

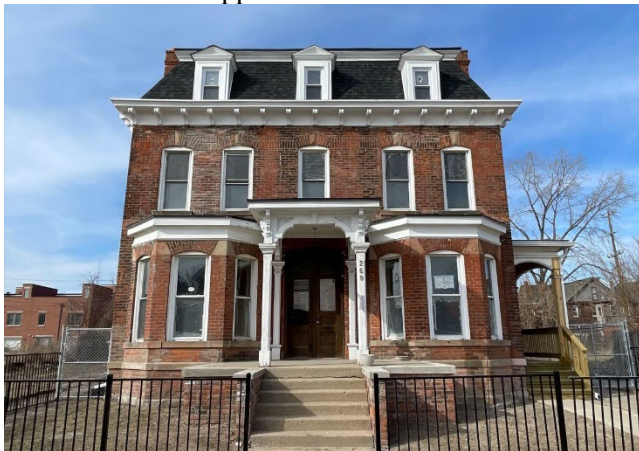
STAFF REPORT: 3/8/2023 REGULAR MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: #23-8235
VIOLATION NUMBERS: #693, 694, 695
ADDRESS: 269 WATSON
HISTORIC DISTRICT: BRUSH PARK
APPLICANTS: MEIR ISRAEL, ROSE VALENCIA
PROPERTY OWNER: ARBEN GJEKAJ
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 2/13/2023
DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS: 3/29/21, 4/27/22, 8/25/22, 2/20/23

PREPARED BY: D. RIEDEN

SCOPE: DEMOLISH GARAGE, RECONSTRUCT SIDE PORCH, INSTALL FENCE (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1875, the property at 269 Watson is a 3-story residence facing southeast. The mansard roof has asphalt shingles with bracketed eaves and features three, pediment-topped dormers. The east and west sides of the house each have brick chimneys, where the house is clad with red brick detailing several types of brick masonry: stack bond soldiers and headers, English Cross bond, and arches with keystones over each second-floor window. Each of the blind arch windows are double-hung and have been replaced over time. The third-floor windows, which were truly arched at the top, were replaced sometime before 2011 and are one of the violations listed below. The first-floor bays are similarly arched with stone quoins at the top of each corner and a stone, wrap-around sill. The arched portico over the dark wood front door is highly detailed with ornate brackets. The front brick faced porch is elevated with concrete coping and steps that lead to the front walkway. A simple lawn is barely rooted in the front yard. The property is now surrounded by a 6 foot chain-link fence in the rear yard and a 4 foot, black painted metal fence in the front yard that meets the front public walkway. The rear concrete block garage, now demolished without out approval, and this fence installed without approval are included in the list violations below and are included in this application.



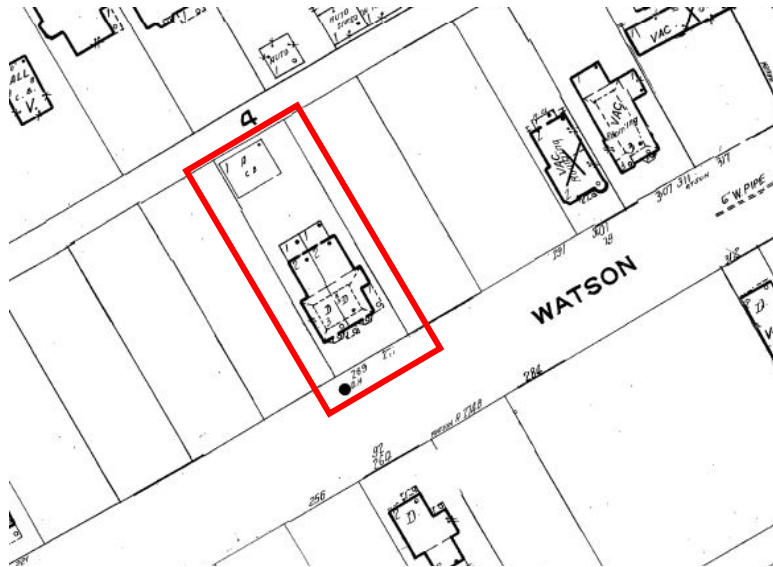
Site Photo 1, by Staff Feb. 20, 2023: (Southeast) front elevation.



Designation Image, 1975: (Southeast) front elevation.

This property has the following former HDC approvals and violation on Detroit Property Information System (DPI):

- October 1996, HDC COA: Front doors, roof, repair front porch, paint trim, tuck/point brick, sidewalk
- April 2022, Violation: Windows replaced on front elevation 3rd floor prior to 2011, after designation.
- April 2022, Violation: Brick wall, doors, windows and a portion of the east elevation porch was removed without approval- Resolved by September 2022, HDC COA.
- August 2022, HDC COA: Replace asphalt roof, repair soffit and brackets, replace gutters/downspouts.
- September 2022, HDC COA: General rehab, installation of rear balcony and rear porch.
- February 2023, Violations: Demolition of garage, installation of fencing without approval



Sanborn V3, P030 1971, showing the demolished garage location.



Aerial 1 of Parcel # 01000765 by Detroit Parcel Viewer, showing the demolished garage location.



Site Photo 2, by Staff February 20, 2023: (East) side elevation, showing front and rear fence installations, east porch installation (work completed without approval).



Site Photo 3, by Staff February 20, 2023: (West) side elevation, showing front and rear fence installations, and former site of rear garage (work completed without approval).

PROPOSAL

Staff initially received an application for the east elevation porch. Upon site visits and subsequent observations, Staff observed additional work and received confirmation from the applicant that this application consists of the following work: demolition of the rear garage, installation of a rear perimeter chain link fence and front yard metal fence, and reconstruction of the east elevation porch. All work was completed without approval. Much of the detailed information requested by staff has not been received at the time of this report.

DEMOLITION OF GARAGE (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

The applicant has requested to include this work in the application. Staff has requested an assessment on the condition of the garage, description of the work that was done in the removal of the garage and photographs. Staff has not received any material to date of this report.

INSTALLATION OF REAR AND FRONT YARD FENCES (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

The applicant has requested to include this work in the application. Staff has requested a site plan locating both fence types, dimensions for both fences and gates, materiality, and product information. Staff has not received this information to date of this report.

EAST ELVATION PORCH (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

The applicant proposes to replace all wood decking, posts, railing and stairs on the east elevation porch, but retaining the roof, ceiling, arches and pediment support at the porch entrance. (See attached sketch and description.) Some wood fascia is replaced with wood. And some of the post headers have additional header application details that were added at the top of each post that were not original to the porch. The porch dimensions stay within their historic floorplan. However, the railing has been raised to 42" height. All wood is pressure treated wood. Staff requested information on paint or stain treatment of the porch and the skirting but has not received any information to date of this report. (See also Site photo 2)

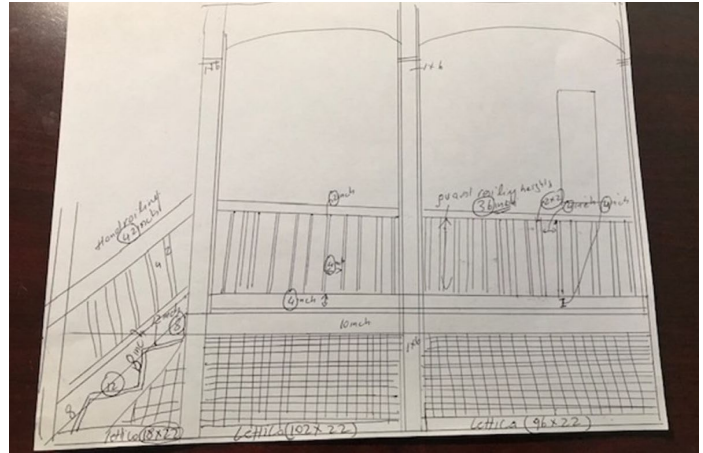


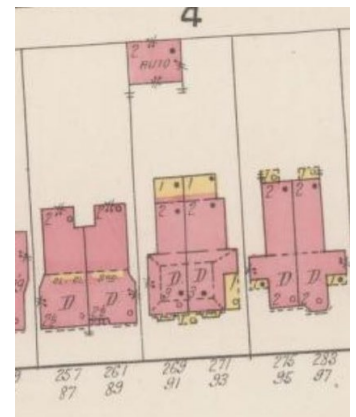
Figure 1, by Applicant: (East) side elevation, showing proposed porch.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Brush Park Historic District was established in 1980. Its Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-120) provide the following guidance:
 - “On the buildings of the Victorian period, elaborate detail in wood, stone, or sheet metal was common; areas treated include porches, window and door surrounds, cornices, dormers, and other areas.”
 - “The major landscape feature of the district is the vacant land, which creates a feeling that buildings are missing in the district. Some houses have more than the standard 50-foot lot and have wide side yards. Individual houses have front lawns often subdivided by walks leading to the entrance; lawns are exceedingly shallow or nonexistent in the area between Beaubien and Brush. Side drives are rare, access to garages or coach houses being from the alleys.”
 - “Garages and coach houses are located in the rear of residential properties and are generally oriented to the alley.”
- Staff asked the applicant to confirm if this application was a continuation of the rehabilitation of the previous application work that has been submitted. The name of the applicant is the same as before, but staff has not received confirmation.
- Staff requested that all sides of the house and former garage site be photographed and submitted as part of his application. Staff has not received this as part of the application to date of this report.

DEMOLITION OF GARAGE

- Because staff has not received information from the applicant regarding the condition of the garage prior to its demolition, staff has utilized images from Sanborn maps and Google Street view to yield the following observations:
 - The 1921 Sanborn map shows the presence of a two-story brick garage that predates the concrete block garage at the northwest property corner.



Sanborn V3, P117, 1921, showing the original garage location and materiality.

- The 1971 Sanborn map shows the presence of a concrete block garage prior to the historic designation of Brush Park in 1980. *(see Sanborn above)*
- Staff observes from Google Street images that the building appears to be concrete block construction and not likely to be original to the time of the construction of the house.
- Staff estimates the demolition occurred sometime between April and August of 2022.
- It is staff’s opinion that the concrete block garage that was demolished by the applicant was not the original historic garage as depicted in the 1921 Sanborn, and based on the limited information available, the garage was non-contributing.



Site Photo 4, by Google Street May,2019: (Northwest) Rear elevation, showing rear garage prior to demolition.

FENCING

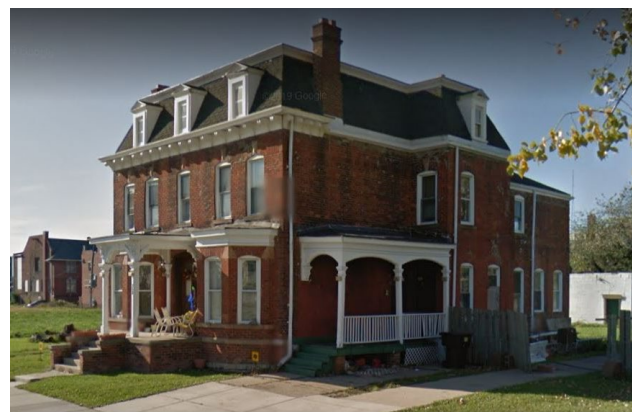
- Staff observed that the front yard fence is over the 3’ allowable height for front yards according to the HDC Fence and Hedge Guidelines. However, staff observed that Brush Park has fences in the front yard that are 4’ high similar to this fence. While the color and the metal material of this fence are appropriate, the execution of its installation has some of the top and bottom rails disjointed. *(See Site photos 2-3)*
- The chain link fence at the side and rear of the property is appropriate and does meet the HDC Fence and Hedge Guidelines. However, staff offers the opinion that a more appropriate location for the chain link fence gate would be at the corner of the brick east porch entrance, rather than at the corner of the wood post of the east porch, so that the height of the fence does not obstruct the detailing of the building’s architecture. *(See Site photo 2)* Also, staff offers the opinion that the fence be painted black to create some continuity with the front yard fence.



Site Photo5, by Staff February 20, 2023: (South) front elevation, showing front fence installation.

EAST ELEVATION PORCH

- When the applicant last appeared before the Commission in September 2022, staff noted that the east porch was in the process of demolition. At that time, the applicant was invited to include this work in their application but did not respond.
- The square Tuscan capitals of the wood posts, the wood railing and the brick pier supports of the wood posts of the original east elevation porch are distinctive character-defining features of the building.
- The original porch had brick piers under the wood deck that supported the wood posts. These brick piers have been removed and replaced by wood posts by the current construction of the new porch.



Site Photo6, by Google Street Oct 2011: (East) side elevation, showing east original porch with brick pier supports and original railing and post design. Also note the garage in the rear.

- The original porch posts had square Tuscan capitals that have been replaced by simple ledges. Staff observed that wood plate detail has been applied to the archways that were not previously present. These modifications in design are not appropriate and do not follow the Secretary of Interior Standards.
- Staff observed that the railing design is different from the original design in the following ways:
 - It introduces a handrail along the steps
 - The railing design has a 2x4 sub-rail and lower rail running face-forward along the top and bottom of the railing, creating a thicker, less elegant design that is not appropriate to the detailing of this property's historic architecture. The original railing had a simple upper and lower rail that was less obtrusive and could be replicated by rotating these rails so that they are less visible.
- Staff has observed that the rear porch and this side elevation porch have introduced new skirting that are not historic to the house. (The rear skirting was not approved in the 2022 COA, and the rear deck and balcony has not yet been stained or painted as stipulated as a condition in this COA.)
- Staff observed that 2022 COA stipulates that the applicant shall paint the approved east door a color from Color System C and have this reviewed and approved by HDC staff. Staff has not yet received this review.

ISSUES

- All work in this application was completed without Historic District Commission (HDC) approval.
- Staff did not receive complete photo documentation nor a building assessment of the original conditions of the garage before it was demolished.
- Similarly, a true assessment of the east porch was not documented prior to demolition.
- Staff has not received response to several attempts receive complete information for this application.
- Staff has not yet received full elevation photographs of the rear and side elevations of the house and has not yet received confirmation that the rear porch and balcony have been built according the approved 2022 COA. However, there are some indications such as the addition of skirting, which was not in the original design and the lack of paint or stain, which is a condition of the COA that has not yet been satisfied, that has staff concerned.
- Staff has no issue with the chain link fence, but as noted above, offers the opinion that the east gate be more appropriately located at the brick corner of the east entrance of the house to allow the east porch be unobstructed as staff has identified the east porch as a character-defining feature of the house and should not have new features attached in front of it.
- While the railing height approximates the original scale, the design of the railing has created an excess of bulk and thickness that has exceeded the historic finesse and elegance of the original design of the porch railing. It is staff's opinion that the new railing does not meet Standards 2, 5 and 6.
- The installation of skirting should be installed behind framing, per National Park Service Brief 45 "Preserving Historic Porches". Larger vertical boards should divide the skirting a the location of columns/piers to continue the porch's vertical support line from roof-to-grade. This house formerly had brick columns that were destroyed at these locations, which could have served as this vertical support line that is lost. It is staff's opinion that both the restoration of the brick piers, with upper and lower framing and then placing the skirting behind these elements, the skirting would then meet the guidelines as described in Brief 45.
- Staff offers the opinion that the design, scale and materiality of the porch deck is appropriate. However, staff has yet to receive a response from the applicant on the application for paint or stain for the deck and would offer the opinion that an appropriate color would be chosen from Color System C with review and approval from staff.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation 1: East porch (work completed without approval)

Staff finds that the reconstruction of the east porch posts, replacement of brick piers with wood, redesign of the railing and introduction of skirting does not meet the Secretary of Interior Standards for the following reasons:

- The east porch railing, the applied detailing to the arches and the altered post design destroys and alters the original features that characterizes the original railing and original square Tuscan capitals of the posts, which are historic character defining features of the building.
- The replacement of the brick piers from the east porch with wood posts that are obscured with skirting that is neither framed nor follows historic standards.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the above work items, as it do not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically 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.

4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.

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.

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

Recommendation 2: Install fencing, East Porch Deck (Work Completed Without Approval)

It is staff's opinion the installation of the front and rear fence and east porch deck and stair are appropriate. Staff therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed because it meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and the Brush Park Historic District Elements of Design.

Staff recommends the COA be issued with following conditions:

- The applicant relocates the east gate of the chain link fence to the brick corner of the house, behind the east porch, painted black.
- The deck be painted a color that matches Color System C color scheme of the HDC color guide.
- The applicant provides HDC staff a review of the above items before installation.