

STAFF REPORT: APRIL 10, 2024, REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00100

ADDRESS: 762 SEMINOLE

HISTORIC DISTRICT: INDIAN VILLAGE

APPLICANT: MARK J. MCBRIDE, MCBRIDE STUDIO, INC

PROPERTY OWNER: ANDREW METRY AND JAVIER PEREZ

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: MARCH 11, 2024

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: MARCH 26, 2024

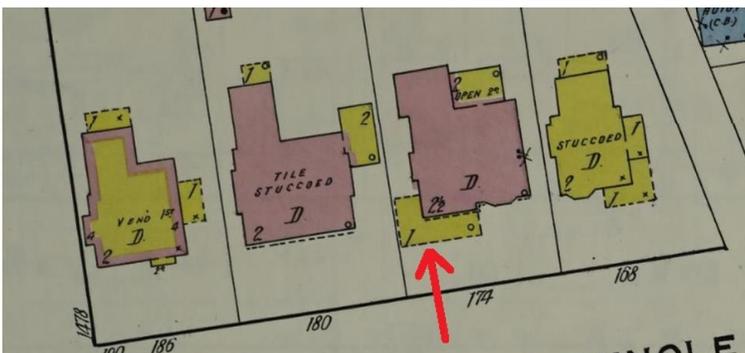
SCOPE: RECONSTRUCT PORCH

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The building at 762 Seminole, built in 1908, is a two-and-one-half story house facing east onto the street, on the southernmost block of the Indian Village Historic District. Features including its flared Mansard roof, stucco cladding with prominent brick quoins, and arched, flat-roofed, columned porch place it within the French Eclectic style—an uncommon style in Detroit, even in the architecturally diverse Indian Village. Decorative tiles on the porch, bay window, and chimney are also important features.



House at 762 Seminole. March 2024 photo by staff.



Subject property shown in 1951 Sanborn map; arrow added by staff to indicate porch.

Subject of this application, the porch largely collapsed in 2023. Prior to the collapse, it was topped by a metal balustrade anchored by brick piers.



The porch in 2022. Image from application documents.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to reconstruct the damaged porch. The proposed work would largely restore the condition of the porch prior to the 2022 collapse; however, the metal balustrade would be eliminated. In its place, a sloped, hipped, standing-seam copper parapet would be added. Behind the parapet, the roof would step down to an EPDM flat roof.



West elevation of proposed work. Image from application documents.



Left: Section of proposed work showing EPDM flat roof area and relationship to second-story window. Right: North elevation of proposed work. Note light fixture, balustrade, and plant shelf. Images from application documents, cropped by staff.

In addition to the parapet, the proposed work would add new features to the porch. Three hanging light fixtures would be added. On the lower level, A new balustrade would be added to each (north and south) side of the lower level and to the central bay of the front (west) elevation. Adjacent to each of the porch’s wingwalls, a plant shelf would be added.

The proposal also includes brick and stucco repairs to the porch, exterior of the core building, and chimney. This would include new traditional stucco to replace deteriorated stucco. Decorative details including limestone Tuscan columns and tile medallions would be preserved (when absent, they would be reinstalled). The stucco would be painted a cream color in a breathable masonry paint.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Indian Village Historic District was established by resolution of the City Council in 1971 and codified November 5, 1976. A Final Report was not prepared for the district.
- The Elements of Design for Indian Village provide the following relevant observations:
 - “The majority of the buildings are faced with brick, while many are partially or totally stucco. . . . Roofing includes slate, tile, and wooden and asphalt shingles. Stone trim is common.
 - “The use of stucco or concrete, with or without half-timbering, as a contrast to brick surfaces is not unusual. Tile, slate, or wood shingle roofs have particular textural values where they exist.”
 - “Where stucco or concrete exists, it is usually left in its natural state, or painted in a shade of cream.”
 - “Flat roofs exist primarily on porches and sunrooms.”
- Staff concludes that the porch is almost certainly an original feature of the building.
 - A Sanborn map (see page 1 of this report) shows a historic porch with the same footprint. Although the yellow shading of the porch might be interpreted to indicate frame construction, staff observed that other masonry porches in the same edition are also colored yellow; it appears that the convention was to color porches yellow regardless of construction.
 - Flat roofed, masonry porches with metal balustrades are common in French Eclectic architecture.

Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, indicates “open terraces, porches, and balconies with balustrades or metal railings” as a diagnostic feature of the “symmetrical subtype” of French Eclectic architecture (2020, page 487).

- A 1978 photo by the Historic Designation Advisory Board shows what appears to be an original, cast iron balustrade, with decorative panels centered on each bay. The apparent age and style of this feature suggests that the porch is original. (The feature was removed prior to the 1980 photo).



1978 Historic Designation Advisory Board photo.



1980 Historic Designation Advisory Board photo.

- The proposed light fixtures are appropriate for the style of the porch and house, in staff opinion.

- The open nature of the porch is an important, character-defining feature, in the opinion of staff. However, the proposed work retains this character in that the proposed balustrades would only be on three of the five bays, are not visually prominent, and do not extend across the entire opening (there is a gap between each balustrade and the adjacent column).
- The wingwalls are an important character-defining feature of the porch. However, the proposed plant shelves, due to their modest scale, do not overwhelm or destroy the historic features; further, they would be reversible.
- The proposed stucco and brick repair retains historic materials and construction techniques.
- The proposed color is mentioned in the Elements of Design and is appropriate.

ISSUES

- The flat roof with metal balustrade is a historic and character-defining feature of the building. Adding a parapet would be a very prominently visible alteration to the form, texture, material, and color of this feature, contrary to Standard #2 of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, which state that “alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.”¹
- The proposed work would conceal the lower portion of the second-floor window from view, also constituting an “alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property.”
- The most appropriate course of action would be to replicate the missing historic balustrade. However, if this were to be technically infeasible due to its unique design, installing a simple, modern balustrade, or no balustrade at all, would also be acceptable, in staff opinion.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a *Certificate of Appropriateness* for the proposed work as it meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, with the following condition:

- The porch will use a flat roof, similar to what historically existed on the building, rather than the steeply pitched roof parapet depicted in the application drawings. A metal balustrade may optionally be added.

¹ “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.”