

**STAFF REPORT: JULY 10, 2024, REGULAR MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00333**

**ADDRESS: 630 VIRGINIA PARK**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW CENTER AREA**

**APPLICANT/OWNER: JOE GUADAGNINO**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JUNE 12, 2024**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JULY 1, 2024**

**SCOPE: ENLARGE DRIVEWAY (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)**



*July 2024 photo by staff showing existing condition and work completed without approval.*

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Built in 1906, the property at 630 Virginia Park is a two-and-one-half story building, located midblock and facing south towards the street. It is an English Revival or Tudor Revival house, clad in brown brick. Character-defining features include the asymmetrical façade with a dominant Tudor-style gable that projects forward from the east side of the front façade. On the west side of the front façade, a covered porch with a limestone cap also projects from the centrally located front entrance. Above, expressive fascia boards and half-timbering in the upper portion of the gables are supported by decorative dentils. An articulated gable aligned with the front door projects past the rest of the porch canopy and balances the composition of the front façade. Within the doorway, a door surround with transom and sidelights is also a defining feature. Windows were replaced in 2020 or 2021 pursuant to Certificate of Appropriateness #21-7400.

Subject of this application, the driveway has recently been expanded from a narrow, ribbon driveway, to a wider paved surface. This work is completed without approval and is visible on the property. (shown in photos on the next page).



Undated 2022 or 2023 photo by staff showing prior driveway configuration.

## **PROPOSAL**

The proposal is to enlarge the driveway (work already completed). Changes to landscaping are also proposed.



*Rendering of proposed work. Image from application documents. (Note that the fence shown in the rendering has been reduced in scale and is subject of a separate administrative approval.)*

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The New Center Area Historic District was established by Ordinance 530-H in 1982. The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-129 of the Detroit City Code) provide the following guidance:
  - “The typical treatment of individual properties is a flat or slightly graded front lawn area in grass turf subdivided by a concrete or brick walk leading to the front entrance; a side walk sometimes leads to the rear. ... Some straight side driveways, primarily in concrete but a few in brick, leading from the street to the rear garages exist on Virginia Park, Bethune, and Lothrop.”
  - “Foundation plantings of an evergreen and deciduous character are present on individual lawns.”

### Driveway

- Repaving of a historic driveway is appropriate and is typically approved administratively under Resolution 01-01 and Resolution 20-03. Although this work increases the area of pavement and converts a ribbon driveway to a full driveway, this work has a minimal impact on the character of the property and is consistent with other driveways found in the district. The work is appropriate, in staff opinion, with the exception covered under “Issues,” below.

### Landscaping

- The proposed work would “Increase size of front garden beds, add step stone footpath to driveway and plant one small-medium sized tree,” as stated in the application scope of work. The narrative further clarifies that the footpath would be “white flagstone or similar” and the tree would be “a flowering tree ... such as crabapple or dogwood.”
- The proposed garden beds recreate foundation plantings, as mentioned in Elements of Design and seen in a 1982 photo from the time of designation. A single tree in the front yard is consistent with the historic character of Virginia Park. The proposed footpath constitutes a “side walk ... to the rear” as mentioned in the Elements of Design. The proposed landscaping work is appropriate, in staff opinion.



*1982 Historic Designation Advisory Board photo showing historically appropriate foundation plantings.*

## ISSUES

- The proposed (already installed) driveway extends in front of the front façade of the house by about twelve inches. As a driveway is, by definition, a pathway from the street to a rear garage, this additional width effectively creates a paved surface in the front yard of the property. This interferes with the character-defining front lawn and is inappropriate, in staff opinion (thereby precluding administrative approval of the completed work). The work is contrary to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, namely Standard #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.”



*July 2024 staff photo showing inappropriate overlap of driveway with front façade of the house.*

- The rendering (shown on page 2 of this report), depicts a front walkway that has been narrowed and partly hidden behind shrubbery, an awkward and non-historic condition. However, this walkway has already been installed and is in its historical location, contrary to the rendering. The walkway, in its present configuration, is appropriate and would typically be approved administratively under Resolution 01-01 and Resolution 20-03.

## 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 proposed (already installed) driveway shall be reduced in width by approximately twelve inches to avoid overlapping the front façade of the house.
- The walkway leading to the door shall not be altered from its existing footprint.

