

STAFF REPORT: NOVEMBER 8, 2023 MEETING

PREPARED BY: A. DYE

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2023-00072

ADDRESS: 7908 – 7912 ST. PAUL

HISTORIC DISTRICT: WEST VILLAGE

APPLICANT: RENATA POLK, SUSTAINABLE VILLAGE GROUP

PROPERTY OWNER: RENATA POLK

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: OCTOBER 16, 2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: OCTOBER 25, 2023

SCOPE: REMOVE WOOD SIDING (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL), INSTALL WOOD SIDING, REPAIR/REPLACE WINDOWS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The two-family dwelling at 7908 – 7912 St. Paul was erected after 1897 and before 1910. It is a 2 ½ story structure on a raised foundation.

The symmetrical façade is centered with a two-story bay that displays a typical window pattern for this era: central fixed windows with leaded glass transoms above, and double-hung windows, matching the height of the central openings, in place on the angled walls. The bay culminates with a recessed gable within which is a small centrally placed fixed or awning window. Covered entry porches fill the remaining first floor of the front elevation and small double-hung windows are centrally located within the remaining wall surface at the second level.

The historic wood siding and much of the wood trim was removed without HDC approval, so the underlying wood sheathing is the current exterior wall surface. Historic wood windows (some with leaded glass, some with wood muntins) are still in place in many openings, and the majority of visible window sash appear to be wood framed one-over-one double-hung units. Metal storm windows are in place on all non-boarded openings. Wood scrollwork applied trim remains at the underside corners of the front gable. The porches are in a state of reconstruction; the rebuilding of the porches were previously approved by the Commission.



Staff photo, October 25, 2023

PROPOSAL

- Remove wood lap siding on the front and sides; install new wood siding.
- Replace trim, soffit, and fascia.
- Replace front doors.

- Repair remaining windows; install new wood windows where needed.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The West Village Historic District was established in 1983.
- The Sanborn maps show the structures adjacent to 7908 were also constructed between 1897 and 1910. The three houses have a commonality of design through massing (long and filling the width of the lot), raised foundations, steeply pitched roofs (with matching ridge height), front-facing gables with centered window openings, projecting front elevation walls, wood clapboard siding in different dimensions, and applied decorative ornament.



Staff photo, January 24, 2023.

- One highly visible detail that was present on all three buildings is the dual-sized wood siding - narrow boards on the front elevation with wider, more standard-sized boards on the side and rear walls. This combination is seen throughout West Village and is a defining feature of many clapboard homes in Detroit. Narrow siding, like narrow flooring, is more expensive to install, and intended to imbue the front elevation with a richer character (quite literally).
- The Commission reviewed an application for 7980-7912 St. Paul at its February 2023 meeting.

The Commission denied:

- Removal of the wood lap siding and installation of Hardie Plank smooth lap siding on all elevations,
- Replacement of trim, soffit, and fascia, and
- Replacement of all windows (except leaded glass sash) and installation of Anderson 100 series windows.

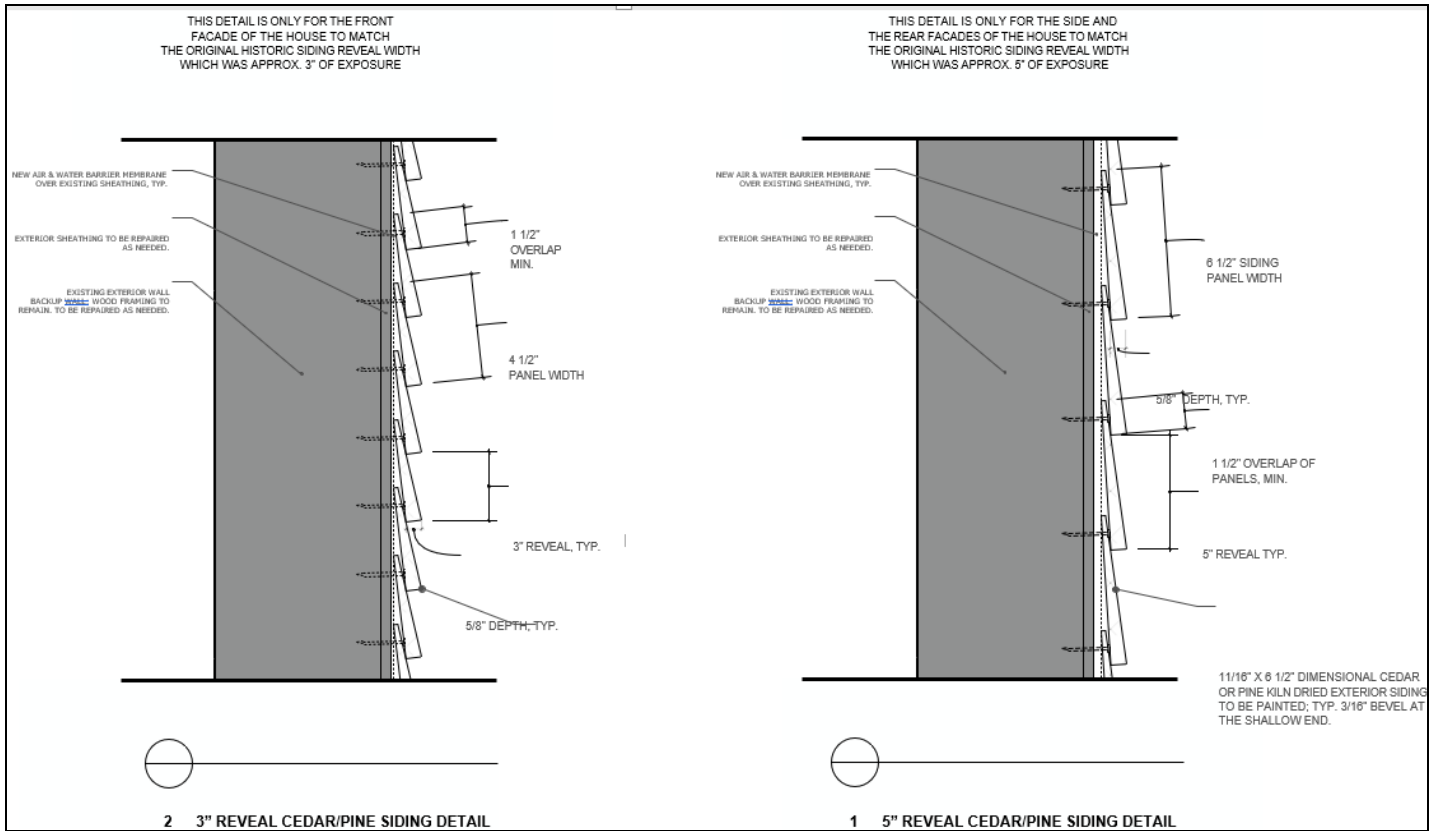
The Commission approved:

- Erection of two front porches, and
- Installation of fiberglass entry doors (with ¾ clear glass panels).



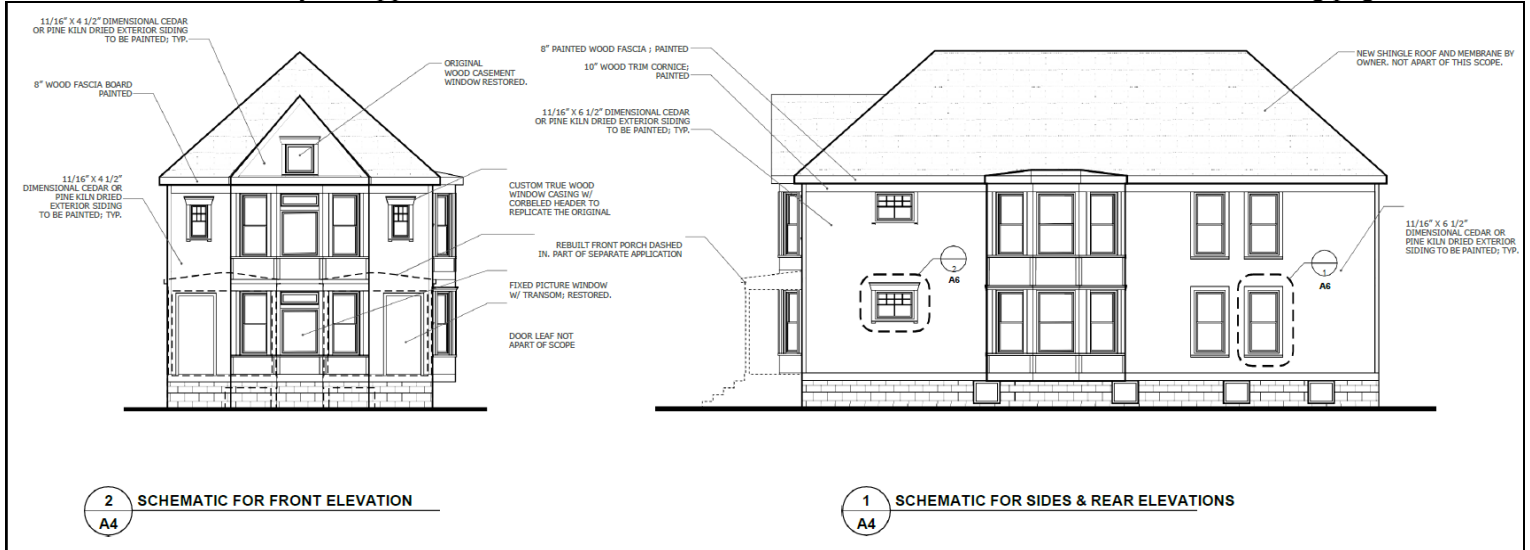
7908 - 7912 St. Paul - Google street view, May 2019.

- The current application proposes to install new wood clapboard siding on each elevation. The front elevation's siding will have a three-inch exposure and the side and rear elevations' siding will have a five-inch exposure, similar to what is shown in the May 2019 photograph on the preceding page.



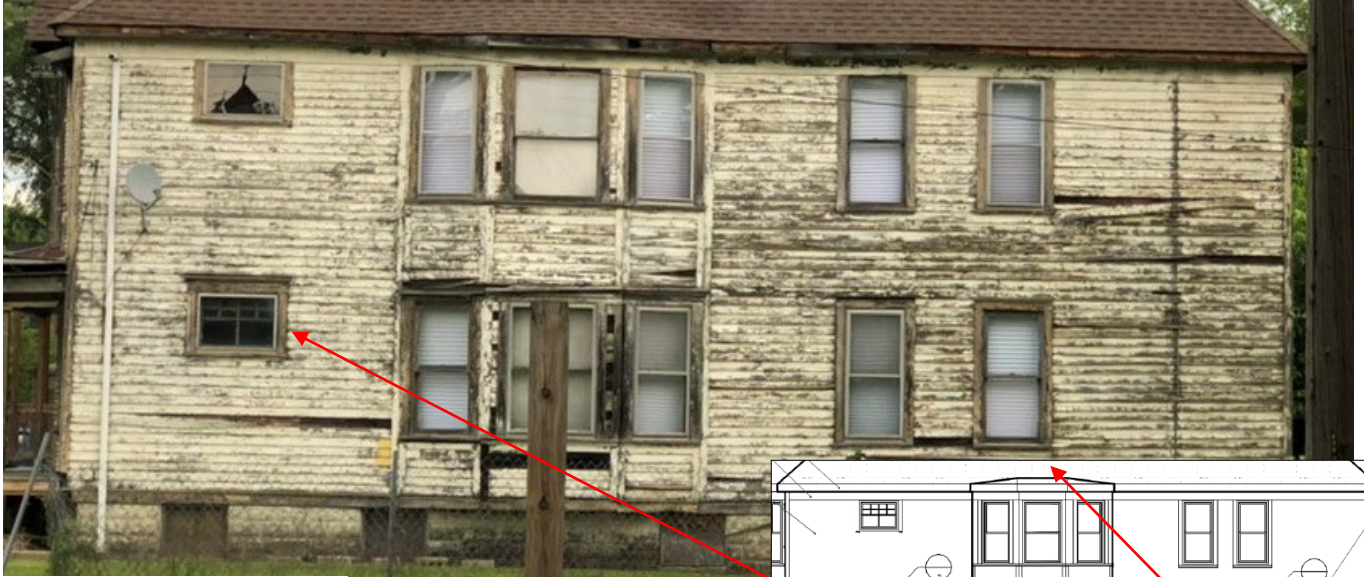
Applicant drawing.

- The recreation of trim and wood siding at the front/north and side/west elevations are shown on drawings submitted by the applicant. Photo of the historic condition at the west elevation is on the following page.

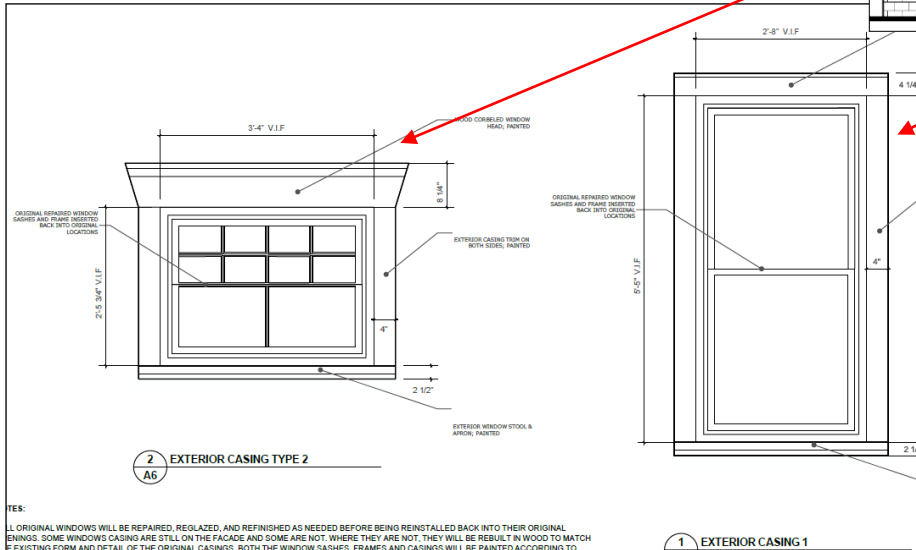
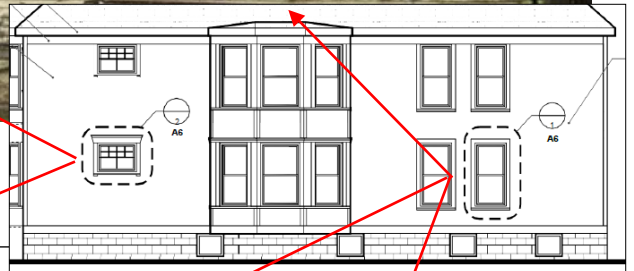


Applicant drawing.

- The drawings show window casings will be constructed in a similar way to the historic condition.



Applicant photo. West elevation.



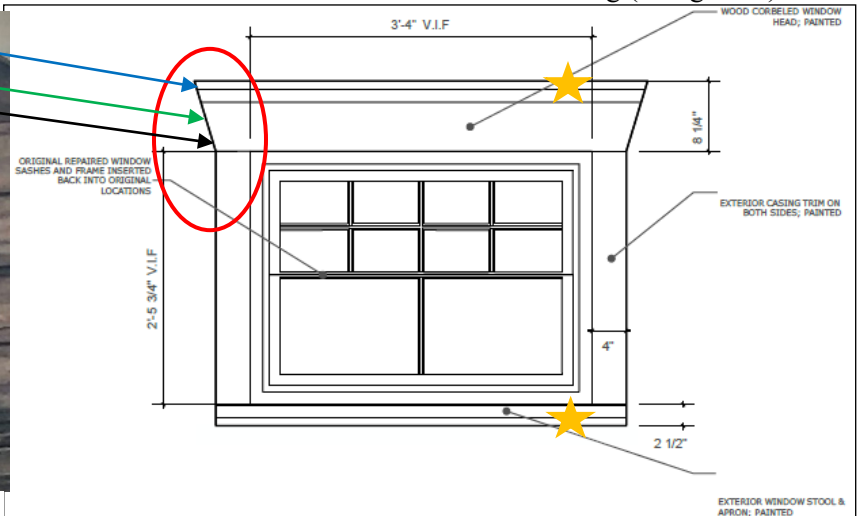
Applicant drawings.



Applicant photo. East elevation. This close-up view shows the window casings for typical vertical window openings; the protruding trim at the headers and sills is also visible.

ISSUES

- The drawing for the window casing for the small windows is not drawn accurately: it doesn't show the trim directly above the window opening (black arrow), the flat trim is shown to angle outward (green arrow) rather than only the decorative trim above the casing extending outward on an angle (blue arrow). Additionally, the protruding dimension for the sill and the header's decorative trim isn't noted on either drawing (orange star).



Above: Staff photo. Right: Applicant drawing.

- Elevation drawings were not submitted for the east (side) and south (rear) elevations. The dwelling has four unique elevations so a drawing for each side of the house must be submitted to confirm the new siding, trim, and other details (if present) will match the previous existing conditions.

Example – east elevation – oriel window:

The roof was flat and clapboard siding covered the walls below the windows.

Example – south elevation – rear walls and porch railings/stairs:

The applicant hasn't explained nor shown how the rear elevation will look. Specifically: will the built-out walls at both decks be retained or will they be removed, what type of railing will be installed, and will a two-story stair be erected. If stairs are to be erected, the placement, design, and finish of the stairway will need to be shown on a site plan in addition to the elevation drawing.



Google street view, May 2019



Above and below: Applicant photos, undated.

Below left: Staff photo, Feb. 2023.



- The existing loss of detail and character on the dwelling is substantial. The elevation drawings must confirm that removal of additional detail will not occur. The below pictures show ornament that remains in place below the front façade’s gable. One bracket is missing from the left side, but three remain intact. The decorative trim is unique to 7908-7912 St. Paul and is a distinctive character-defining feature. Depiction of these brackets, including the leaded glass windows in the central openings of the two-story bay window need to be added to the elevation drawing.



Staff photos, January 2023

- The applicant needs to submit the manufacturer’s or fabricator’s information, including sash dimensions, for the new wood windows that are proposed for the openings that don’t have existing sash. The openings that will receive new windows must be noted on each elevation drawing.



RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds that the proposal will not alter the features and spaces that characterize the property and district and therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed as it meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and the Elements of Design for the district.

However, staff recommends the Commission issue the COA with the following conditions:

- Elevation drawings for the east and south elevations will be created and will document all related scope of work (including trim, wall, and porch details).
- The window casing drawings will be corrected to accurately reflect the existing conditions and dimensions.
- The front elevation drawing will be revised to include notations of the retention of trim within and below the gable.
- A site plan will be submitted to confirm placement and dimensions of rear stairwell (if one is being erected).
- Manufacturer’s or fabricator’s information, including sash dimensions, for the new wood windows will be submitted. The elevation drawings will note the window openings that will receive new window sash.
- Revised plans noting all the above conditions will be submitted for staff review prior to pulling a permit.