

STAFF REPORT: 10/12/22 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: 22-8046

ADDRESS: 1531 PARKER

HISTORIC DISTRICT: WEST VILLAGE

APPLICANT: MEGAN ANDERLUH

PROPERTY OWNER: DZIUDA, BRANDON & ANDERLUH, MEGAN

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: AUGUST 26, 2022

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: OCTOBER 6, 2022

SCOPE: DEMOLISH EXISTING FRONT PORCH, CONSTRUCT NEW FRONT PORCH

EXISTING CONDITIONS

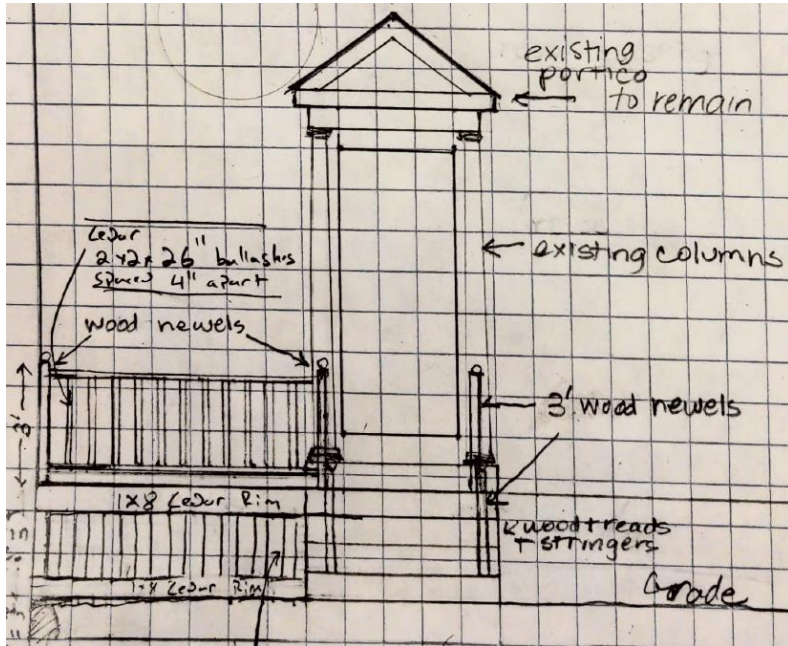
The house at 1531 Parker is a two-and-one-half-story foursquare house built in 1925. It faces east onto the street; like many houses in West Village and especially on Parker Street, it has a shallow setback from the public right-of-way. The front porch, subject of this application, features a short concrete deck with steps oriented perpendicular to the main entrance. A short portico consists of a Classical pediment projecting only about two feet from the façade, separated by columns. One of these columns became detached in September 2022 and was removed by the owner. Physical and documentary evidence strongly suggests the porch was reconfigured during the mid- to late twentieth century, as described under Staff Observations and Research, below.



October 2022 site visit photo by staff.

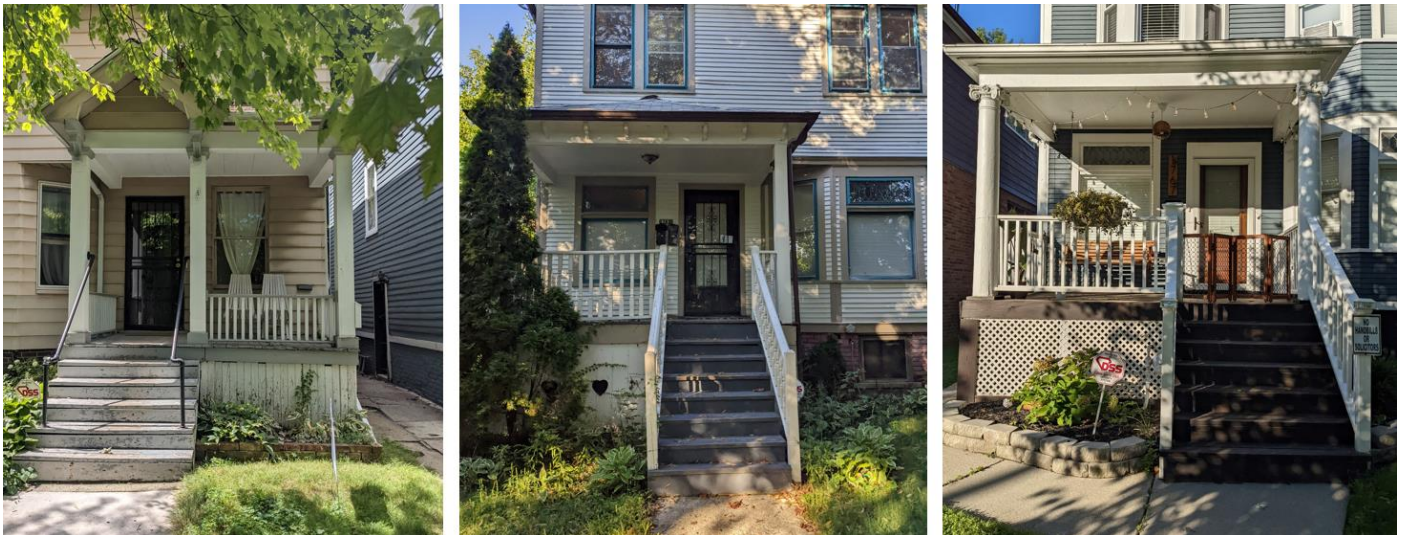
PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to demolish the existing reinforced concrete porch deck and steps, which is currently cracking and sagging. The proposal is to retain the portico and build a new wood porch with handrail and guardrail. The proposed porch is to have the same height and depth as the existing porch and occupy the footprint of the existing porch. However, it will be oriented such that the front steps lead directly from the front door, rather than oriented perpendicular as in the current configuration.



Front elevation of proposed porch. Sketch by applicant. Additional images are found in the application.

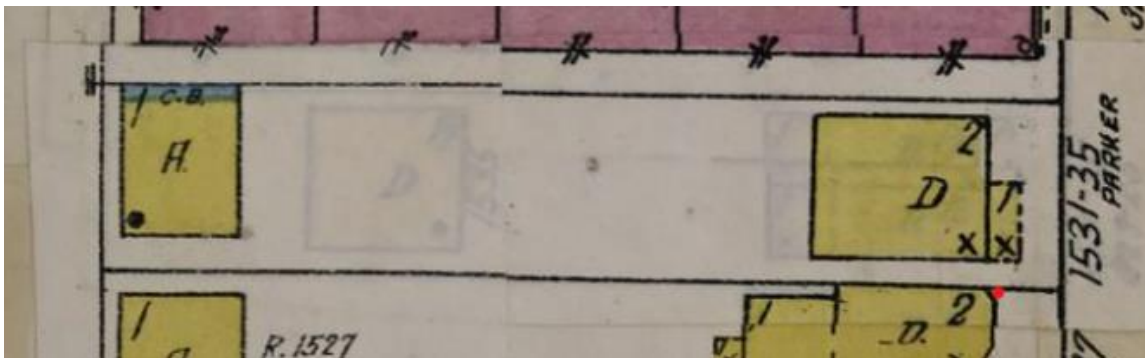
The applicant states that they have designed the proposed porch based on visual details found on other porches on Parker St.



Comparable wood porches in the vicinity; note that they are defined by three major elements: A base (stoop and flooring), a middle (composed of support columns), and a top (a full-width roof which crowns the composition). Photos by applicant.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The West Village Historic District was established by Ordinance 547-H in 1983. The Final Report for the district states that it is “of historical importance as a benchmark to the growth of Detroit in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” implying a Period of Significance.
- The Elements of Design for the district (Sec. 21-2-132) note that “most residences have porch projections and/or entrance recessions.” West Village is described as having an “urban character, rare in the city,” due in part to the diversity of its architecture and its uniform setbacks.
- Staff researched Sanborn maps and building permits, and visited the site, to determine if the existing porch proposed for demolition is an original, historic, or character-defining feature. Staff determined that it is not. The materials used, workmanship, the degree of weathering, and other observations suggest that it dates from the mid- to late twentieth century. As the applicant has also observed, a Sanborn map from 1950 shows a wood porch.



Subject property in 1950. Dotted line and yellow field indicate open wood porch. Image: Sanborn Map Company.

- Further, staff was able to determine, with a reasonable degree of certainty, the configuration of the original or historic porch. Several clues, including the use of rougher brick on the left (south) end of the foundation contrasted with textured brick on the right (north) end, the use of newer dimensional lumber to infill areas where original porch elements formerly existed, and the orientation of a concrete walkway with respect to the front entrance, suggest that the building once possessed a wood porch very close to what the applicant has proposed.



Illustration by staff.

- Further, staff analysis, based on the Sanborn documentation and field inspection, determined that the porch was once fully covered, and that the pediment was likely shortened and reinstalled at its current location at the time the porch roof was removed. First, uncovered wood porches are not found in the West Village Historic District, or on buildings of that period in general. Also, the location of cut marks in a belt course at the height of the pediment suggest alterations. Finally, staff observes that the next-door building at 1527 Parker has the same massing, floor plan, and fenestration pattern (though a mirror image), suggesting that the buildings were built together and would also have had the same porch configuration.
- In the view of staff, the materials and dimensional qualities of the proposed porch, including its balusters, posts, and other elements, are appropriate for the property and the district.
- Staff suggests that the spatial relationship between the building and the street is an important feature, of particular importance in West Village due to the characteristic shallow setbacks and “urban” environment. The proposed work would restore this relationship.



Neighboring porch at 1527 Parker. Photo by staff.

ISSUES

- The proposed porch reconstruction, though potentially appropriate as phase one of a broader project, would result in an uncovered wood deck, which is not a historically appropriate porch expression on a building from this period. By itself, it would create a situation that does not fit the historic character of the property (Standard #2) and is not “compatible” with the “integrity of the property its environment” (Standard #9). Uncovered stone, masonry, or concrete porches do have precedent on buildings of this age, especially in nearby Indian Village as well as Boston-Edison.
- Though restoration of lost features is not required by the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation*, the construction of the proposed porch would partially, but not fully, reconstruct the missing historic porch. This partial reconstruction would create an incongruous appearance. (Also, an uncovered wood porch would be vulnerable to deterioration from the elements.) Staff suggests that the applicant could

consider replication of the full, covered porch. Such a porch would appropriately be modeled after porches found on comparable buildings in the West Village Historic District, including 1527 Parker, extending the existing historic pediment and columns forward toward the street, and covering the remainder of the porch with a hip or flat roof section supported by a third column. Alternatively, a contemporary, “clearly differentiated” design in a complementary and compatible style would also be appropriate (Standard #9), as long as it incorporated a roof. Such a design should nonetheless retain the existing historic pediment and columns (Standard #2).

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78: Determination of Historic District Commission

The proposed porch is compatible with its environment and meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work, with the condition that:

- A porch roof shall be added, meeting the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, subject to approval by staff, incorporating the historic elements still extant (i.e, the pediment and columns), which may be repositioned.