

**STAFF REPORT:** 4/12/23 REGULAR MEETING

**PREPARED BY:** T. BOSCARINO

**APPLICATION NUMBER:** 23-8232

**ADDRESS:** 4440 E. CANFIELD/4444 RUSSELL

**HISTORIC DISTRICT:** SWEETEST HEART OF MARY ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

**APPLICANT:** JASON FLIGGER, 4J ARCHITECTURE DETROIT, PLLC and EDMUND BORKE, FINANCE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**PROPERTY OWNER:** MOTHER OF DIVINE MERCY PARISH

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION:** 2/24/23

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT:** 3/23/23

**SCOPE:** ALTER FRONT PORCH OF RECTORY BUILDING

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The subject property is one of four buildings comprising the Sweetest Heart of Mary Roman Catholic Parish Historic District. The subject property, identified as a “rectory” in the Final Report for the district, was built in 1900. It is a two-story, side-gabled hip roof, brick building with Colonial Revival and Italian Renaissance elements. The Final Report for the district references “ornamental brickwork on its quoins and architraves,” a “hipped and gabled roof,” and, on the west façade, a “columned porch and gabled dormer” as important features of this rectory building. The Elements of Design observe “Neo-Georgian-style window keystones, porch details, stone sills, denticulation, and a Palladian window dormer.”



*March 2023 photo by staff*

## PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to demolish the wood elements of the existing porch, shown in the photo above, to be replaced with new wood elements based on a historic photo, shown below. The new work is proposed to include two tapered Tuscan columns, two rectangular engaged Tuscan columns, a Classical entablature, an upper balustrade composed of custom-milled balusters, and a beadboard ceiling. New roof decking, EPDM membrane, and a recessed porch light are to be installed. Copper coping and flashing will be visible. The new wood is proposed to be painted SW 7005 Pure White.



*Historic porch in undated photo from application. Cropped by staff.*

The applicant states several reasons for wishing to replace the porch, including undersized integrated gutters, inadequate slope, and decayed soffits and fascia. The application explains the desire to redesign and rebuild the porch roof, rather than repair the existing porch roof, as follows:

The existing flat roof slopes downward slightly away from the rectory building and contains a shallow integral gutter that is supposed to drain to a downspout mounted on the rectory front façade adjacent to the south pilaster. The existing downspout is a 3" diameter painted PVC sewer pipe. It is unclear whether the roof slope was an original design feature or if it was created by decay of the original support columns and replacement of those columns with temporary columns that were too short. The current counteracting roof slope prevents water flow toward the

downspout drain resulting in it spilling over roof edges. The poor condition of the integral gutter inverts allows water in the gutter to soak into the roof structure. The seepage of water into the roof structure and edge spillover has contributed to decay of the wood soffits, fascia and roof joist ends and it likely contributed to decay of the original columns that ultimately necessitated their removal. Professional roofing contractors have indicated that redesign of the roof drainage strategy is necessary for successful installation of a new roof on the porch.

The brick masonry is to remain in place. The application proposes to clean the brick according to 2018 published HDC guidelines.



- ① DEMOLISH ROOF AND ROOF FRAMING
- ② DEMOLISH ROOF SUPPORT STRUCTURE
- ③ DEMOLISH PILASTERS
- ④ DEMOLISH COLUMNS
- ⑤ DEMOLISH PORCH CEILING
- ⑥ REMOVE PORCH LIGHT BUT MAINTAIN BRANCH CIRCUIT FOR CONNECTION TO NEW LIGHT

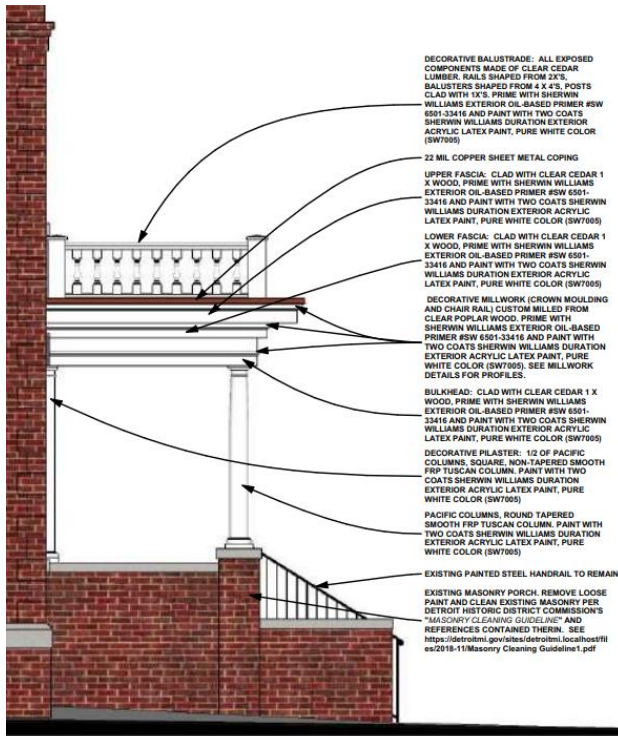
*Existing porch proposed for demolition. Image from application.*



*Existing condition of porch roof. Photo provided by applicant.*



*Existing condition of porch. Photo provided by applicant.*



**PERSPECTIVE VIEW**

## **NORTH ELEVATION (SOUTH OPP.)**

*Proposed work as shown in application. See application for additional images.*

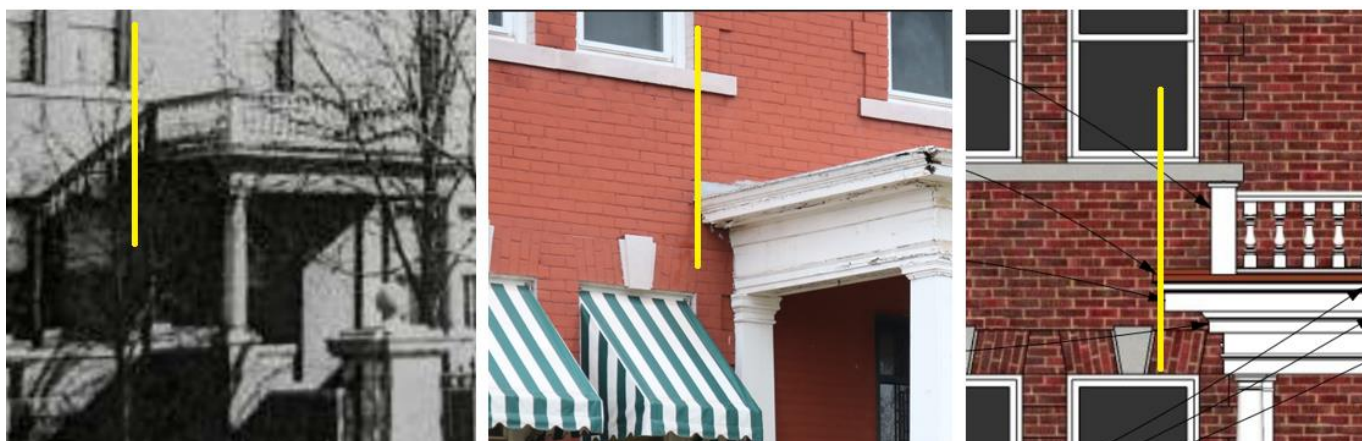
## **STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH**

- The Sweetest Heart of Mary Roman Catholic Parish Historic District was established by Ordinance 473-H in 1981. Its Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-125) note the painted brick and wood porch of the rectory building; the Elements state that the porch is light gray. Although not mentioned in the Elements of Design, staff observes that the brick porch foundation is unpainted red brick.
- The Final Report emphasizes the relationship of the buildings to Polish immigration and population growth in the 1880s and 1890s; it also discusses the importance of the original architecture of the buildings. This suggests a Period of Significance and implies that later alterations to the buildings are less important to the district's character.
- Staff was unable to determine the date of the porch from building permits and Sanborn maps. As an estimate based on architectural style, it was likely or modified in the 1920s or 1930s. It is not certain if any original porch elements were incorporated into the later work. However, it appears likely that the most of the remaining porch elements, other than the front two columns, are original. As noted in the application, "the existing rectangular pilasters appear to be original." Also, "the centerlines of pilasters that support the porch adjacent to the building do not align with the centerlines of columns that support the porch distally." That the two front columns are misaligned in this manner supports the likelihood that although they were added later, the remaining porch elements are original.
- It is not clear why the original porch was altered.

- Although the Final Report does not specify an exact Period of Significance, the rectory building is primarily significant for its c.1900 expression, as noted above. Any subsequent alterations would thus not have “acquired historic significance” (Standard #4).
- The proposed work would remove features (i.e., columns) that are arguably not character-defining, replacing them with reconstructed features from the Period of Significance based on photographic evidence. It would also add a balustrade, similarly reconstructed from the Period of Significance. These work items would potentially satisfy Standard #6, “replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.” However, staff concerns with the broader scope of work are described below.

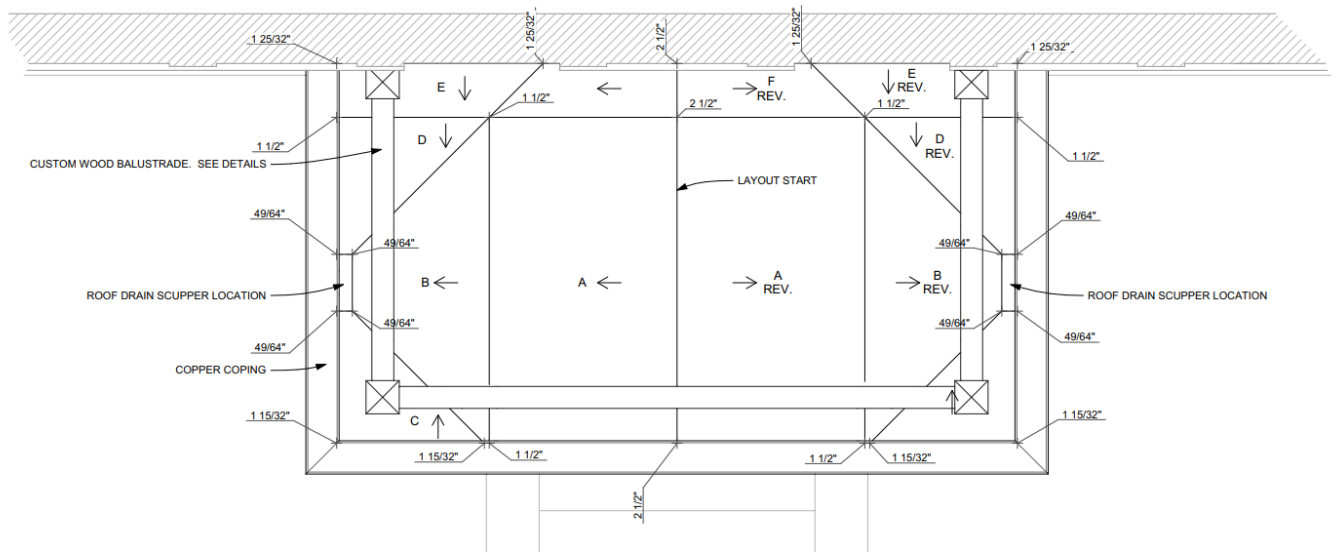
## ISSUES

- Although staff is, in a general sense, supportive of the proposed, evidence-based replication of a historic porch from the Period of Significance, staff objects to proposed work, as described, for the following reasons:
  - The proposal does not fully examine the possibility of original historic materials being present. It is possible or likely, for instance, that only the front two columns are newer, with the remainder of the porch being original. The original porch, to the extent that it exists, is an important, visually prominent, character-defining feature that should be retained. To the extent that any of its components have deteriorated beyond repair, this condition should be documented, and any proposed replacement elements must “match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials” (Standard #6). A closer inspection of the existing porch would also provide additional “physical evidence” (Standard #6) that would supplement the historic photograph to facilitate an accurate replication of the historic porch.
  - The proportions of the proposed porch are clearly different from those of the historic porch. For example, the upper cornice of the proposed porch appears to be about two feet wider than the same element of the historic porch. The dimensions of the proposed porch would thus alter the visual relationship of the porch to the core facade. The proportions of the proposed porch entablature also appear to be changed from the current porch.



*Left to right: Historic (from application), current (staff photo), and proposed (from application) porch; yellow line added by staff to indicate approximate western extent of porch cornice. Image is typical of both sides of porch as porch is symmetrical.*

- It appears that the proposed wider porch roof is intended to provide clearance for drain scuppers located on the sides (north and south elevations) of the proposed new porch. Staff suggests that other mechanisms for drainage could be explored that would not require changing the dimensions of the historic porch.



*Roof plan showing drainage system. Image from application; see application documents for additional images and detail.*

- Staff notes that pure white is not an appropriate paint color. The Elements of Design specify light gray; Color System C provides several off-white color options for Colonial Revival and Neo-Georgian architecture. Staff suggests that the proposed color is acceptable as it matches the existing trim color of the building and retains the sense of contrast with the dark-painted brick; however, should the entire building be repainted in the future, an off-white trim color would be more appropriate.

## RECOMMENDATION

### Recommendation (Section 21-2-78) Determinations of Historic District Commission

Staff recommends the Commission issue a *Denial* for the work as proposed because it destroys features and spaces characteristic of the property, failing to meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular:

- The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
- Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.