STAFF REPORT 10-09-2024 REGULAR MEETING **PREPARED BY:** G. LANDSBERG
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00523
ADDRESS: 1457 SEMINOLE
HISTORIC DISTRICT: INDIAN VILLAGE
APPLICANT/OWNER: GEORGES AYOUB
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 09-16-2024
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 09-27-2024

SCOPE: REPLACE ASBESTOS-CEMENT SHINGLE ROOFING WITH ASPHALT SHINGLES

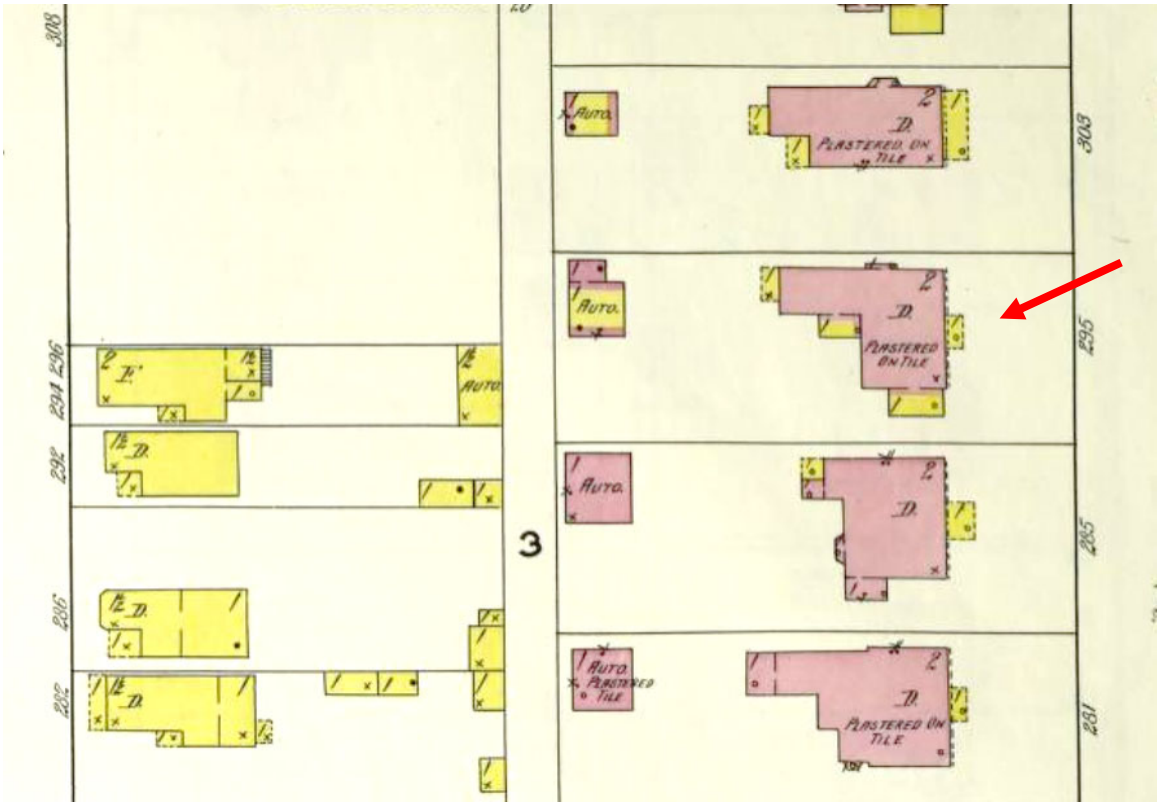
View of 1457 Seminole, looking west from the sidewalk. Staff photo, September 29, 2024.

EXISTING CONDITIONS
The house at 1457 Seminole, was built in 1911 in a colonial revival style with stucco ("plaster on tile") exterior. It is 2½ stories and features a symmetrical expression composed of multi-light-over-1 double-hung wood windows. The roof is side gabled with shed-roof dormers and features asbestos-cement shingles. A wrought iron fence encloses the front yard, and lush plantings at the sidewalk and throughout the front yard hide much of the house from view.

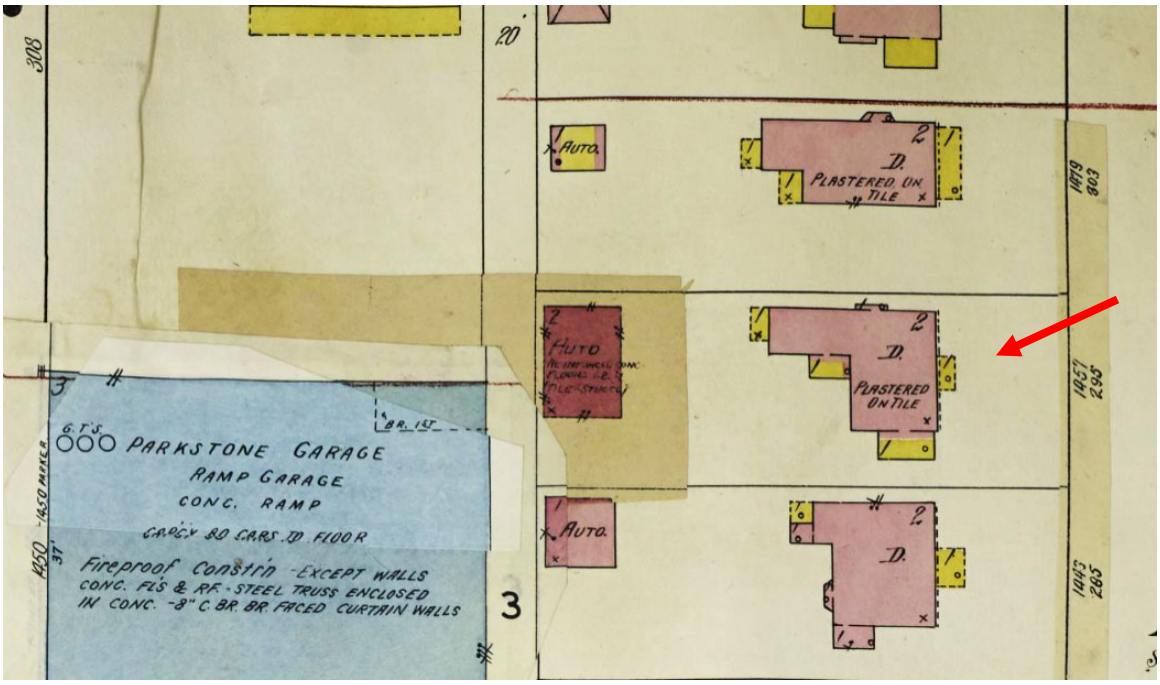
The property has a record of careful stewardship under the previous longtime owner. BSEED and HDC files show a long trail of applications and approvals dating back to the 1970s, including the pulling of BSEED permits in 1974 for a storm door and repairs at the rear porch, painting of the wood trim in 1979, and repainting of the trim ("C:5 Yellowish white") again in 1988, installation of pergolas and fence in 2003, replacement of the carriage house roofing in 2005, installation of a front yard fence in 2014, replacement of brick/concrete walkways with blue stone in 2014, new front yard ornamental tree in 2014, installation of porch light fixtures in 2015.

HDAB Designation photo, 1971

Parcel at 1457 Seminole, per Detroit Parcel Viewer.



1915 Sanborn map of 1457 Seminole and vicinity. Prior to the 1920 renumbering scheme, the house was addressed as 295 Seminole. As it was primarily a fire insurance reference, Sanborn maps depicted construction materials with great care. The "x" refers to a shingle roof; a dot means composition (asphalt), and an open dot means slate or metal. Frame (wood) buildings are shown in yellow; structural brick buildings are shown in red, concrete/block in blue. D=dwelling, F=flats, S=stores.



The 1951 update shows a larger garage in place at 1457 Seminole, as well as substantial changes on nearby Parker Street, including the 1920s erection of the Parkstone Garage.

Detail view of roof conditions at northeast dormer. Staff photo, September 29, 2024.

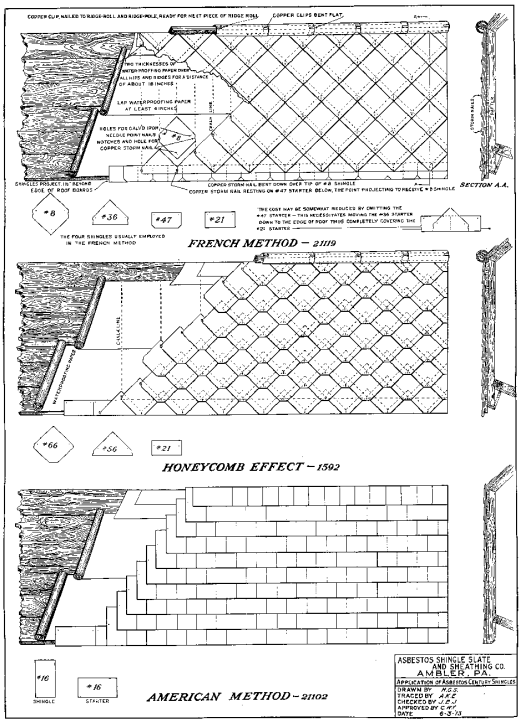
View of 1457 Seminole from the sidewalk through front gate. Staff photo, September 29, 2024.

PROPOSAL
The applicant proposes to replace the asbestos-cement roof shingles with asphalt composition shingles. The gutters will also be replaced.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- The Indian Village Historic District was established in 1971 as Detroit's second local historic district. Though no report was prepared, a National Register report is available. A period of significance from 1900-1930 is usually accepted.
- The applicant claims in his submission materials that the "existing roof was last replaced in the 1970s (based on the previous owner's knowledge)." Unfortunately, HDC staff has no record confirming this work, which may also have occurred prior to district designation. Both the 1971 and 1980 HDAB designation photos show what appears to be the current roofing in place, suggesting that it is either original to the house, or was in place prior to the district's designation.
- The National Park Service, via its Technical Preservation Services division, does provide some background regarding asbestos-cement shingles used on historic properties. Such shingles are quite different in manufacture and design than concrete tiles, which were produced to mimic clay tile precedents, and have more robust dimensions, geometry, and textural character. Asbestos-cement singles, by contrast, are a flatter "modern" product that sought to improve on the various asphalt composition products. The NPS writes that:

> *In the United States, mechanized production of asbestos-cement shingles began in the first decades of the 20th century, following Austrian Ludwig Hatschek's invention of a process in 1900 to manufacture rolled and pressed asbestos-cement sheets. Hatschek's patent, reissued in United Stated in 1907, led to a rapid proliferation of the new shingles…*
>
> *The hydraulic pressing process enabled the shingles to be given a texture, such as a rough rustic surface or one imitating weathered wood. The many styles and sizes of asbestos-cement shingles available, made possible roofs laid in various methods including American, Dutch Lap, and French (known in several variants as hexagonal, honeycomb or diamond).*



The shingles at 1457 Seminole were laid using the "American Method" (bottom), per this drawing made available by the National Park Service, from 1913. This is an attempt to mimic the rectangular and orderly expression of slate.

The park service goes on to note that asbestos-cement shingles were "produced into the 1980s, testimony to their popularity and affordability. The countless buildings with this roofing material also attest to the durability of this product." Unfortunately, other than the historical perspective, the NPS gives no recommendations concerning appropriate replacement treatments.

- Staff stipulates that, per the application, the current roofing has "many tears, broken and missing tiles, and mold growth." The applicant further states, and staff agrees, that "asbestos tiles are impossible to repair, present a safety hazard for workers, and require an abatement company to remove the tiles." Documentation is included in the application proving that the current shingles contain asbestos. The applicant also includes a letter from their property insurer threatening loss of insurance unless the roof is replaced.
- The existing shingles have a clear manufactured "texturing" that appears to imitate wood, which is mentioned in the NPS historical information as a common feature. The overall expression, however, tends towards the rectangular order of a slate roof. A 1991 surveyor's report in HDC files describes the roofing as "composition shingles." All HDC records and photographs of the property show these same shingles in place dating back to 1971.
- Staff is unable to establish whether the shingles date back into the historic period (Period of Significance), though we consider it unlikely given the early (1911) construction date of the house and the arrival of asbestos-shingles to market during this same era. It is also quite unlikely that a composition shingle could survive for nearly 115 years, even augmented with cement. The Sanborn maps state "shingles," which typically refers to wood shingles. We believe that the current shingles, based on design and weathering patterns, are likely a late post-war (1960s) replacement of the original roofing, which by then would have been in excess of 50 years old. Staff agrees that, given both the condition of the current roofing, and the hazards/challenges of maintaining and working with asbestos containing materials, that the current asbestos-cement roofing is beyond reasonable repair, both economically and technically.
- Staff finds that modern asphalt (i.e., composition) shingles are a reasonable analog to the existing shingles, which (even if historic) have no obvious replacement product which would better match their unique expression. They would also be a "compatible" option for a house originally fitted with wood shingles, if such feature was no longer extant, as in this case.
- The existing gutters are already modern replacements.
- The treatment for the existing dormer walls, also clad with the asbestos-cement shingles, is unclear in the application. Asphalt shingling would be acceptable, as might certain other treatments of wood or stucco.

ISSUES

- None; staff suggests a condition allowing staff approval of dormer sidewalls when the design is clarified and submitted.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation, Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff recommends that the proposed work should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Indian Village Historic District's Elements of Design, with the condition that:

- A design for recladding of the dormer sidewalls be submitted, subject to staff approval.