

STAFF REPORT: 4/12/2023 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: D. RIEDEN

APPLICATION NUMBER: #22-8280

VIOLATION NUMBER: #711

ADDRESS: 729 SEWARD

HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW CENTER AREA

APPLICANT: SARAH GARRITY GUENTHER

PROPERTY OWNER: 700 SEWARD DETROIT LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 3/20/2023

DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS: 3/24/23

SCOPE: REPLACE WOOD WINDOWS WITH ALUMINUM-CLAD WINDOWS (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The building located at 729 Seward Avenue is a 2½-story single-family residence constructed ca. 1907. The structure is clad in red brick which is also painted red in color and features limestone and wood details as well as cedar shake. The asymmetrical façade includes a two-story bay at the right side of the elevation and a raised covered porch at the left side of the elevation which includes the main entrance to the house. The wood double-hung windows were replaced without approval and are the subject of this application. The multi-gabled roof is covered in reddish-brown asphalt shingles and features three dormers (2 at the front elevation and one at the rear elevation). The property includes a parking lot directly adjacent to the house to the east which is accessed via a curb cut onto Seward Avenue. A large garage is located behind the house at the far southwest corner of the lot.



Site Photo 1, by Staff March 24, 2023: (North) front elevation.



Site Photo 2 by Google Street, June 2019: (North) front elevation showing original windows.

This property has the following HDC approvals and violations for work done without approval on Detroit Property Information System (DPI):

- Violation: Replaced wood windows with aluminum clad wood windows following HDC denial for window replacement.
- HDC Denial, May 2020: Replacement of existing wood, double-hung windows, trim, and brick mold with new double-hung vinyl units and trim.
- HDC COA, May 2020: Replace doors, replace roof, repair and repaint shake shingle dormers, tuck-point and paint masonry, replace concrete steps at front and rear with wood porch, replace gutters/downspouts, install exterior lighting, electrical and plumbing systems, and replace existing landscaping to match.
- HDC COA, Dec 2000: Construct garage.



Site Photo 3, by Applicant 2019: (East) side elevation, showing original wood, double-hung window and depth of inset of the sash into the window opening.



Site Photo 4, by Applicant 2023: (East) side elevation showing new installed window flush with wall opening.

PROPOSAL

The owner is submitting documentation for windows replaced which have not been reviewed or approved by the Commission. The proposal consists of the following work: replace all double-hung, wood windows with Quaker Brighton Series double-hung, aluminum-clad wood windows, color black, per the attached drawings and details.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The New Center Area Historic District was established in 1982. Its Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-129) provide the following guidance:
 - “Most window openings are taller than wide, but are frequently grouped into combinations wider than tall.”
 - “Buildings of Medieval and/or Arts-and-Crafts inspiration generally have painted wood trim of dark brown; black and red is also present.”
 - “Storm windows are sometimes a different color from the window frames and sashes; window sashes are most often the same color as the window frames, with a few exceptions. Colors used on trim of apartment buildings are frequently brown, gray, black or green.”
- From the Google Street images and previous images, it is staff’s observation that the original windows were wood, double-hung with a 1/1 configuration. And the windows are recessed in the opening, which creates a dimensionality that is a historic character-defining feature of the building. (Staff has not received a report on the condition of these original windows.) It is staff’s opinion that these original wood windows, their double-hung operation, and their recessed placement in the window opening are distinctive character-defining features that have been either removed.
- The application states that detailed photographs of the existing windows and documentation of the existing windows’ dimensions were not taken. However, staff found in the May 2020 application for the replacement of windows there was substantial photo documentation of the existing windows.
- Staff observed that the architect’s description of the installed windows does not match the permitted drawing windows. Staff received clarification that the Quaker product (aluminum-clad wood windows) not the Jeld-Wen windows as shown in the BSEED approved drawings were installed. After investigating the case history, staff found that the project went through the BSEED permit process in May 2020 without HDC approval for the windows. The BSEED permitted drawings included the HDC COA for approved work but this COA does not list approval for the windows. Furthermore the drawings show that the

windows were of a different make (Jeld-Wen) and were mostly single-hung windows. Staff recently received an updated application and confirmation that all windows installed were Quaker's aluminum-clad wood windows. Most are double-hung, some on the third floor, are single-hung installations. (See updated application material.)

ISSUES

- No documentation establishing that the original windows at the rear of the house were beyond repair was submitted or available.
- All window replacement work in this application was completed without Historic District Commission (HDC) approval and despite receiving a denial for a previous window application for replacement of the wood windows in the May 2020 application.
- It is staff's opinion that the removal of the original wood windows alters the original *scale, design, and materiality* and introduces new windows that are incompatible and inappropriate for this historic property, and therefore does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Some double-hung windows were replaced with single-hung windows.
- Staff observed that the execution of the installation of the windows alters the historic appearance of the building by erasing the distinctive character-defining feature of the recessed, wood, double-hung windows, creating a flat wall-like feature that erased the dimensions of these historic character defining features. (*See Site photos 3 & 4*)

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation 1: Replace wood windows with aluminum-clad wood windows

Staff finds that the replacement of the original wood windows with single-hung and fixed windows does not meet the Secretary of Interior Standards for the following reasons:

- The windows that were removed without approval were a distinctive historic feature that characterized the property. The windows dated to the building's original construction and included 1/1 double-hung wood units.
- The application does not include documentation that the windows removed without approval were deteriorated beyond repair to an extent that merited their replacement.
- Some double-hung windows were replaced with single-hung windows.
- The installation of the windows has created a flatness across the exterior of the house, destroying the distinctive, character-defining features of shadow lines and recessed window openings.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the proposed window replacement, as it does not the district's Elements of Design nor 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.

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.