

**STAFF REPORT: NOVEMBER 8, 2023 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: A. DYE**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2023-00082**

**ADDRESS: 1257 LONGFELLOW**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON**

**APPLICANT: CLARENCE BOYKIN, CBJ CONSTRUCTION**

**PROPERTY OWNER: LOREN RADDEN**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: OCTOBER 16, 2023**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: OCTOBER 25, 2023**

**SCOPE: REMOVE WOOD WINDOWS (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL), INSTALL VINYL WINDOWS**

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The dwelling and garage at 1257 Longfellow were erected circa 1916. The lot is located at the southeast corner of Longfellow and Byron. The property has a Longfellow address, but the front entrance faces Byron. The house and garage were designed in a similar architectural style and matching materials; the articulated elevation of the garage faces the house rather than the street.



*HDC staff photos, October 25, 2023.*

The dominant exterior material is stucco and contrasting dark brown brick was used for windowsills, chimney, jagged masonry surrounds at the top of the house and garage, as well as the Byron-facing parapet. The use of “Dutch/Flemish gables” at the house and garage are distinctive features in which a parapet disguises the end of a traditional gabled roof. The garage roof also features a clipped gable facing Bryon.



The majority of the window openings on the house and garage are rectangular in shape, however many of the openings on the house have flat curved trim above the windows to create an arched appearance. Currently most of the window openings within the house are empty, however some historic windows remain in place on the north, west and south elevations. At the garage, three of the four casement windows remain in place; the remaining window openings are empty. Prior to removal, the window openings were comprised of mullied vertical, true-divided light wood casements of varying heights.

**PROPOSAL**

The proposal requests replacing five windows, however most windows at the property have been removed. The applicant proposes to install white vinyl casement windows with between-the-glass grids.

**STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH**

- The Boston Edison Historic District was established in 1974.
- Detroit Parcel Viewer lists Lanie Cromer as the owner, not Loren Radden.



*Designation photos, 1974. HDAB. These photos capture the west/Byron elevation (above right) painted a different color than the north/Longfellow elevation (above left). The two colors remained in place through at least 1980, the house current has a uniform off-white paint color on the house and garage.*

- According to research posted on the Facebook group “Historical Detroit Area Architecture”: *The original owner/client of 1257 Longfellow was Raymond Wilcox; the house and garage were designed by Grand Rapids architect William M. Clark.*
  - The Grand Rapids architectural firm of Vierheiling and Clark had designed a house in 1904 for Frederick and Caroline Wilcox. This house is located at 15 College S. E., in what is now the Grand Rapids Heritage Hill Historic District.
  - Staff assumes that Raymond was the son of Frederick and Caroline, grew up in the Grand Rapids house, and hired Mr. Clark to design his home in Detroit. The Grand Rapids house offers many similar, but more elaborate, features to the Detroit house, including Flemish/Dutch gables, and arched designs over rectangular-shaped mullied window openings.



*Google street view, 2020.*

- The dwelling at 1257 Longfellow displays minimal embellishments that created dramatic contrasts. The distinctive character-defining features include:
  - Smooth surface stucco walls,
  - Dutch/Flemish gables at the front and rear elevations,
  - Windowsills comprised of a single course of rowlock brick,
  - Arched window openings that have mullied rectangular wood casement windows with a vertical divided-light glass pattern,
  - A wide, narrow chimney that is in line with the roof ridge and masonry parapet wall,
  - Exposed rafter tails,
  - Angled wall extensions at the corners of the front and rear entrance walls,
  - Projecting hood and projecting header trim at the second-floor windows on the two primary elevations.



*Staff photos, October 25, 2023.*

*Above: brick detail at third floor (north and east) elevations.*

*Below right: Northwest corner, chimney in partial view.*

*Below left: Front entrance, arched opening to porch and exposed rafters visible.*

*Upper left: Dutch gable at east/side elevation, and similar arched opening at side entry.*



- The garage matches the house in design, materials, and patterning. Therefore, the structure has many distinctive character-defining features, including smooth stucco walls, Dutch gable, brick sills, arched door, mullied windows, jagged masonry surround for upper window opening, angled walls flanking the overhead door, rafter tails, and a clipped gable roof. The garage is an integral structure to the property and district.



*Above: Google street view, August 2011, shows the physical and architectural relationship between the dwelling and garage.*

*Left: Staff photo, October 2023.*

*Below: Staff photo, October 2023. Take from alley.*



Repair/Violation History

- 2000 - A COA was issued for the repair of the wood windows, repairs to the roof, the reinstallation of the garage door and windows, installation of gutters and repainting (stucco – A:4 Pale Yellow, trim – B:8 Blackish Green).
- August 1, 2022 - A SeeClickFix notification was received by HDC staff which reported that a new roof and gutters were being installed and painting of trim was taking place.
- August 1, 2022 - HDC staff conducted a site visit and noted that most of the windows at the first and second floor had been removed, trim had been painted black and a new black asphalt shingle roof had been installed. The owner and crew informed staff that the original windows would be reinstalled once they were painted. Staff explained that HDC approval is required and gave information about application submission.



Staff photos, August 1, 2022.

*Above: Longfellow elevation – Windows at the second floor had been removed.*

*Right: South elevation faces the garage; most of the windows have been removed.*

*Below: Byron elevation – All but one window had been removed.*



- August 24, 2022 - A Building Department inspector inspected the property. No permit or attempt to pull a permit had occurred. Owner told inspector he would pull permits.
- September 14, 2022 - HDC staff received another SeeClickFix notice about the windows having been previously removed and the property open to trespass. Staff conducted another site visit, and contacted BSEED with update.
- December 14, 2022 - BSEED inspector visits property, issued a stop work order, and refers to court.
- January 3, 2023 - An email with photos sent to HDC staff reported the original windows were in a pile at the curb.



*Undated photos that accompanied the January 3, 2023 email to HDC staff.*



- January 3, 2023 –HDC staff visited the site and noted that the windows were gone, only shards of glass remained.



*Staff photo, January 3, 2023.*

### **Photo documentation of windows being removed**

- During the drafting of this report, staff reviewed the house’s visual timeline on Google Maps. The July 2022 street view images captured people working at the property and the windows being removed. This is the activity led to the August 2022 SeeClickFix notification. As noted in the above timeline, the windows were discarded approximately six months later.



*Google street view, July 2022.*

- Additional work that has been identified, but is not included in this application:
  - New asphalt shingle roof,
  - New gutters and downspouts,
  - Painting fascia and window trim black

## ISSUES

- The applicant has not replied to staff communication requests related to this project. Staff listed the proposal scope of work based on the submitted materials, not the physical condition of the house.
- Standard Six states, *“Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.”*
  - The current application did not provide sufficient documentation outlining the deterioration of the original wood windows that were removed without approval.
  - Based on images that showed the windows within the openings prior to removal, as well as the photo of the discarded windows at the curb, it is staff’s opinion the visual documentation showed the window sash were intact and the wood frames and glass panes appeared to be in repairable condition.
- The removal of the existing windows destroyed a distinctive character-defining feature and substantially altered the appearance of the building.
- All the windows were removed without Historic District Commission approval; therefore, based on the Standards, new windows should match all the details of the historic windows that were removed.
- It is staff’s opinion, through limits of fabrication and material, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic districts.
  - Vinyl windows and wrapped brickmould offer a plasticity and flat/thick appearance that does not adequately match the profile/dimensionality and appearance of historic windows, such as wood.
  - Consumer grade vinyl windows weather poorly, deteriorate rapidly, and exhibit poor detailing and detracting color/sheen.
  - The framing material, glazing, and seals (which keeps the argon gas intact between the insulated glass) of vinyl windows break down more quickly in ultraviolet light than wood or steel-framed windows.
  - Vinyl also lacks rigidity and can expand and contract more greatly than wood and steel. This can result in discoloration and warping of the vinyl frames, as well as condensation between the glass layers.
  - The installation of the proposed vinyl windows does not follow NPS guidelines for new replacement windows, as the proposed windows are not “consistent with the general characteristics of a historic window of the type and period”, are not “compatible with the overall historic character of the building”.

## RECOMMENDATION

### **Recommendation One: Denial**

Staff finds that the proposal for the replacement of the historic wood windows with vinyl windows does not meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the following reasons:

- The removal of the original wood windows destroyed distinctive character-defining features and substantially altered the appearance of the building.
- All the windows were removed without Historic District Commission approval. Therefore, based on the Standards, new windows should match all the details of the historic windows that were removed.
- Through limits of fabrication and material, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic districts.
  - Vinyl windows and wrapped brickmould offer a plasticity and flat/thick appearance that does not adequately match the profile/dimensionality and appearance of historic windows, such as wood.
  - Consumer grade vinyl windows weather poorly, deteriorate rapidly, and exhibit poor detailing and detracting color/sheen.
  - The framing material, glazing, and seals (which keeps the argon gas intact between the insulated glass) of vinyl windows break down more quickly in ultraviolet light than wood or steel-framed windows.



- Vinyl also lacks rigidity and can expand and contract more greatly than wood and steel. This can result in discoloration and warping of the vinyl frames, as well as condensation between the glass layers.
- The installation of the proposed vinyl windows does not follow NPS guidelines for new replacement windows, as the proposed windows are not “consistent with the general characteristics of a historic window of the type and period”, are not “compatible with the overall historic character of the building”.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the work as proposed, as it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standards 1, 2, 5, and 6:

*1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.*

*2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*

*5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*

*6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*