

ANN ARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Staff Report

ADDRESS: 903 West Huron Street, Application Number HDC24-0089

DISTRICT: Old West Side Historic District

REPORT DATE: June 13, 2024

REPORT PREPARED BY: Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator

REVIEW COMMITTEE DATE: June 10, 2024

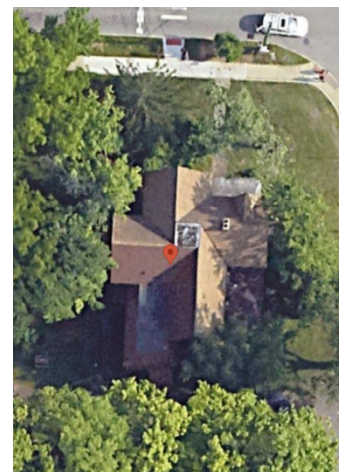
OWNER

Name: Bartholomew Fisher
Address: 209 Pleasant Place
 Ann Arbor, MI 48103
Phone: (734) 320-1026

APPLICANT

Historic District Commission Staff
 301 E Huron St
 Ann Arbor, MI 48104
 (734) 7949-6265

BACKGROUND: This stately Italianate house at the southwest corner of West Huron and South Seventh was originally 99 W Huron, built in 1875. It is a near twin of 844 West Huron, kitty-corner across the intersection of South Seventh, which was built three years earlier. 903 features a stone foundation, pedimented and “eared” window and door trim, an intricate two-lite front door and elaborate picture window beside it, wood lap siding, and tall one-over-one windows. The house has four main gables, one facing each direction, with wide board trim, a steeply pitched roof, and an interesting “pinwheel” in the center of the roof where the ridges from the gables join in a square. Three of the four gables have a small round window, a typical Italianate detail. The front/north and east elevations have fancy boxed-bay windows; the west elevation has a more simple but two-story boxed-bay. A steeply pitched gabled wall dormer faces West Huron above the front porch.



LOCATION: The site is on the south side of West Huron Street, at the southwest corner of South Seventh Street.

APPLICATION: City staff is requesting the review of work started or completed at this address without a Certificate of Appropriateness. This work includes replacement of front porch posts, decking and skirting; replacement of a rear window with a door; and installation of an accessible ramp to the new back door.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS:

Ann Arbor City Code Chapter 103 § 8:421(3)

When work has been done upon a resource without a permit, and the commission finds that the work does not qualify for a certificate of appropriateness, the commission may require an owner to restore the resource to the condition the resource was in before the inappropriate work or to modify the work so that it qualifies for a certificate of appropriateness. If the owner does not comply with the restoration or modification requirement within a reasonable time, the commission may request for the city to seek an order from the circuit court to require the owner to restore the resource to its former condition or to modify the work so that it qualifies for a certificate of appropriateness. If the owner does not comply or cannot comply with the order of the court, the commission may request for the city to enter the property and conduct work necessary to restore the resource to its former condition or modify the work so that it qualifies for a certificate of appropriateness in accordance with the court's order. The costs of the work shall be charged to the owner, and may be levied by the city as a special assessment against the property. When acting pursuant to an order of the circuit court, the city may enter a property for purposes of this section.

From the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

- (1) A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
- (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.
- (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.

From the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (other SOI Guidelines may also apply):

Entrances and Porches

Recommended: Designing and installing additional entrances or porches on secondary elevations when required for the new use in a manner that preserves the historic character of the buildings, i.e., limiting such alteration to non-character-defining elevations.

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Not Recommended: Introducing a new entrance or porch that is incompatible in size, scale, material, and color.

Installing secondary service entrances and porches that are incompatible in size and scale with the historic building or obscure, damage, or destroy character-defining features.

Windows

Not Recommended: Removing or radically changing windows which are important in defining the historic character of the building so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

Introducing a new design that is not compatible with the historic character of the building.

Health and Safety

Recommended: Identifying the historic building's character-defining spaces, features, and finishes so that code-required work will not result in their damage or loss.

Complying with health and safety codes, including seismic code requirements, in such a manner that character-defining spaces, features, and finishes are preserved.

Not Recommended: Altering, damaging, or destroying character-defining spaces, features, and finishes while making modifications to a building or site to comply with safety codes.

Making changes to historic buildings without first exploring equivalent health and safety systems, methods, or devices that may be less damaging to historic spaces, features, and finishes.

Building Site

Recommended: Identifying, retaining, and preserving buildings and their features as well as features of the site that are important in defining its overall historic character.

Not Recommended: Removing or radically changing buildings and their features or site features which are important in defining the overall historic character of the property so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

From the Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines (other guidelines may apply):

Windows

Not Appropriate: Changing the number, location, and size or glazing pattern of windows by cutting new openings, blocking-in, or installing replacement sash which does not fit the historic opening.

Residential Doors

Not Appropriate: Installing a new door opening.

Residential Porches

Appropriate: Installing a new porch and entrance on secondary elevations may be appropriate if it does not diminish the building's architectural character and the design and materials are compatible with the building and the site.

Using replacement features that match the documented historic design. If no documentation exists, using a simple, plain design.

Painting or staining all exposed wood elements.

Not Appropriate: Creating a false historical appearance by adding a porch, entrance, feature, or detail that is conjectural or comes from other properties.

Using decking as a flooring material that does not have a closed butt joint.

Safety Codes

Appropriate: Complying with barrier free and safety codes in a manner that ensures the preservation of character-defining features.

STAFF FINDINGS:

1. 903 West Huron is a four-unit rental property. In October of 2023 a ticket was issued to the owner for two civil infractions: failure to apply to the HDC and work performed without permits. City inspectors had identified work started or completed that included repairs to the front porch on the front of the house, and the conversion of a window to a door on the rear of the house. The new door was accessed via a removable ramp, with no stoop or stair. In November of 2023 the property owner submitted three photographs and this description in STREAM (the City's online permitting system): "repair front and rear deck, replace rear stoop and ramp, replace 3 rear doors. build new ramp for owner unit. replace windows in one story addition along seventh st." Staff emailed a list of required information that would make the application complete, but that information was never uploaded to STREAM or otherwise provided, except additional photos were emailed to staff from the property owner; those are included in the attachments.

The ticket resulted in multiple court appearances. Since the property owner has not submitted a complete HDC application in STREAM, this is a staff-initiated request to the HDC to consider the work that has been undertaken to date to resolve this outstanding situation.

2. The work completed on the front porch includes the replacement of porch posts, decking, and skirting. The front beam and square posts that were replaced were not original, and the matching new posts are appropriate since they are simple and the design of the original posts is only partially known. One historic post (half post?) survives, mounted against the wall by the front picture window. It has chamfered corners. It is likely that the original porch had decorative brackets and other fancy trim, but at this time that is unconfirmed. The new decking has a closed butt joint and runs perpendicular to the

house, both of which are appropriate. Horizontal slats that served as porch skirting have been replaced with new trim boards in front of diamond lattice. Staff believes that the porch work is generally compatible, and because historic materials aren't believed to have been removed, the owner probably could have been issued a staff approval for the work if a complete application had been submitted.

3. On the south elevation of the house, visible from the public right-of-way, work was begun to replace a window with a door. The only historic material remaining after this work is the former window's pedimented crown. The trim that enframed the window on the sides has been removed. The window opening was made larger to accommodate a steel door and a narrow, disproportionate transom window. The door and transom are framed by underlayment or tar paper. The intended design or method to finish this trim is unknown.
4. The reasons for the installation of the door are unclear. A ramp has been used to access the new door, implying that an occupant has a mobility challenge. Whether the owner first explored equivalent health and safety systems, methods, or devices that would have been less damaging to historic spaces, features, and finishes is unknown.
5. It should be noted that determining who performed the work included in this application is not relevant. The work was undertaken without permits and the current property owner is responsible for attaining a Certificate of Appropriateness, restoring the resource to its former condition or modifying the work so that it qualifies for a Certificate of Appropriateness.
6. Secretary of the Interior's Standard number 1 reads: "A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships." The historic use of the house is a single-family residence. The current use is four one-bedroom apartments, each with a maximum of two occupants. Staff believes that replacing a character-defining window with a new back door is not a minimal change and is incongruous with Standard 1.
7. Standard 2 says that "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." The removal of the historic window and the installation of a door and transom in its place are out of character with the historic appearance of the house and alter the rear elevation of the house in a way that is visually disruptive.
8. Standard 5 says that "Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved." The house's windows, with their tall sashes, pedimented crowns, and eared enframements are a distinctive feature of the house, all of which were present on the window that has been removed. Removing these distinctive features is inconsistent with Standard 5.
9. Standard 9 says that "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." The alterations have destroyed historic materials: the window opening, casing, framing

and trim. The new door is not compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of the window and degrades the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

10. This application has been made more difficult by the owner's reluctance to provide requested information. An email sent to the owner that described required information is attached.
11. Should the HDC deny a motion to approve all or part of the work done to date, a second motion is needed and should have a clear date by which the owner is ordered to restore the work to its prior condition.

POSSIBLE MOTIONS: (Note that the motion is only a suggestion. The Review Committee, consisting of staff and at least two Commissioners, will meet with the applicant on site and then make a recommendation at the meeting.)

For the front porch:

I move that the Commission issue a certificate of appropriateness for the portion of the staff-initiated application at 903 W Huron Street, a contributing property in the Old West Side Historic District, to replace a porch beam, three porch posts, decking, and skirting. The work as completed is compatible in exterior design, arrangement, texture, material and relationship to the rest of the building and the surrounding area and meets *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, in particular standards 1, 2, 5, and 9 and the guidelines for entrances and porches, and building site; and the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines* for porches.

For the window-to-door work:

I move that the Commission issue a certificate of appropriateness for the portion of the staff-initiated application at 903 W Huron Street, a contributing property in the Old West Side Historic District, to remove a window on the south elevation and replace it with a door and transom, on the following condition: that drawings showing compatible trim and cladding around the door that meets the *Ann Arbor Design Guidelines* and the *Secretary of the Interior's Design Guidelines* are submitted as a new application in STREAM for staff approval, and that the work is completed by December 13, 2024. As conditioned, the work is compatible in exterior design, arrangement, texture, material and relationship to the rest of the building and the surrounding area and meets *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, in particular standards 1, 2, 5, and 9 and the guidelines for entrances and porches, and building site; and the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines* for porches.

In addition, if either motion does not pass:

I move that because this work was done without permission of the Commission and does not qualify for a certificate of appropriateness, the property owner is ordered to restore the (front porch) (window on the south elevation) to (its) (their) prior condition. The restoration work must be completed by September 13, 2024.

ATTACHMENTS: photos

903 W Huron, 1972 (Ann Arbor News, courtesy AADL Old News)



Up Or Down? WEDNESDAY MAR 8 1972

This 112-year-old house at 903 W. Huron is a possible stumbling block in the city's plans to relocate S. Seventh to align with N. Seventh. The city's Historical Commission is opposed to any plans which would call for demolition of the structure, terming it a historic one. City officials say that

to realign Seventh St. on the northeast rather than southwest corner (where this house stands) would cost considerably more money. The owner of the property has informed the city she is anxious to sell the house and is not interested in preserving it as historic structure.

Google Street View Photos

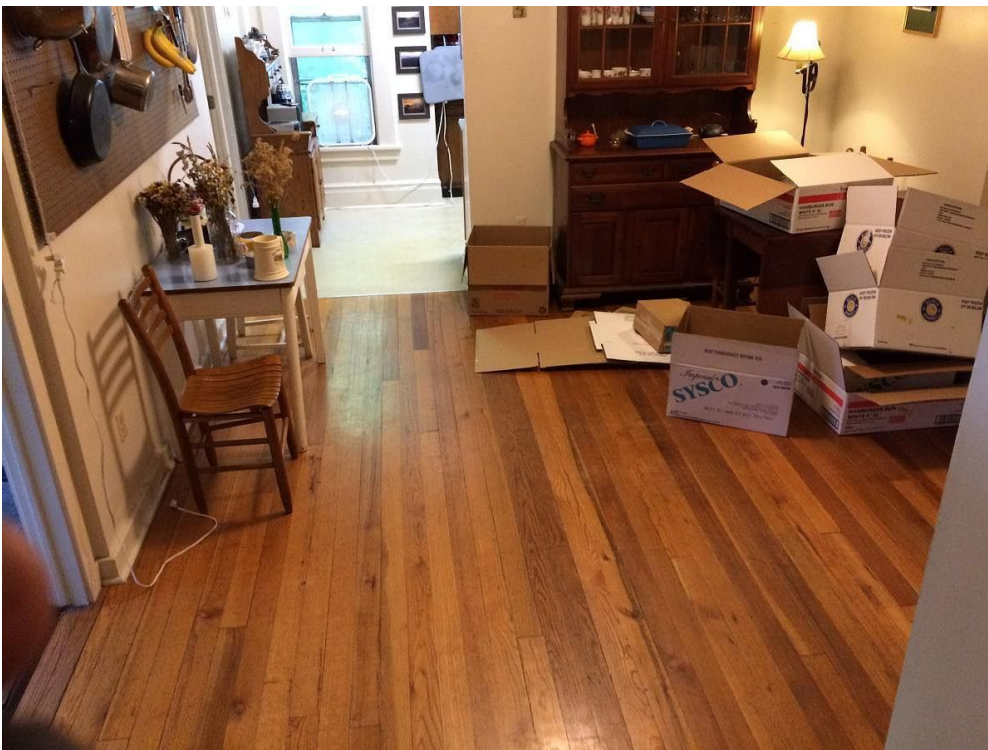
April 2024 (Window has been replaced with a door)



November 2020 (Window before conversion to a door)



Undated interior photos from Zillow of 903 W Huron #1 (Note the glass block kitchen window that faces the rear parking lot, and the grey chair cushions (?) hanging from a cupboard in both photos. The window with the box fan is the one that was converted into a door.)



November 2023 Application photo from HDC23-0214



November 2023 Application photo from HDC23-0214



Owner's photograph of the door he replaced in the same opening, from 3/20/24 email



Owner's photographs from 2/22/24 email to staff





October 4, 2023 City Inspector Photos



City Assessor photo 5/17/2022

General Parcel Attachments X

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