

**ADDRESS: 873 VIRGINIA PARK**

**APPLICATION NO: #22-8058**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW CENTER AREA**

**APPLICANT: SCOTT KRALL/BLUESTAR DEMOLITION INC**

**OWNER: JOHN BROWN**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 12/2/2022**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11/22/2022**

**SCOPE: DEMOLISH HOUSE AND GARAGE**

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The property at 873 Virginia Park features a handsome single-family dwelling and a garage which were erected ca. 1915. The two-story home is rectangular in plan and has a broad hipped roof with distinctive deep overhanging eaves with metal brackets which are enclosed with stucco-clad, metal soffits. Portions of the soffits were recently removed with HDC approval. An arched-roof dormer with a Palladian window tops the roof at the front elevation, while arched, hipped, and gabled-roof dormers are located at the side and rear elevations. Stucco clads the front and sidewalls of the dormers at the front and side elevations. The cladding at the rear elevation rooftop dormer was recently removed without HDC approval. The building's exterior walls are clad with a variegated mix of buff and brown colored bricks. A brick chimney is prominently featured at the building's front elevation. Flat-roof, partial-width, one-story brick porches are located at the front and side elevations. A flat-roof, brick porte cochere is located at west/side elevation. Windows are the original 6/1, double-hung wood units. A hipped-roof, two-car garage with stucco and brick exteriors is located to the rear of the house.



**873 Virginia Park, current appearance (staff photo taken 12/1/2022)**





**873 Virginia Park garage, current appearance (staff photo taken 12/1/2022)**



**873 Virginia Park garage, current appearance (applicant photo submitted 9/2022)**





Designation, slide. Photo taken in 1982

## PROPOSAL

Per the submitted materials, the applicant is seeking approval of the following work items:

- Demolish the existing home and garage
- Demolish/remove all hardscape
- Seed and mulch vacant lot following building demolition

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The New Center Area Historic District was designated in 1982
- Per the submitted documentation, the current homeowner has held the deed for the property since 2009
- In April and May 2021, HDC staff received notice from several concerned community members that exterior work had been undertaken at the home to include the partial removal of the distinctive coved metal soffit and the removal of the cladding from the rear elevation rooftop dormer. Neither work item was approved by the Commission at that time. **HDC staff reported the violations to the Detroit building department for enforcement. Building department records indicate that a Stop Work Order was posted at the site in response to the unapproved/unpermitted work.**
- In June 2021, the property owner submitted an application to replace the asphalt shingles at the roof of the home and garage. This submission also included a proposal to install a replica soffit at the roof's eaves to address the soffit which had been removed without approval earlier that year. Staff approved the proposal and issued a COA for the work on 6/23/2021. However,

the property owner has yet to follow through on pulling a permit for the replacement of the soffit that was removed without HDC approval. To this day the work remains uncompleted

- In March 2022, HDC staff received complaint that stucco was being removed from the roof dormer at the side/west elevation despite the previously issued Stop Work Order for the unapproved removal of the soffits. HDC Staff visited the site and reported the violation to the Detroit building department for enforcement the day of our receipt of the complaint. HDC staff received additional complaints re: the unapproved work at the side/west elevation roof dormer in September 2022 prompting staff to visit the site and report the work to the building department for enforcement a second time.



**Photo taken by HDC staff in 4/2021 to illustrate unapproved removal of soffit**



**Photo taken by HDC staff in 3/2022 to illustrate unapproved removal of stucco from the side/west elevation dormer**





**Photo taken by HDC staff in 8/2022 to illustrate unapproved removal of stucco from the side/west elevation dormer**

- It is staff’s opinion that the home and garage at 873 Virginia Park contribute to the district. Furthermore, several empty lots exist at the block’s eastern edge, directly to the east and northeast of 873 Virginia Park. The demolition of subject buildings would contribute to the further erosion of the immediate area’s historic fabric and thus would detract from the street’s/district’s historic character.

## **ISSUES**

- Please note staff did request that the applicant provide detailed justification to outline why the owner desires to demolish the building. Specifically, staff did note the low likelihood of an approval “...absent substantial documentation of truly catastrophic structural problems (attested to by a licensed architect or structural engineer...accompanied by a stamped/signed report).” In response, the applicant submitted a short memo from a Project Manager with TDG Architects which outlines his assessment of the property. In particular, the memo outlines the following “Required Corrections”:
  - Remove roofing and substrate
  - Remove existing plaster (assuming interior)
  - Jack up existing structure and resecure
  - Install new soffits
  - Remove and replace all interior finishes

- Remove and replace subfloor as required
- Repair existing stairs

The report also speaks to the need for new plumbing, electrical, and heating and states that the windows are in need of replacement.

- Staff reviewed the memo, visited site several times, and concluded that it is clear that the deteriorated conditions at the home can be repaired. Rather, the issues outlined in the report are commonplace in buildings which sit vacant/unmaintained for an extended period of time and are regularly rehabilitated. It is staff's opinion that the submission has not provided detailed information from a licensed architect or licensed structural engineer which clearly indicates that it is not feasible to rehabilitate this significant home and garage. Finally, please note that no information was submitted re: the condition of the garage beyond a statement that “..the Detract [sic] Garage is in the existing or worse condition.” It is therefore staff's opinion that the proposed demolition of the home and garage at 873 Virginia Park is in direct conflict with the Secretary of the Interior Standards and staff recommends that the Commission issue a Denial of this project.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **Recommendation - Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness**

HDC staff recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the proposed project because the work does not conform to the district's Elements of Design and does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, in particular Standards #:

- 2.) *The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*
- 5.) *Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*
- 6.) *Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*