

STAFF REPORT: JULY 12, 2023 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8436

ADDRESS: 1901 CHICAGO

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON

APPLICANT/OWNER: BRADLEY NASH

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JUNE 3, 2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JUNE 27, 2023

SCOPE: INSTALL AIR CONDITIONING CONDENSERS ON ROOF AND SIDE WALL (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1951, the property at 1901 Chicago Boulevard is a two story, brick house facing north onto the street, a wide boulevard with median. The house is Colonial Revival in style, with prominent pilasters, metal casement windows, and a recessed entrance bay. A flat-decked, hip roof provides the location for an air conditioning condenser.



Site visit photo of the subject property, as seen in June 2022, taken from the far (north) side of Chicago Boulevard looking south towards the house.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to install two heat pump condensing units, one on the roof of the building, and one on the east wall. The unit on the roof is a replacement for a previous air conditioning unit of the same size and in the same location. It is 29 inches tall, according to a submitted product brochure, and mounted on a bracket that adds a few inches of additional height. The unit on the east wall is new; dimensions are not provided. The proposal also includes the planting of butterfly bushes to conceal the east wall unit. All work is completed and is visible on the property.

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 proposed (already installed) rooftop unit is approximately the same size and shape, and in the same location as the previous unit. However, staff has no record that the previous unit was ever approved.
- The rooftop unit is not easily visible from Rosa Parks or from the side of Chicago Boulevard nearest the house. However, from the far (north) side of Chicago Boulevard, the rooftop unit becomes clearly visible.



Comparison of new unit (left) and old unit (right). Photos provided by applicant, edited and cropped by staff.



Comparison of new unit (left) and old unit (right). Photos provided by applicant, cropped by staff.

- The ground-level unit on the east elevation is entirely new work. Though it is on a prominent, street-facing elevation, it is located on a blank area of wall and in a recessed area, helping to mitigate its visual impact.



Ground-level unit on east wall viewed from Rosa Parks sidewalk towards back yard of house.



Image of new ground-level unit and butterfly bushes provided by applicant.

- Neither unit removes nor obscures any historic features. The work would be acceptable if better hidden from view.

ISSUES

- By adding visually incompatible elements in prominent locations, the work creates an “alteration of ... spaces that characterize a property,” contrary to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, Standard #2.
- Staff is concerned that the butterfly bushes will not thrive due to their shaded, east-facing location. Further, they lose leaves during the winter and will not adequately shield the air conditioning unit from view.

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 rooftop air conditioning unit will be moved to the south and west to the maximum extent practicable, as determined in consultation with staff; the yellow label will be removed.
- The ground-level air conditioning unit will be further camouflaged, either by field-painting it brown, or by planting evergreen plant species to conceal it from view.