

STAFF REPORT: APRIL 10, 2024 SPECIAL MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2023-00066
ADDRESS: 1180 VINEWOOD
HISTORIC DISTRICT: HUBBARD FARMS
APPLICANT: VALERIA LOPEZ
PROPERTY OWNER: VALERIA LOPEZ
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: MARCH 23, 2024
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: MARCH 28, 2024 **AND APRIL 5, 2024**

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO
REVISED April 10, 2024

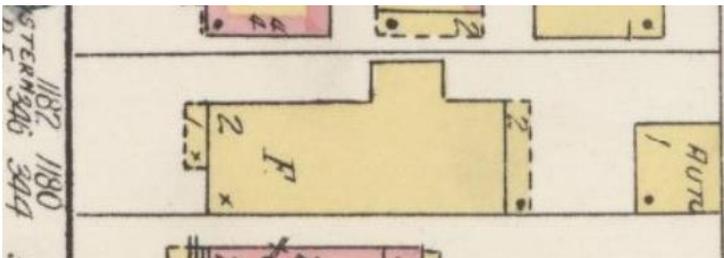
SCOPE: ALTER DWELLING INCLUDING WINDOW AND DOOR OPENINGS, ROOF, SIDING, AND PORCH (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

1180 Vinewood was built in 1900 and faces west onto the street. In recent months it has been heavily altered without review or approval by the Historic District Commission.



Left: March 2024 photo by staff. Right: Photo from July 2023 listing on realtor.com.



The subject property as depicted on a 1921 Sanborn map. The rear porch and garage have since been removed.



The house around 1993. Photo by the Historic Designation Advisory Board.



The house in 2006. Photo by staff.

1180 Vinewood was, until recently, a two-and-one-half-story house. Sitting on a brick foundation, its facades were defined by projecting, rectangular, box-bay windows on the front (west) and north side of the building, and a projecting, flat-roof front porch. Its irregular roof plan included a front-facing (west-facing) gable on the southern half of the front façade, a steep, pyramidal tower on the north half of the front facade, two north-facing cross gables, and a south-facing dormer. The building showed a mix of the Queen Anne and Free Classic styles; additional character-defining features included scalloped, wood shingles on the upper half-story at the gable ends of the building, a Classical cornice with dentil trim along the porch and above the first-floor bay windows, and curved brackets, also on the first-floor bay windows.

Prior to the 1993 ordinance enacting the Hubbard Farms Historic District, there were several alterations. Simulated masonry cladding and composite siding were added, though the original siding remained underneath and the scalloped shingles on the upper half-story remained exposed. Original porch supports and doors were replaced. Exposed wood stairways were added to access residential units on the second floor.

By 2000, staff photos show that vinyl or aluminum siding was added to the front (west) façade only, and a six-foot-high chain-link fence was installed. Both work items were done without Historic District Commission approval. For the latter item, an application was submitted on April 3, 2001. The Commission issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for the fence on May 10, 2001, with the condition that it be *either* reduced to four feet in height *or* moved back to the façade line of the house. However, the fence was never reconfigured to meet this condition; it remains in violation.

In 2018, the Historic District Commission issued a Certificate of Appropriateness for a proposal to substantially rehabilitate the exterior of the house. However, the work was never performed. (Both prior COAs are posted to the Historic District Commission property page for reference.)



Left: November 2020 photo from Google Street View. Right: Image from 2023 application documents, view from the north. Note that the pyramidal roof tower is missing; red arrow is added by staff to indicate former tower location.

At some time between May 2019 and November 2020¹ a fire damaged the house's second story and attic half-story. The fire caused damage to the interior framing of the building, as seen in a photo provided by the applicant, and also caused damage visible on the building exterior.

In 2023, staff observed extensive work completed at the property without Historic District Commission approval. Perhaps most noticeably, the attic half-story had been shortened, eliminating its pyramidal tower, front-facing gable, north-facing cross gable, and south-facing dormer. The fenestration pattern had been altered, with many window openings reduced in size or eliminated altogether. The footprint of the north wall was expanded slightly, eliminating a recessed central section and creating a solid plane. The north-facing box-bay window had been reduced from two stories to one, and the front-facing box-bay window had been altered by either removing or covering over a Classical entablature with dentils and adding a gable to the top of its second story. Expanses of building paper suggest that much of the historic siding had been removed as well. A few historic, wood, one-over-one or two-over-two windows remained on the building, along with Classical trim on the historic porch and what remained of the north-facing box bay window.



October 11, 2023, photo by staff.

On October 11, 2023, staff encountered the property owner and provided a brochure explaining the Application for Work Approval requirements for properties in City of Detroit historic districts. The Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department inspected the property on October 16, 2023, and finally posted a Stop Work order on March 5, 2024 after multiple requests by Historic District Commission staff.

By the time of the Stop Work order, additional work had been done on the house. The porch is now removed entirely, replaced with a gable-roof porch. The remaining historic windows are removed, with vinyl slider and sash windows installed. The windows are trimmed with what appears to be aluminum or vinyl. The Classical trim on the north-facing bay window has been either removed or covered with a hip-roof projection.

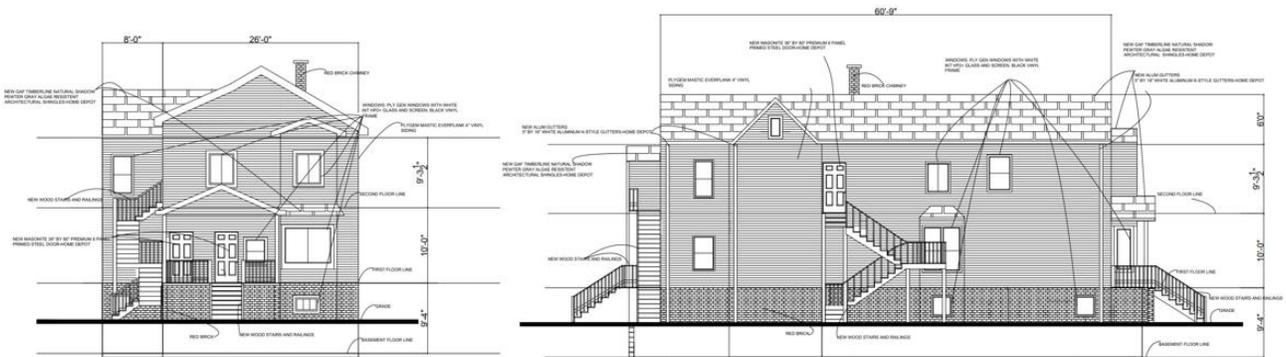
¹ According to Google Street View images. City of Detroit records do not provide a date for the fire.

After the Stop Work order, staff observed additional work on the house: New electrical service connections were added on the exterior, north elevation. This work was visible on April 5, 2024, but not present on March 28, 2024.



April 2024 staff photo; new electrical service connections visible at bottom right.

PROPOSAL



West (left) and north (right) elevations of proposed work. Please see application materials for full drawing set.

The applicant seeks approval for work that is largely already completed and visible on the building, plus additional cladding and finish work. The proposal is summarized as follows, with asterisks indicating work that is already completed or in progress.

The applicant proposes to remove the following features from the building:

- Flat-roof front porch including Classical entablature*
- Classical entablature and curved brackets on bay windows*
- Simulated masonry cladding on the front porch foundation*
- Siding including vinyl/aluminum, asbestos, and wood clapboard*

- Scalloped shingles on attic story*
- Two-story rear (east) porch
- Doors*

The applicant proposes to alter the overall form of the building, as follows:

- Reduce height of building from two and one-half stories (fenestrated attic) to two stories (shorter, unfenestrated attic)*
- Convert irregular roof form with tower, front gable, side gable, and side dormer to an asymmetrical gable roof*
- Eliminate a recessed, central portion of the north elevation, expanding the building footprint and creating a flat, planar wall surface.
- Add gable top to formerly flat-topped, west-facing, box bay window*
- Convert two-story, north-facing box-bay window with flat roof to single-story, box-bay window with hip roof*
- Alter fenestration by reconfiguring window openings, reducing window openings in size, or eliminating window openings altogether*

The applicant proposes to add the following features to the building:

- Gable-roof front porch*
- Two-story rear (east) porch
- Two-story side (north) stairway

The applicant proposes to install the following products:

- Ply Gem windows in white vinyl with frame wrapped in black vinyl*
- Aluminum gutters in white
- GAF Timberline architectural shingles in pewter grey
- Ply Gem EverPlank vinyl siding in unspecified color
- Glass block basement windows

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The designation of historic districts by the Detroit City Council, and their subsequent administration by the city’s Historic District Commission and enforcement by the Buildings, Safety Engineering, and Environmental Department, serves a broader public purpose from which all Detroit residents benefit. Historic districts protect the city’s cultural heritage, improve property values in both the districts themselves and the surrounding areas, and strengthen the local economy.² Inappropriate or incompatible work within historic districts undermines this broader public purpose.
- The Hubbard Farms Historic District was established by Ordinance 01-93 in 1993.
- Hubbard Farms is one of six historic districts in Detroit that have been “certified” by the National Park Service for purposes of the federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit.³ This credit has provided tangible benefits to the community including, in just the last few years, the rehabilitation of 3615 West Vernor, 461–465 West Grand Boulevard, and 1441–1453 Hubbard, sponsored by the city’s Housing Revitalization

² Detroit City Code § 21-2-1.

³ Robb McKay, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, email to staff, July 25, 2014. (The other certified districts are the Berry Subdivision Historic District, the East Ferry Avenue Historic District, the Madison-Harmonie Historic District, the New Center Area Historic District, and the Peterboro-Charlotte Historic District.)

Department in conjunction with private partners. Staff is concerned that, over time, each building in the historic district that is destroyed or inappropriately altered brings the district closer to a loss of certification and, consequently, a loss of the eligibility of buildings within the district for the associated credit.

- The substantial alteration of this resource, without approval and with no regard for historic character, further imperils the integrity of this district.
- The Final Report for the Hubbard Farms Historic District provides a Period of Significance of 1870 through 1930. The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-157 [d]) are intended to guide additions and new construction in the district and assist the Historic District Commission in identifying existing character-defining features of each building that require preservation. Pertinent Elements of Design are excerpted as follows:
 - *Height.* The majority of residential buildings are either two or two and one-half stories tall, meaning they have two full stories with an attic or finished third floor within the roof.
 - *Proportion of openings within the façade.* Proportion varies according to building type, age, and style. Generally, window openings in the district are predominantly taller than wide; several windows are frequently grouped into combinations wider than tall. Window openings are most often subdivided, the most common window type being double-hung sash, whose area is generally further subdivided by muntins ... In general, buildings have between 15 percent and 35 percent of their area glazed.
 - *Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades.* Window openings are usually regularly arranged by floor, although there is most often variety between floor levels. In the Queen Anne and Richardsonian Romanesque style buildings, openings are often irregularly arranged ... Many of the residential buildings have dormers or gables that are fenestrated.
 - *Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections.* Placement of entrance and porch projections vary from building to building, usually depending on type, size, and style. In general, a great variety of porches and entrances characterize Hubbard Farms ... Porches on houses built around the turn of the twentieth century tend to be large, sometimes stretching along most of the first story ... Most of the houses in the district have rear porches.
 - *Relationship of materials.* Brick and wood are the primary building materials originally used ... Wood trim is most commonly used for window, porch, and functional elements as well as decorative trim; some lintels and sills also exist. Front porch step materials are either wood or concrete.
 - *Relationship of textures.* A variety of rich textural relationships exist in the district—those created by the juxtaposition of various materials, such as brick, stone, stucco, and/or wood, and those created by the repetition of the materials themselves, such as clapboard, wood fish scale shingles or decorative brick.
 - *Relationship of colors.* Wooden elements of Victorian buildings show more freedom, ranging from shades of rose to green, sometimes with a contrasting color highlighting the architectural detail.
 - *Relationship of architectural details.* Architectural details generally relate to style ... Porches are commonly treated and usually have columns of a classical order. Buildings of Victorian substyles also tend to have details of wood located around the entrance, porch, windows, bays, towers, and dormers. Lathe-turned and jigsaw cut wooden elements and details are common ... In general, the

Hubbard Farms District is extremely rich in architectural detail.

- *Relationship of roof shapes.* Queen Anne and other Victorian substyles exhibit greater heights, intersecting planes, and steep slopes.
 - *Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.* The majority of fences are of the chain link variety; four-foot chain-link fenced front yards are seen throughout the district but to a lesser degree at the south end of Hubbard and Vinewood.
 - *Scale of façades and façade elements.* On Victorian buildings decorative detail tends to be small in scale, while façade elements, such as bays, dormers and towers, are large in scale.
 - *Degree of complexity within the façade.* The Victorian substyles tend to be more complex, complicated by towers, gables, and decorated porches.
 - *Symmetric or asymmetric appearance.* Other styles [than Classical] are generally asymmetric but result in balanced compositions.
- Although no professional assessment has been provided, it appears from photographs (see page 3) that an extensive rebuilding of the second floor and attic half-story would have been required after the recent fire damage. However, within a historic district, such work is generally required by both state law and the City Code to meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation (quoted in full below), including Standard #6: that “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.”
 - In some cases, substitute materials may be used in the replacement of deteriorated features when historic materials are unavailable or otherwise unfeasible (see National Park Service, *Preservation Briefs 16: The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exteriors*, updated in 2023 and previously referenced by staff in reporting for 1423 Sixth [HDC2023-00143]).
 - Some, relatively minor, aspects of the proposed scope may approach appropriateness or be appropriate with additional clarity or modification. These include the replacement of non-historic doors, the removal of non-historic siding and simulated masonry, the addition of a new rear porch and side stairway, and the installation of glass block basement windows. Nonetheless, staff guides that under Sections 21-2-73 and 21-2-78, the application in full is demonstrably inappropriate and should be rejected in its entirety.
 - The 2018 Certificate of Appropriateness (18-5866) for the property allows replacement of historic windows with *matching* aluminum-clad wood windows (that is, windows of the same configuration in the same size and location) and the replacement of existing siding with new wood siding. The current work does not adhere to the 2018 COA.

ISSUES

- The proposed work vastly deviates from eleven of the twelve Elements of Design quoted above. (Though it conforms to the “height” element, the work is nonetheless inappropriate due to the removal and alteration of historic and character-defining materials, features, and spaces, as described below).
- According to the National Park Service (*Preservation Briefs 17: Identifying Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings as an Aid to Preserving Their Character*), “the shape of the building” including its roof shape, “porches or bay windows,” and “openings for windows and doorways,” are “the major contributors to the

building's overall character." The proposed work changes these features, contrary to Standard #2, which requires that "the alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided."

- The alteration of the roof shape is, in staff opinion, the most severe and inappropriate component of the proposed (already completed) work. Staff cannot conceive of an appropriate scope of work (that is, a scope of work meeting the Standards and capable of being approved by the Commission) that would not involve substantially reconfiguring the existing condition of the roof form to restore its prior geometry and appearance.
- The overall footprint of the building is also changed by the elimination of a recessed, central portion of the north wall.
- The decorative trim (dentils and brackets) on the porch and bay windows, and wood scalloped shingles at the gable ends, are distinctive features that are unique and important to the building's historic appearance. Standard #5 requires that such features "shall be preserved." Standard #6 allows such features to be replaced, but only with matching features, and only when they are shown to be beyond repair.
- Vinyl is an inappropriate window and siding material. Standard #6 requires that historic materials be used "where possible;" if substitute materials are warranted, vinyl is not an appropriate substitute material (see National Park Service, *Preservation Briefs 16: The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exteriors*, 2023).
- Pure white is not an appropriate color for windows or gutters on a building of this era and style (off-white is acceptable).

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78: Determinations of Historic District Commission (Certificate of Appropriateness)

Staff concludes that the proposed work is inappropriate for the following reasons:

- The proposed work removes distinctive and character-defining features from the building (such features must be preserved; if beyond repair, they may be replaced with matching new features). These features include the front porch, decorative trim on bay windows, wood siding, and wood scalloped shingles.
- The proposed work alters historic features and spaces by fundamentally changing the form of the building. Inappropriate spatial alterations include reducing the height of the building, converting the historic roof form with tower, front gable, side gable, and side dormer to a gable roof, increasing the footprint of the building on the north wall, adding a gable top to the west-facing bay window, converting the north-facing bay window from two stories to one, and altering the fenestration pattern.
- The proposed work adds an incompatible new front porch to the building.
- The proposed work adds historically inappropriate vinyl materials to the building.

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

- 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 a missing feature 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.*