

STAFF REPORT 09-22-2021 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 21-7480

ADDRESS: 2555 LONGFELLOW

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON

APPLICANT: LYNNE BRYANT (2545 LONGFELLOW)

OWNER: REGINALD BRYANT

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 08-27-2021

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 09-16-2021

SCOPE: INSTALLATION OF FENCE AT CORNER LOT (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is a vacant lot at the western limit of the Boston-Edison Historic District, at the southeast corner of Longfellow and Linwood. The parcel is now enclosed by a 6-foot wood fence built with standard dog-eared pickets, set back slightly from the sidewalk line. The fence breaks the historic setback line established by the houses along Longfellow and projects north to the edge of the right-of-way.



*View towards the east at 2555 Longfellow, at the western limit of the Boston-Edison Historic District.
Staff photo, September 16, 2021.*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

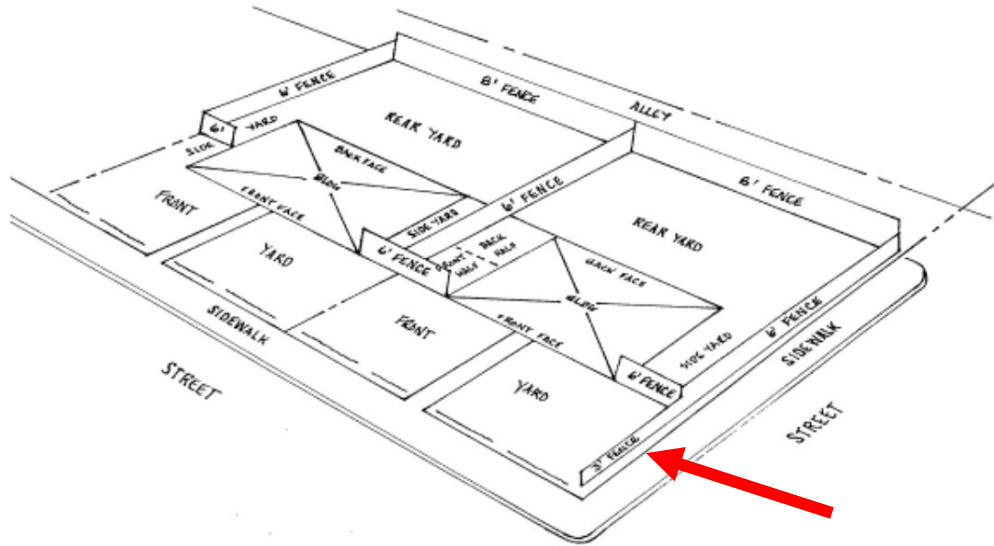
Per the submitted drawings, photographs, and narrative, the applicant proposes to legalize the fence built without Commission approval. The fence is 6' high, and runs approximately 58 feet westerly along Longfellow, then approximately 132' southerly along Linwood, and then easterly an undetermined distance (perhaps 80') to meet the rear detached garage of 2545 Longfellow. The fencing is composed of SelectCut "ColorPro" Pickets, which are a treated pine product factory pre-stained in an "earth tone" resembling cedar.



View of fence installation from Linwood, looking northeast Staff photo, September 16, 2021.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was established in 1973.
- The fence as erected violates the Commission’s Fence and Hedge Guidelines, which states that “front yard fencing is not allowed except on a corner lot and then only from the front face of the house on the side of the public right of way to the front walk.” The accompanying diagram illustrates this guideline, which additionally specifies that the fence run would be limited to 3’ in height (red arrow).



- Independent of the *extents* of the fence, the style and material of the fence is consistent with the Fence and Hedge Guidelines and appropriate to the district. The earth tone/cedar staining is not objectionable.
- As the Fence and Hedge Guidelines are a policy of the Commission, your body can make exceptions or overrule them if a particular case or application is deemed historically appropriate despite diverging from the Guidelines. Staff, however, cannot suspend or disregard the Guidelines.
- Though the Guidelines speak to fences on lots occupied by houses, the condition at a corner vacant lot adjacent to a row of historic houses would not and should not, in staff’s opinion, disrupt the prominent setback line created by the historic context. The intent of the fence guidelines, among other things, is to preserve historic vistas.
- Staff observes that the 6’ run of fencing projecting past the setback and then east along the Longfellow sidewalk does in fact disrupt the historic character and views of the district, such historic character being specifically noted in the following excerpted Elements of Design:
 - **Element #12, Walls of Continuity:** *The major wall of continuity is created by the buildings with their uniform setbacks within the blocks. New buildings should contribute to this wall of continuity...*
 - **Element #13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments:** *...It is characteristic for corner lots to have hedges or fencing at side lot lines along the sidewalk. There is a wide range in the type of fencing. Fencing within the public view was generally designed to complement the style, design material, and date of the residence...Side lots are not uncommon for the larger properties in the district...such side lots are usually landscaped and are often fenced at or near the setback line*
 - **Element #17, Rhythm of building setbacks:** *Because of the existence of various subdivisions and related subdivision and deed restrictions, setbacks vary from area to area within the district, although they are generally consistent within each block or area. The varying designs of the houses, occasionally with slight setbacks in the facades, cause the houses to relate to the front setback line in different ways. This creates a slight variation in the setback line. Nevertheless, within each block or area, a wall of continuity is created.*



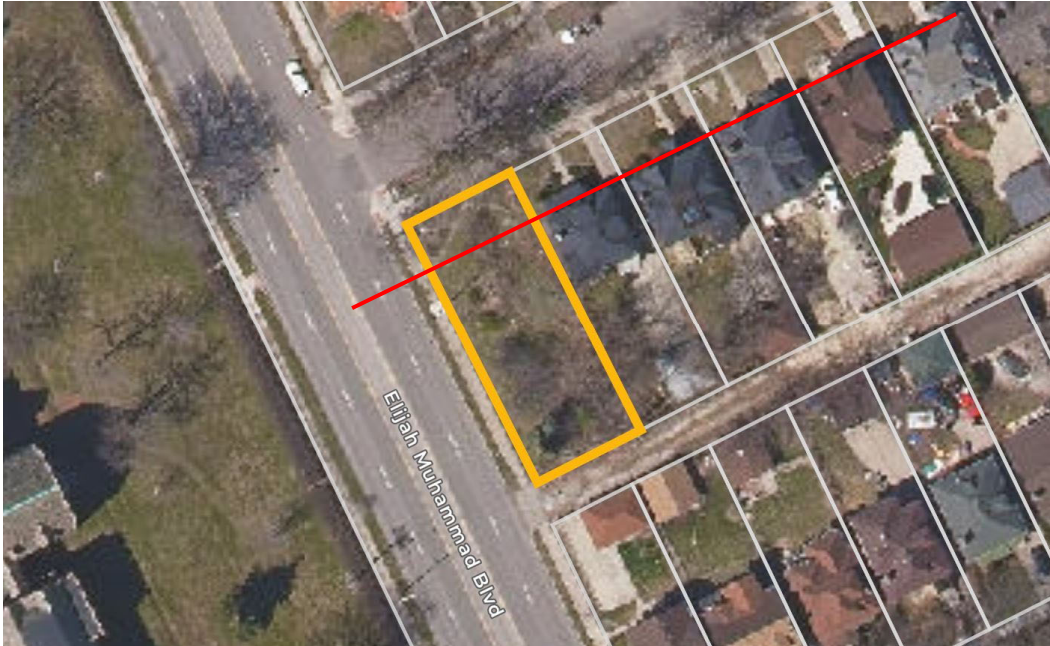
View towards the west (Linwood) standing on Longfellow sidewalk. Staff photo, September 16, 2021.



View towards south from Longfellow sidewalk taken from same position as photo above, showing return of fence towards adjacent house, with small section of fence (red arrow) properly aligned with setback line. Staff photo, September 16, 2021.

ISSUES

- It is staff's opinion that the height of the fence along Linwood, north of the setback line, should be removed or reduced to 3' in height, consistent with the Commission's long-established Fence Guidelines. The run of 6' fence along the Longfellow sidewalk should be removed and/or relocated to the south in alignment with the setback line of 2545 Longfellow, again as per the Guidelines illustrated above. The recommendation is to approve with such a condition.



Parcel view of 2555 Longfellow, outlined in yellow. The fence is colinear with the yellow outline for much of its extent. The historic setback line of the homes is added in red; note that projecting front porches are not included in the line. Staff recommends that the fencing extents be pulled south of this red line, while allowing a 3' height north of the line along Linwood, if desired.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78, Determinations of Historic District Commission

The proposed work is compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of its environment, and does not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. Staff therefore recommends that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Boston-Edison Historic District's Elements of Design, with the condition that:

- The fence be modified so that the only portion projecting north of the setback line collectively formed by the homes on the south side of the block would be a 3' height run along Linwood, which may extend to the Longfellow sidewalk and there terminate without enclosure, in accordance with the Commission's illustrated Fence and Hedge Guidelines. A 6' height run of fence may be repositioned to run along the setback line westerly from the home at 2545 Longfellow to the Linwood sidewalk, to join the enclosing section running south along Linwood, at the same point from which the 3' height commences towards the north.