

**ADDRESS: 264 WATSON**

**APPLICATION NO: HDC2024-00660**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: BRUSH PARK**

**APPLICANT: JOHN BIGGAR/STUDIOZONE DETROIT**

**OWNER: ELIZABETH BRUSH**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 11/25/2024**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11/18/2024**

**SCOPE: ERECT COVERED DECK AND STAIR AT REAR**

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The house located at 264 Watson was erected ca. 1880 as a single-family, Queen Anne style dwelling. The house features a central 2 ½-story high, hipped mass with a 2 ½-story high, projecting gabled roof wing at the front. A 2-story, flat-roof rear addition had been constructed 1890. Exterior walls are primarily clad with brick that has been painted red, however wood appears in the front gable end. The applicant has noted that the building has both vinyl and wood windows. Despite the replacement of some of the building's wood windows, the original wood brickmould appears intact throughout. A partial width wood porch, added in 2021, is located at the building's front façade. A second, historic-age, flat-roofed wood porch with decorative jigsawn details and turned wood posts, is located at the side wall. A non-historic, flat-roof wood porch with a concrete block deck/floor is located at the building's rear.



**264 Watson, photo taken by staff on 11/25/2024**

## **PROPOSAL**

Per the submission, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to renovate the house. Specific work items include the following:

### **Roof**

- Install new asphalt shingles. Metal 1/2 -round gutters, and metal downspouts
- Retain and repair and paint existing brackets, soffits, and fascia
- At west side, install a new gabled-roof dormer, to be clad with cement fiber siding and include two, 1/1, single-hung wood windows
- At roof of flat-roof rear wing, erected enclosed stairway (clad with cement fiber siding) to lead from attic to roof. Erect a gabled roof canopy which shall shelter the stairs and a new deck with composite flooring. Wood railing, installed at the top of the parapet will enclose the canopy at the east and south sides

### **Front Façade**

- Replace existing non-historic porch with a new hipped-roof porch with decorative wood brackets, turned wood posts, wood deck, and brick piers with wood lattice skirting which will wrap around the east side.
- Install a new full-height, paneled wood door with oval vision within current opening

### **East Side/Wall**

- Demolish existing historic-age wood porch
- Erect a new hipped roof, wood porch with a new porch with decorative wood brackets, turned wood posts, wood deck, and brick piers with wood lattice skirting which will wrap around to the front façade

### **Rear Wall**

- Remove existing non-historic wood porch and masonry deck
- Install new wood porch steps with composite decking/flooring and wood handrails/guardrails
- Install two new wood panel doors and associated wood trim

### **Windows**

- Retain existing vinyl windows (work complete)

### **Site**

- Remove one mature tree from rear yard
- Install a 24"x24" concrete pad in rear yard
- Install a concrete patio (dimensions not specified) to the direct rear of the house
- Plant arborvitae along west property line

## **STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH**

- The Brush Park Historic District was designated in 1980
- See the below designation photo of the house to note the following:
  - The side porch which is proposed for demolition was present and appears to be of historic age/original to the date of the house's construction
  - The front porch has ca. 1960s metal posts and does not appear to be of historic age

- The front doorway has a transom and appears to have been partially infilled with plywood.



**264 Watson, designation slide dating from 1980.**

- A review of records maintained by the Detroit Historic District Commission revealed that the house was rehabilitated in 1981 under a City-funded, home repair program. Exterior work items included the installation of a new asphalt shingle roof, the addition of the current ornamental woodwork/vergeboard at the front facades gable end, the addition of new porch columns at the front porch, and the removal of the rooftop rail at the front porch (see above photo). The drawings associated with the rehabilitation indicate that all of the windows were wood, with some needing repair.
- The applicant has indicated that some of the wood windows were replaced with vinyl units by a previous owner. A review of HDC records revealed that this work did not receive a COA. The applicant has therefore elected to add this item to the current application. Please note that staff was unable to glean the location and number of vinyl windows. The applicant has therefore committed to providing a complete inventory and photos of the vinyl windows prior to the meeting. Staff will share this information with the Commission upon our receipt of the documents.
- A review of HDC records and Google Streetview has revealed a number of additional unapproved work items which have been undertaken over time, to include the following:

- Erection of the rear wood porch sometime after 1981 - The 1981 drawings indicate the presence of a deck with a small, shed-roof overhanging canopy on brackets over the rear door. Also, a gabled roof enclosure was located at steps which led to the basement was present. Sometime after 1981, the basement door enclosure was removed and the current large wood canopy was erected. The current application proposes to replace the current wood porch and non-character-defining masonry deck with a new wood deck with wood handrails and guardrails and composite floor. Staff supports this approach

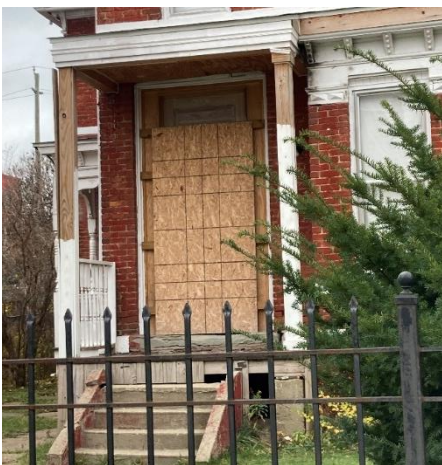


**Current rear porch proposed for removal.**

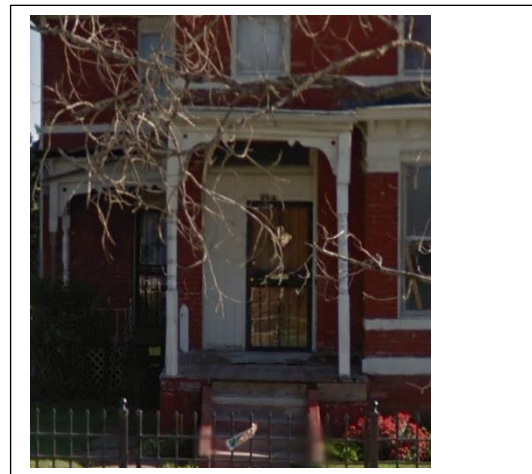


**Conditions at rear in 1981**

- Removal of the front porch and erect a new porch – Google Streetview images indicate the front porch was removed sometime between 2011 and 2013, leaving the masonry deck and steps. The current wood porch was erected 2021. The current application proposes to replace this non-historic front porch with a new wood porch, modeled on the details present at the existing historic-age side porch. Staff generally supports this proposal, although the applicant is seeking to demolish the historic east side porch and wrap the porch around to the east wall, which staff does not support. As noted above, the side porch appears to date from the building’s original date of construction. Also, the porch displays significant ornamental features which are illustrative of the building’s vintage/period of construction and Queen Anne style. As such, the porch is a distinctive, character-defining feature which should be retained.



**Front porch, current conditions, Staff, 11/25/2024**



**Front porch, 2011. Google Streetview**

- Remove transom at front door and install new door which fills rough opening – Per the above designation slide, the front door opening was partially infilled with plywood and a non-historic age door. A transom topped the door. The doorway retained this configuration until 2022, when the transom, door, and plywood infill was removed and replaced with a new wood door. The current application does not propose to restore the transom. Rather, it seeks to install a new wood door and trim in the current round opening. As the transom was historic age and removed without HDC approval, staff recommends that it be restored.

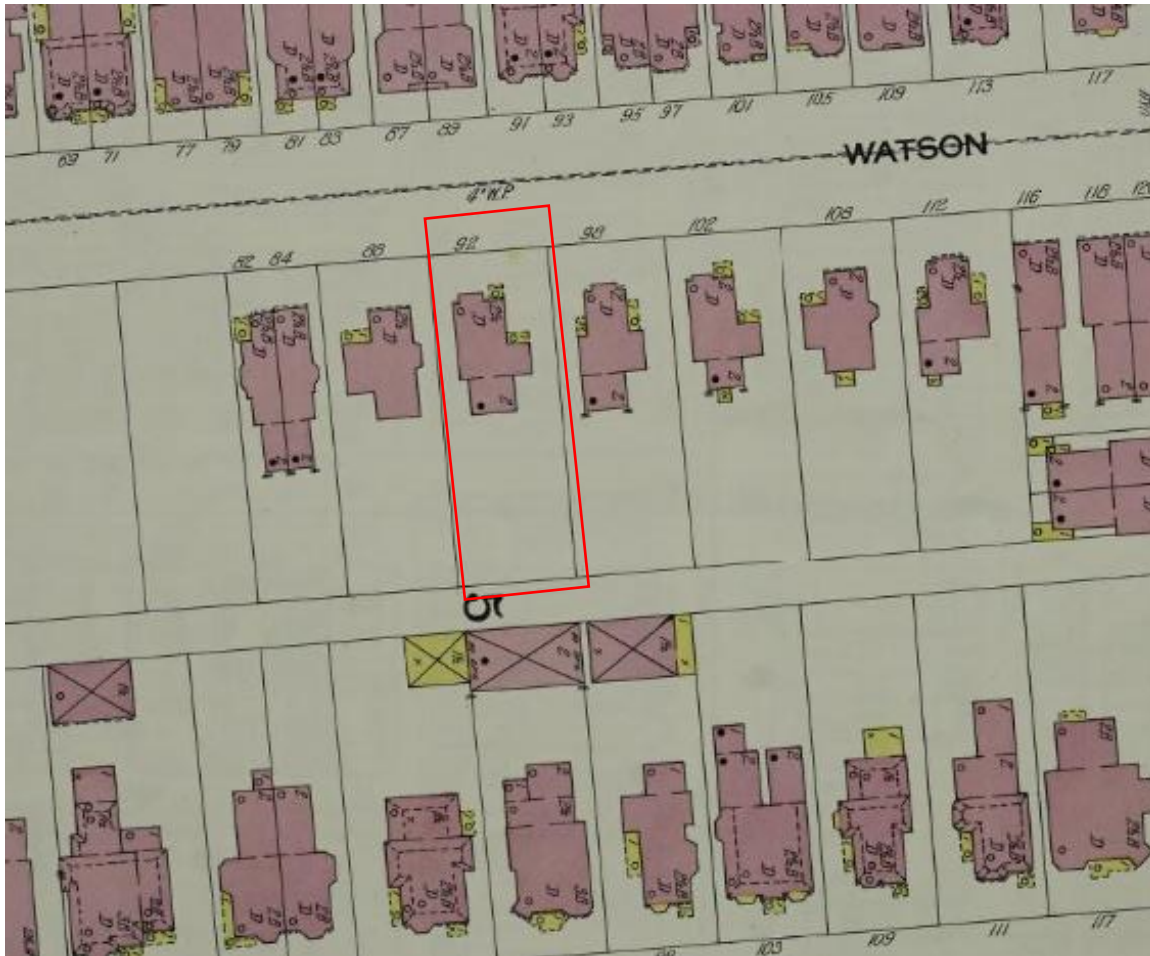


**Front door, 2022. Google Streetview. Per the above photo taken by staff on 11/25/2024, the transom, wood infill, and door depicted in this image are now gone. A new wood door which fills the entire opening is current present. The applicant is seeking to install a new door and trim in the opening**

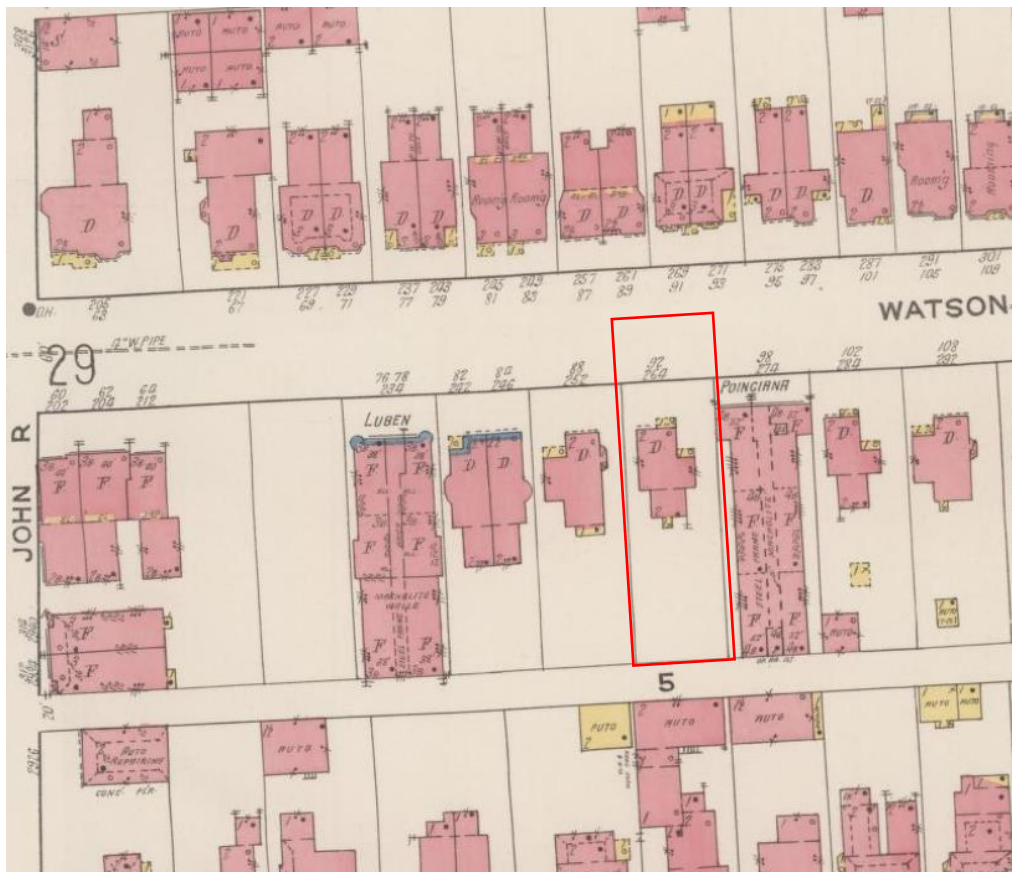
- Staff generally supports the applicant’s proposal to install a new dormer at the west side rooftop as it appears to be a relatively modest means to provide additional space to the attic. However, as the dormer will be highly visible, staff does recommend that the eaves display some sort of overhang to avoid a bland, flat aesthetic commonly found at modern roofs and ensure the element is compatible with the house and its historic surrounds. See the below examples from the district:



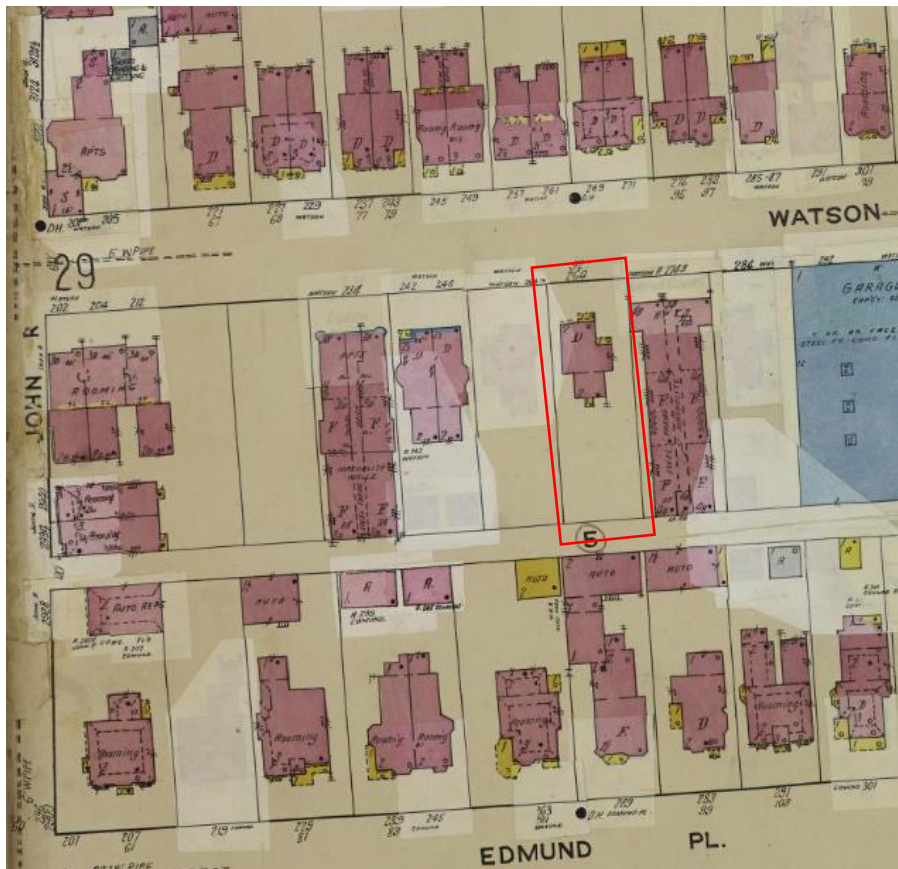
- See the below Sanborn Maps which indicate that the building never did have a wrap around porch. As noted above, staff does think the approach of removing a non-historic front porch and installing compatible new wrap around porch is appropriate in general, but in this specific case, the removal of the historic side east porch to accommodate the new wrap around porch is inappropriate as this porch is a distinctive, character-defining feature of the property because it appears to date from the building's original date of construction and displays significant ornamental features which are illustrative of the building's vintage/period of construction and Queen Anne style.



264 Watson, 1887. Note that the building is addressed as 92 Watson at this time



264 Watson, 1921



264 Watson, 1950

## ISSUES

- As noted above, the applicant is seeking the Commission’s approval to remove the historic-age wood porch at the east side and replace it with a new wood porch which will wrap around the front façade. Staff notes the following re: the front and side porches and proposed new wrap around porch:
  - As stated above, the front porch columns were installed in 1981. At that time, only the historic age roof and masonry deck remained. Neither feature was character-defining, in staff’s opinion. By 2013, the wood porch had been removed, leaving only the masonry deck. The installation of a new front porch in the style of the proposed meets the Standards, in staff’s opinion
  - However, the project proposes to demolish the side porch and replace it with a wrap around wood porch. It is staff’s opinion that this proposal does not meet the Standards as the application does not provide documentation that shows that this character-defining porch is deteriorated beyond repair. Also, if the side porch was shown to be deteriorated beyond repair the new porch the Standards require an exact replication. While the new porch appears to borrow design cues from the historic, it does not exactly replicate the existing. The applicant has stated that the owner wishes to demolish the side porch because it is poor condition. The applicant has committed to providing additional information re: the condition of the porch prior to the HDC’s 12/11/2024 meeting. Staff will forward the information on to the Commission for review upon our receipt of the documents.



**East side porch proposed for demolition, HDC staff 11/25/2024**





**East side porch proposed for demolition, HDC staff 11/25/2024**

- The application proposes to remove a mature tree from the rear yard (species unknown). The applicant has stated that the tree is dying, and its roots have caused damage to the sewer line. However, the current application does not include a letter from an arborist supporting the assessment of the tree's health. Therefore, staff recommends against its removal. The applicant has committed to providing additional information re: the condition of the tree prior to the HDC's 12/11/2024 meeting. Staff will forward the information on to the Commission for review upon our receipt of the documents.
- The applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to retain the vinyl windows which were installed without COA by a previous owner. As noted, staff was unable to fully ascertain the window materials from the public right-of-way and the applicant has committed to providing

additional information prior to the HDC's 12/11/2024 meeting. Note that it is staff's opinion that vinyl windows are not appropriate for a house of this vintage for the following reasons:

- Vinyl windows 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" which would have been originally present at the house.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission deny the proposal to retain the current vinyl units.

- As noted above, the historic front door wood transom was removed recently without HDC approval by a previous owner. The current application does not propose to restore the transom. Staff recommends that it be restored as it was a distinctive character-defining feature.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **Recommendation #1 - Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Denial: Remove the existing east side porch, install vinyl windows, remove a mature tree from the rear yard, install a new front door**

It is staff's opinion that the above-listed scope items are not compatible with the character of the building and historic district for the following reasons:

- The east side porch proposed for removal is a distinctive, character-defining feature of the property because it appears to date from the building's original date of construction and displays significant ornamental features which are illustrative of the building's vintage/period of construction and Queen Anne style.
- The application does not provide documentation that shows that the distinctive character-defining east side porch is deteriorated beyond repair. Also, if the porch was shown to be deteriorated beyond repair the new porch the Standards require an exact replication. While the new porch appears to borrow design cues from the historic, it does not exactly replicate the existing.
- Regarding the tree proposed for removal, the current application does not include a letter from an arborist supporting the assessment of its health.
- The vinyl windows which were installed without COA are not appropriate for a house of this vintage for the following reasons:
  - Vinyl windows 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” which would have been originally present at the house.

Therefore, staff recommends that the Commission these scope items because the work does not conform to the district’s Elements of Design, nor does it meet Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically, Standards #:

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 historic 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.*
9. *New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.*

**Recommendation #2 - Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness: Remaining scope items**

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the remaining work items because the work is in keeping with the district’s Elements of Design and meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. However, staff does recommend that the COA be issued with the following conditions:

- The new dormer proposed for installation at the west side roof display an eave overhang this is consistent with the existing homes in the district. HDC staff shall be afforded an opportunity to review the dormer plan details prior to the issuance of the project permit.
- The new front porch shall only extend the width of the current front porch/shall not wrap around the east side. The final permit documents shall be revised to reflect this condition.
- HDC staff shall be afforded an opportunity to approve the dimensions of the new rear yard patio prior to the issuance of the project permits.