Not met. The center block is too small to reflect the bulk of the nearby historic houses and while the wings add breadth, they do not provide sufficient bulk. The design is clever, in that it uses the center block to achieve the required height, and the one-story wings to provide breadth. But this creates a façade that is completely uncharacteristic of the district. Neither the center block taken alone, nor the wings, would be appropriate in the district. Putting them together does not help. The staff has suggested flat roofs for the wings, expressing them as sunrooms, which would be characteristic of the district. But then the main block is too small.

Indian Village Element 16, Directional expression. Agree with staff assessment.

Indian Village Element 17. Rhythm of building setbacks: Met.

Indian Village Element 18: Relationship of lot coverage. Met.

Indian Village Element 19. Degree of complexity within the façade. The major elements of the design are appropriate; it is not possible to judge smaller complex elements from the plans provided.

Indian Village Element 20. Orientation, vistas, overviews. Agreement with staff. Incorporating the garage helps to meet the elements dealing with size and proportion, but the only attached-garage doors visible from the streets in the district are on more recent houses built before designation.

Indian Village Element 21: Symmetric or assymmetric appearance. Met.

Indian Village Element 22. General environmental charatcer. Agreement with staff asesment.

The Secretary's Standards do not approve of single-pane sash with fake divided lights, whether the dividers are flat or moulded. Why would this not apply to a new house as much as to an historic one, since the concern is the way the windows reflect? Highly efficient windows with true divided lights are available. The cost of those might be reduced by using divided lights in the upper sash and a single light in the lower sash. That formula is extremely common in the district's historic houses, including those of Colonial Revivial or Neo-Georgian character.

Mr. Worden is a past-president of the Historic Indian Village Association. He served the permitted nine years on the Board of Advisors of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and is an AAdvisor Emeritus. The Michigan Histoirc POrwservation Network elected hom Secretary for some years and he eventually served as Chairman. For almost thirty years, he served the City Council as Director of Historic Designation; in that role he wrote the Elemetns of Design for Indian Village.