

STAFF REPORT: AUGUST 14, 2024, REGULAR MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00364

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO
Correction in bold red on Page 4

ADDRESS: 134 ARDEN PARK

HISTORIC DISTRICT: ARDEN PARK-EAST BOSTON

APPLICANT/OWNER: CARI KEISWETTER

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: JUNE 25, 2024

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: JULY 25, 2024, AND AUGUST 7, 2024

SCOPE: INSTALL CONCRETE PAVEMENT IN FRONT YARD



July 2024 photo by staff.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Built in 1912, the property at 134 Virginia Park is a one-and-one-half story house, facing north towards the street. It is Colonial Revival in style, clad in red-brown brick and yellow-painted wood siding. Character-defining features include the asymmetrical façade with gambrel roof, Tuscan-columned, recessed front entry porch, and a flat-roofed porte cochere or carport.

Pertinent to this application, a one-car-width concrete driveway extends from a rear, two-bay garage (built in 1913), through the carport, to the street. Parallel to the driveway, a paved pedestrian walk extends from the front entrance to the sidewalk. The walkway has been truncated, without approval from the Historic District Commission, and formerly extended all the way to the street. The latter work was performed between 2015 and 2021, according to Google Maps and staff photos.



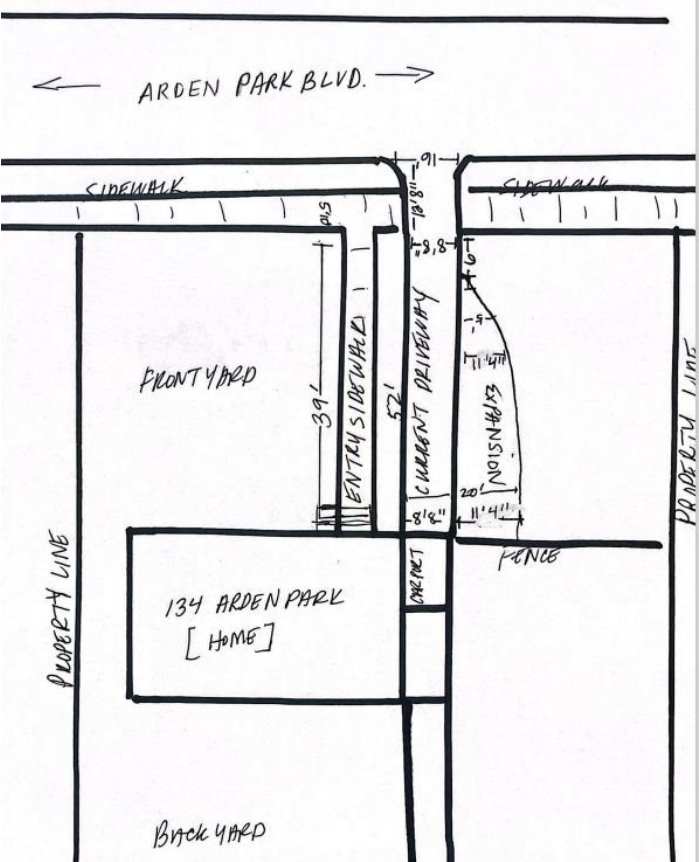
1981 Historic Designation Advisory Board photo.



Aerial view from Detroit Parcel Viewer.

PROPOSAL

The proposal is to expand the current paved area of the property, extending from the current driveway and installing additional concrete immediately to the east. The proposed width 11'4" and described as "to accommodate two cars."



Rendering of proposed work (not to scale). Image from application documents.



August 2024 staff photo with arrow added to indicate approximate location of proposed pavement.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The New Center Area Historic District was established by Ordinance 442-H in 1981. The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-123 of the Detroit City Code) provide the following guidance:
 - “Most houses are situated at or near the center of the lot, leaving open space on either side. Where buildings are closer to one side, a more spacious side yard exists.” (*Rhythm of Spacing of Buildings on Streets.*)
 - “Characteristic treatment of individual properties is a flat front lawn area in grass turf, often subdivided by a walk leading to the front entrance. Materials for such walks are concrete or brick or a combination of these materials.” (*Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.*)
 - Hedges between properties are common. (*Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.*)
 - Straight, single-width side driveways leading from the street to the rear garages are the norm and are either paved in brick, concrete or asphalt. (*Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.*)
- The Arden Park-East Boston Historic District Final Report, authored by the Historic Designation Advisory Board at the time the district was established in 1981, does not mention driveways or paved areas specifically but highlights the importance of the district as a designed landscape with intentional and significant green space.
- Staff consulted with the Supervisor of Plan Review of the Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department who stated that although the City Code generally provides no limit to the amount of pavement that may be installed within the front setback (i.e., the front yard) of a residential property, the City Code nonetheless would prohibit the use of that space for parking (Charles Reed, email to staff, August 8, 2024). Staff suggests that the review of the Historic District Commission should concern itself with the historic appropriateness of the proposed paved surface, overall, irrespective of its intended use.
- Should the property owner wish to repave the existing driveway without expanding the paved area, this would be appropriate and would generally be approved administratively under Resolution 01-01 and Resolution 20-03.

ISSUES

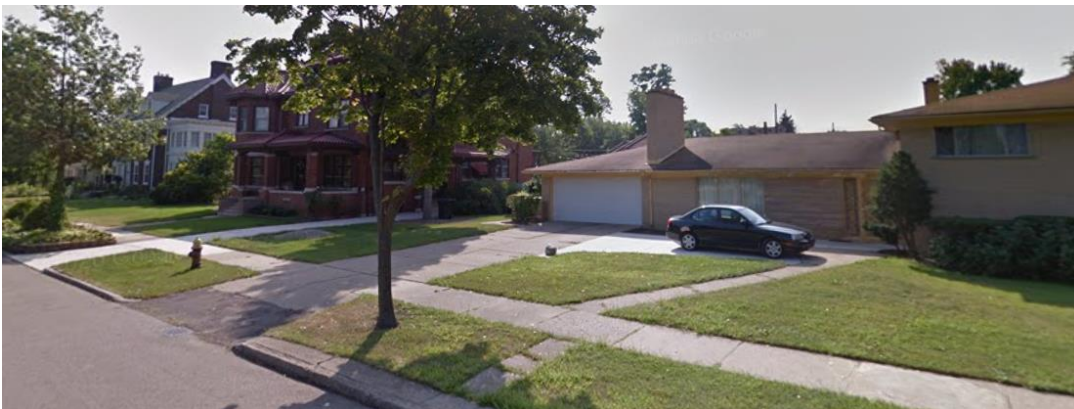
- In early-twentieth-century Detroit neighborhoods in general, a driveway (if it exists at all) is limited to relatively narrow path leading to a parking and loading area that is behind the house—it is not, itself, a parking or loading area. Houses from the historic period typically also have relatively narrow pedestrian pathways leading from the street to a front or side entrance. The paving of additional front-yard area beyond the minimal driveway and pedestrian walkway areas is a relatively recent, suburban-style development pattern, not appropriate in the context of Detroit’s historic neighborhoods.
- A visual survey of the Arden Park-East Boston Historic District indicates that the presence of broad, uninterrupted lawns, occasionally punctuated by rows of hedges or trees running perpendicular to the front facades of individual houses, is a defining aspect of the visual character of the district.



The 100 block of Arden Park Boulevard, looking east toward the subject property. August 2024 staff photo.



The 100 block of Arden Park Boulevard, looking west. August 2024 staff photo.



*The 200 block of Arden Park Boulevard, looking east. This view shows the only example in the neighborhood of a paved front yard area, shown being used for improper parking. There is no record of Historic District Commission approval for the expanded pavement. 2013 Google Maps image. **Correction: Another such area is at 621 Arden Park; this work predates the establishment of the historic district.***

- Further, the Elements of Design (quoted above) specifically note the characteristic nature of open space, grass lawns, and, specifically, “straight, single-width driveways” in the district. In staff opinion, the interruption of these areas with additional paved surface would constitute “alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property,” contrary to Standard #2 (quoted in full below).

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78: Determinations of Historic District Commission

Staff concludes that the proposed installation of pavement does not meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the following reason:

- The proposed work diminishes a character-defining open lawn space by adding an incompatible expanded paved surface.

Therefore, staff recommends that the Commission issue a Denial as the proposed work fails to meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular:

- 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.*