

STAFF REPORT: AUGUST 9, 2023 REGULAR MEETING **PREPARED BY:** T. BOSCARINO
APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8476
ADDRESS: 949 W. CHICAGO
HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON
APPLICANT/OWNER: ANDRE WILLIAMS
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JULY 17, 2023
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JULY 19, 2023 AND AUGUST 3, 2023

SCOPE: DEMOLISH GARAGE, CONSTRUCT GARAGE, REPAIR AND PAINT HOUSE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1916, the property at 949 West Chicago Boulevard is a two-and-one-half story, stucco-clad house facing north onto the street. It is Colonial Revival in style; details include an entry portico with curved underside, semicircular dormers, a dentil cornice beneath the eave line, and soldier brick courses highlighting the foundation, chimney, doorway surround, and window sills. It is located on a corner, double lot. The garage, also subject of this application, is a two-bay, side-gabled building with stucco cladding and visible rafter ends. The garage was built concurrently with the house, according to building permits.



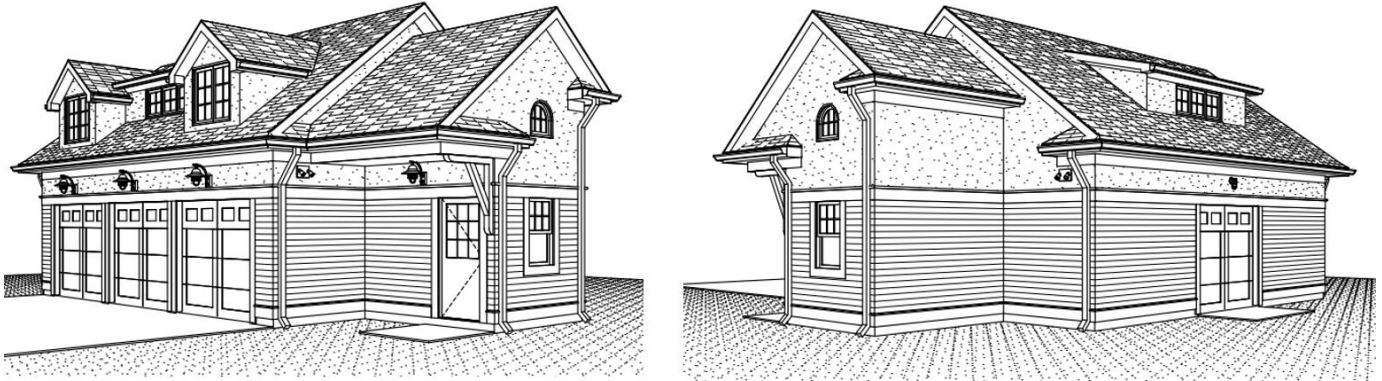
Left: House. Below: Garage, viewed from alley. July 2023 photos by staff.



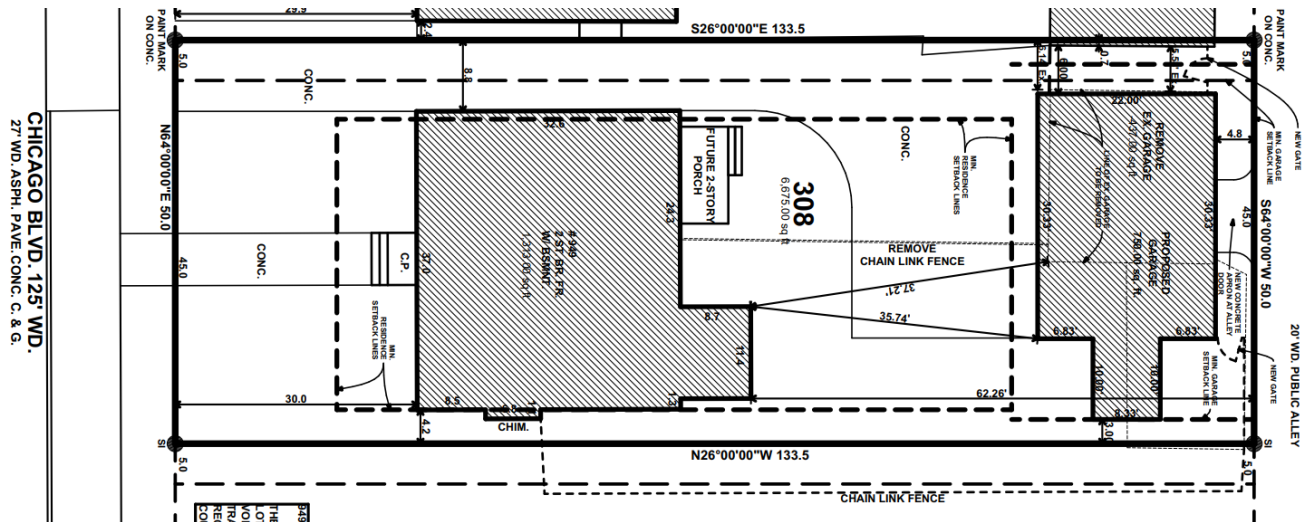
PROPOSAL

Garage

The applicant proposes to demolish the existing garage and build a new garage.



Proposed new garage, views from northwest (left) and southwest (right). Images from application drawings.



Site plan of property including proposed new garage. Image from application drawings.

The proposed garage is a one-and-one-half story, three-bay (three car) garage with additional space provided by a narrower projection to the west. The proposed building has 4" smooth fiber-cement lap siding on the ground level and true stucco above, with painted wood eaves and trim. Other details include box cornices with returns, and shed and gable dormers.

Specifications are included in the application materials for products including Lincoln Window aluminum-clad wood casement and double-hung windows with 7/8" simulated divided lights, Clopay 8'x7' overhead steel panel garage doors with and without glazing, a glazed steel panel pedestrian door, 5" aluminum downspouts, 3"x4" aluminum gutters, asphalt architectural shingles, and several types of light fixtures including gooseneck lights.



Images, from application documents, of proposed materials.



Proposed light fixtures as shown in application documents. Left to right: Barn Light Electric Industrial Guard LED gooseneck light, Southwire tamperproof alley light, Acclaim Lighting security floodlight.

Colors proposed for the garage are from Color System C: C:4 Yellowish White for lap and stucco siding, B:19 Black for windows and garage doors, B:11 Grayish Olive Green for pedestrian door.

The garage shingles are proposed to be IKO Cambridge architectural shingles in charcoal grey; the gutters and downspouts are proposed to be black.



IKO Cambridge charcoal grey. Image from application.

Also included with the proposal is the replacement of a cracked and uneven driveway slab, as described in the application documents.



Areas of concrete proposed for replacement. August 2023 photos by staff.

House

Damaged exterior elements will be addressed by “repairing an item wherever possible ... if an item is beyond repair, it will be replaced in kind.” According to the application, “features determined to be beyond repair will be matched with stock or custom replacements. Rotted structural and trim lumber will be replaced to secure necessary structural integrity and weathertight finish.” The application states that further alterations beyond repair will be applied for separately at a future phase of the project.

Once the house is repaired, the proposal is to paint the entire building the same four colors as the new garage, mentioned above.



Proposed color scheme. Rendering from application documents.

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. Relevant Elements of Design are as follows:
 - “Window openings are virtually always taller than wide; however, several windows are sometimes grouped into a combination that is wider than tall. Window openings are always subdivided. The most common window type is double-hung with sashes that are generally further subdivided by muntins or leaded glass.”
 - “In buildings derived from Classical precedents, voids are usually arranged in a symmetrical and evenly spaced manner within the façades.”
 - “The majority of houses are faced with brick, while many are partially or totally stucco ... Roofing includes slate, tile, and asphalt shingles.”
 - “The use of stucco or concrete, with or without half-timbering, as a contrast to brick surfaces, is not unusual.”
 - “Where stucco or concrete exists, it usually remains in its natural state, or is painted in a shade of cream. 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. Paint colors often relate to style.”
 - “Architectural details generally relate to style.”
 - “The buildings derived from Classical precedents usually have simple, rectangular façades with varying amounts of ornamentation.”
 - “Neo-Georgian and other buildings derived from Classical precedents are generally symmetrical.”

Demolish Garage

- *Best Practices Review: Evaluating Garages and Outbuildings in Historic Districts* (2023) identifies “the garage as a resource of considerable historic merit, despite its sometimes humble appearance,” suggesting that garages are generally considered to be contributing resources worthy of preservation. However, staff opinion is that this garage has lost integrity (the ability of a resource to convey its significance) to the point where it is no longer a contributing resource.
- The garage is visible in a 1988 Historic Designation Advisory Board photo, in an intact condition. There are no other available records regarding the evolution of the building over time. The applicant states in an August 4, 2023 email to staff that it was damaged in a fire around 2002. The fire started in the alley and spread to the inside of the building. Staff observes that the rafters, eaves, and historic (alley-facing) doors, have been lost or irreparably damaged due to fire. This eliminates all former character-defining features other than the stucco cladding, which is also damaged and delaminating due to the lean of the building caused by the fire. The integrity of the building had already been reduced by a non-historic, yard-facing (north-facing) steel door added prior to the 1988 photo.
- According to the National Register Bulletin *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, “Integrity is sometimes a subjective judgment, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property’s physical features and how they relate to its significance.” The Bulletin continues by providing several steps, including “define the essential physical features that must be present” and “determine whether the essential physical features are visible.” As mentioned above, the “essential physical features” are no longer visible in that they were destroyed by fire. Arguably, the form and massing of the building, itself, is an essential physical feature, but this, too, has been compromised as the building is now leaning from structural damage.



1988 Historic Designation Advisory Board photo.



Photo by applicant indicating non-historic steel door and structural damage.



August 2023 staff photo highlighting fire damage.

- The demolition of the garage is acceptable, in the opinion of staff, provided that the new work is compatible with the property, the Boston-Edison Historic District, and its Elements of Design.

Construct New Garage

- The scale of the proposed garage building is larger than the current building, but nonetheless appropriate for the district. Within one block of the subject property, staff observed several large-scale garages and carriage houses.



Example garages and carriage houses in the vicinity of the subject property. July 2023 photos by staff.

- Lap siding is not common for houses in Boston-Edison, but is it very common for garages. For example, the next-door property at 937 Chicago has a garage clad in lap siding.



Garage at 937 Chicago. July 2023 photo by staff.

- The proposed garage largely consists of materials, textures, and details appropriately referencing the Colonial Revival style of the main house and consistent with the Elements of Design quoted above. Staff opinion is that these elements render the proposed building “compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing” of the house and the district, as required by Standard #9.
- A few aspects of the proposed garage are not consistent with the Colonial Revival style of the property. These are restricted to massing, rather than detail, and include shed dormers on the north and south elevations and the asymmetrical massing of the east and west elevations (return cornices are higher on the

north end and lower on the south end). Staff opinion is that that these elements, by introducing novel massing to an otherwise compatible building, allow the new building to be “differentiated from the old,” as required by Standard #9.

- The proposed security lighting meets the 2023 *Security Lighting Guidelines*.
- The application materials specify appropriate colors consistent with the house and Color System C.
- Although front-facing driveways are not common in Boston-Edison (vehicle access is more typically from the alley) they do exist; this driveway is visible in a 1949 DTE aerial photo. Staff suggests that the driveway is a historic feature. Staff also observes that it is likely deteriorated beyond feasible repair; as such, its in-kind replacement is appropriate.

ISSUES

- The proposed light fixtures are stylistically more appropriate for a traditional industrial building or rural building (indeed, the gooseneck fixture is marketed as a “barn light”) or, arguably, a postmodern commercial or residential building. Staff opinion is that they are not “compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion” of the historic setting, as required by Standard #9.
- As written, the proposal is to replace the existing concrete driveway. However, staff notes that the site plan appears to depict a somewhat larger paved area and omits a maple tree observed in site visits (as an additional note, removal of this tree was subject of a March 2022 application to the Historic District Commission, but the application was withdrawn before a staff report was written). Staff’s position is that while individual trees are, themselves, seldom contributing historic resources on their own, the maintenance of a tree canopy is important to preserving the historic character of a residential district.¹ The importance of the tree is enhanced by its visibility from Hamilton Avenue, as the property is located on a corner double lot. Staff opinion is that the location and diameter of the tree suggests it was deliberately planted prior to the designation of the historic district, and is a historic feature. Further, staff sees no evidence that the tree is unhealthy or otherwise warranting removal. Its removal would constitute an “alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property” and “shall be avoided” according to Standard #2 of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.
- It is not clear from the application if the maple tree is intended to be removed or if it was merely omitted from the plan for clarity. However, it appears that the desired garage and driveway can be accommodated without removing the tree.

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:

¹ “Trees, shrubs, and other plantings in the form of lawns, shade trees, hedges, foundation plantings, and gardens often contribute to the historic setting and significance of historic neighborhoods. Plantings were often the result of conscious efforts to create an attractive neighborhood...” *National Register Bulletin: Historic Residential Suburbs; Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places*, National Park Service, 2002, page 12.

- The light fixtures shall be compatible with the property and the Boston-Edison Historic District, subject to approval by staff.
- The paved area shall not be expanded beyond its current extent. If it must be increased to accommodate the new garage, the paved surface will avoid further encroaching within the drip line of the existing maple tree, subject to staff review and approval.



Maple tree viewed from Hamilton (left) and alley (right). August 2023 photo by staff.