

STAFF REPORT: MARCH 8, 2023 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8423

ADDRESS: 1411 AND 1425 CHICAGO

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON

APPLICANT/OWNER: MEAGHAN AND JACOB MARION

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JANUARY 29, 2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: FEBRUARY 21, 2023

SCOPE: ERECT FENCE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1913, the property at 1425 Chicago is a two-story, stucco-clad house facing north onto the street. Distinctive features include an asymmetrical, front-gable roof, prominent wall chimney, side (west) shed dormer, and shallow front porch with semicircular pediment. Pertinent to this application, a single-story, flat-roof sun porch and large side yard are also important features (see analysis below). The side yard is situated on an adjacent lot.



PROPOSAL

The applicant has removed one face of an existing fence without approval and proposes to erect a new fence in a different location (the work is in progress and nearly completed). Only the front section of the fence is included in this application. The final configuration of the side and rear portions has not yet been proposed.

New Fence

The new fence is partially complete and is visible in photos. It consists of an unpainted, pressure-treated, vertical board privacy fence with an open post portion at the top. The fence is generally 6' tall; however, posts protrude several inches higher. The applicant intends, as stated in an email to staff, to cut each post down to 6' and finish it with a wood cap.

The applicant explained in an email to staff that the eastern edge (left side, when viewed from the street) is not in its final configuration, as the applicant is in the process of discussing a shared side fence with the neighbor. According to the applicant, the side fence was removed by a previous neighbor. Staff observes an apparently temporary, 4' snow fence now running along the eastern edge of the property.



Eastern termination of the fence. February 2023 site visit photo by staff.

Old fence

The old fence is a 6' wood stockade fence. Only the rear section remains, as the front and east side sections have been removed, as described above, and the west side is served by the adjacent property fence.



Undated image of old fence, provided by applicant.

The new fence is in a different location than the previous fence, as shown in the illustration below. The removed fence sat at the rear (south elevation) plane of the projecting sun porch, while the new fence sits at the front (north

elevation) plan of the sun porch.



Aerial photo depicting old and new fence sections. Image from Gaia GPS, illustration by staff.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Boston-Edison Historic District was established by resolution of the City Council in 1974. No Final Report was prepared for this district.
- The old fence was installed without approval and did not meet the *Fence and Hedge Guidelines*.
- Sun porches are common, as noted in the Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-106). However, sun porches are typically in the rear of houses, or on corner lots. The existence of a sun porch on the side elevation of a mid-block house is less common in the Boston-Edison Historic District.
- Staff opines that the side lot is a historic, character-defining open space. Building permits show no record of a building having existed at that location, and the lot is seen as open in a 1949 aerial photograph. The orientation of the sun porch appears to be intentional with respect to this open space. Additional photographs from the 1960s and 1970s show that it has remained open. The fence was added sometime

after the historic district was established in 1974. Staff finds no record of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the fence.



Left: Arrow indicating location on 1949 DTE photograph. Right: 1974 photo by the Historic Designation Advisory Board.

- The Elements of Design concur: “side lots are not uncommon for the larger properties in the district, and a number of these form a part of the original site plan for the residence. Such side lots are usually landscaped and are often fenced at or near the setback line.”
- The *Fence and Hedge Guidelines* make a distinction between side yard fencing and side lot fencing. Side yard fencing is allowable at “the front face of the house, the back face or at a point between.” Side lot fencing is only allowable at the front face of the house, according to the *Guidelines*. However, the Elements of Design for the district discuss fencing that is “near” the setback line. The proposed (current) fence is located near the setback line. Although locating the fence at the plane of the front façade of the core block of the house (i.e., the setback line) would perhaps be more appropriate, the proposed (current) location is not inappropriate.
- The 6’ height is acceptable, according to the *Fence and Hedge Guidelines*. An opaque, wood, board fence is also acceptable.

ISSUES

- Unfinished treated wood is a contemporary material that is not appropriate for the Boston-Edison Historic District. The fence should be painted or stained.
- Historic fences in the Boston-Edison Historic District generally run parallel to the plane of the ground and have a uniform height. The sharp downward slope of the east end of the new fence is not appropriate.

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

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed work as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, with the following conditions:

- The fence shall be painted a color as deemed appropriate by staff.
- The fence height shall be standardized to six feet along its entire length.