

**STAFF REPORT: MAY 10, 2023 REGULAR MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8336**

**ADDRESS: 1453 W BOSTON**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON**

**APPLICANT/OWNER: EVAN ASHER**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: APRIL 13, 2023**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: MAY 3, 2023**

**SCOPE: REPLACE SLATE ROOF WITH ASPHALT SHINGLE ROOF, REHABILITATE AND EXPAND DRIVEWAY AND PATIO, REMOVE TREE**

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Built in 1915, the property at 1453 W. Boston is a two-and-one-half story, Flemish-bond brick house facing north onto the street. It is Georgian Revival in style, with a dentil cornice and a curved entry portico featuring Corinthian columns. A two-car, hip roof garage in the rear yard is also subject of this application. Both buildings have a slate roof (a small section of the house has EPDM rubber). A concrete patio connects both buildings. The lot includes ten mature Norway maple trees, one mature magnolia in the front yard, and several other small trees, giving it a noticeably thicker tree canopy than other houses in the district.



## **PROPOSAL**

The applicant proposes two separate rehabilitation items:

### **Roof replacement**

The proposal is to replace the slate roof on the house and garage. The proposed new material is Certianteed

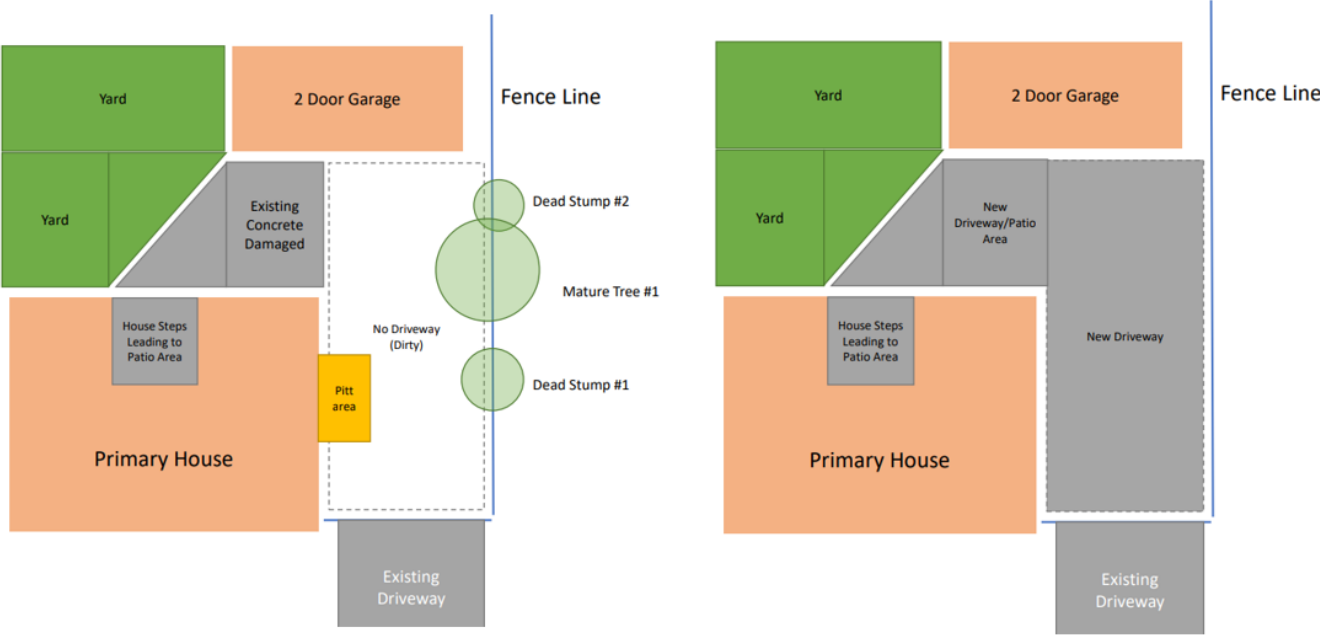
Landmark Climateflex Colonial Slate asphalt dimensional shingles. The proposed work includes related items, such as flashing, vents, gutters, and downspouts, as described in the application materials.



Left: Existing roof. Right: Proposed replacement product. Image from submitted application materials.

**Driveway and Patio**

The applicant proposes to expand an existing driveway and patio area, replacing all existing concrete and pouring new concrete where dirt currently exists, as shown in the sketch below. This work will require removing two tree stumps, one mature tree, and filling in a window well and window opening.



Left: Sketch of existing conditions. Right: Sketch of proposed work. Images by applicant. Images are not to scale.

**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 Elements of Design for Boston-Edison provide the following relevant observations:
  - “Roofing includes slate, tile, and asphalt shingles.”
  - “Tile, slate, or wood shingle roofs have particular textural values where they exist.”
  - “Roofs are in natural colors (tile and slate colors, natural and stained wood colors), and asphalt shingles are predominantly within this same dark color range.”
  - “Straight side driveways leading from the street to rear garages are the norm.”

## **Roof replacement**

- A slate roof is almost invariably a distinctive, character-defining feature of a building, as is the case with the house and garage on this property. The slate roof appears to be original to the house and garage.
- The applicant has submitted photos showing missing and cracked roof tiles, damage to flashing, and interior water damage (see application materials for photos).
- The applicant states that “subpar” repair attempts were made by a previous owner.
- The application materials include a statement from Butcher and Butcher, a company with experience repairing and replacing slate roofs. The company used drone photography (included in the application materials) to examine the roof of the house and noted damage from improper repairs, “loads of slate that are falling out of place, missing, or broken,” and recommended that the roof should be replaced rather than repaired “due to the overwhelming amount of issues.”
- The deterioration on the garage roof is clearly more severe than on the house, with missing tiles on all planes and visible damage to the decking below.
- The applicant obtained a statement from Butcher and Butcher that a replacement slate roof would cost \$140,000 to \$170,000 for the house and \$35,000 to \$40,000 for the garage. According to Butcher and Butcher, a replacement with DaVinci synthetic slate would have a similar cost.
- Realtor.com estimates the value of the house at \$287,561. The applicant states that additional exterior and interior rehabilitation work is forthcoming, creating additional expense for the applicant.
- According to the City Code,<sup>1</sup> “in reviewing plans for the issuance of a certificate of appropriateness, the Historic District Commission shall follow the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for rehabilitation and guidelines for rehabilitating historic buildings as set forth in 36 CFR Part 67.” That regulation includes the direction “the Standards are to be applied to specific rehabilitation projects in a reasonable manner, taking into consideration economic and technical feasibility.”<sup>2</sup>
- The documentation submitted by the applicant is comparable to that of several other proposals the Historic District Commission has issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for within the past three years. The argument provided by the applicant is based on a statement from an experienced contractor advising against repair and providing amounts for two replacement alternatives. This implies a financial feasibility argument as described in the previous bullet point.
- The applicant instead wishes to use an asphalt roof from a different contractor.



## Driveway and patio

- The applicant invited staff to view the back yard on May 3, 2023. The existing paved area is cracked and broken and covered with soil and plant matter such that staff cannot determine its full extent. There is clearly a newer front driveway in good condition which ends at the front plane of the house where a gate is located. Beyond the gate, the driveway is either missing or entirely covered in dirt. In the rear yard, an expanse of broken concrete transitions into a poured concrete patio area. The garage slab is also cracked and broken.
- Due to its apparent age of the patio and the coarse aggregate used, staff suggests that the patio is historic or original to the house.
- Due to the location and orientation of the garage, staff suggests that it almost certain that a continuous side driveway originally ran from the front curb cut to the rear garage. Upon reaching the back yard, the driveway would likely have widened to access both doors of the garage and connect with the patio.



*Staff photos of rear patio area.*



*Staff photos of driveway area.*





*Application photo of driveway area.*



*Staff photos of window well and tree proposed for removal.*

- Staff notes that the tree proposed for removal has grown to create a root system that impedes completion of a driveway that likely existed historically, as noted above. The roots also seem to be expanding and continuing to crack the remaining driveway and patio concrete.
- The tree proposed for removal is a Norway maple, a non-native tree introduced in the eighteenth century as a shade tree. It is one of ten mature Norway maples that currently occupy the property (six in the back yard and four in the front yard). Due to the ability of the tree to spread on its own, and the random placement of the trees, it is likely that these trees grew naturally and were not planted.
- A tree growing at the fence line is unlikely to be an intentional landscape feature. Although maintenance of the tree canopy is often a concern of historic appropriateness, the presence of nine other mature Norway maples on this property, along with other, younger trees that will be able to replace the mature trees as they age, ensures that the tree canopy will be preserved.
- Staff notes that removing the tree will likely damage several sections of chain link fence which will need to be replaced. This constitutes “ordinary maintenance” not requiring review if the damaged portions are replaced with matching material.<sup>3</sup>

## ISSUES

- The applicant has not provided a width for the proposed driveway. Staff notes that driveways in Boston-Edison typically have a uniform width as they proceed from front curb cut to rear garage. Expanding the driveway at the side yard beyond the width of the front-yard portion of the driveway would be an “alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property” (Standard #2).
- The concrete curb in the back yard is an important, character-defining feature in that it appears to be part of an intentional, historic landscape composition and serves the practical function of a short retaining wall, protecting the backyard turf from erosion. Its removal would likewise be contrary to Standard #2. If deteriorated beyond feasible repair, it may be replaced in kind (Standard #6).
- The 2018 Glass Block Guidelines produced by the Historic District Commission provide an “acceptable” mechanism for closing in a basement window without altering its fundamental aesthetic qualities.

## RECOMMENDATION

### Section 21-2-78: Determinations 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 driveway width in the side yard area shall continue the line created by the existing front yard portion of the driveway (upon reaching the back yard, it may expand as shown in the application sketch to connect the garage and patio).
- The concrete curb separating the patio from the grassy portion of the back yard shall be retained. If damaged, it may be replaced in-kind.

- The above-grade portion of the window well shall be enclosed as specified in the Historic District Commission Glass Block Guidelines (the window well may be filled to grade level).

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<sup>1</sup> Sec. 21-2-73

<sup>2</sup> 67.7 (b).

<sup>3</sup> Sec. 21-2-4.