
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District: **Mount Pleasant Historic District** Agenda
Address: **3142 17th Street, NW** Consent

Meeting Date: **February 23, 2012** Alteration
Case Number: **12-114**

Staff Reviewer: **Tim Dennée**

The applicant, owner Workineh Simret, requests the Board's review of a permit application to create an aperture in the brick apron or base of the front porch and to install there a window. The permit is also for siding a screen partition at the north end of the porch. This work has already been performed, and the application was submitted after the fact and following the issuance of a Notice of Infraction.¹

Window

Although there is an old door opening under the porch, there was previously no window. The applicant wanted to introduce light into the under-porch space and, rather than simply replacing the door with one that contains glazing, he had a workman cut a hole in the brick masonry, introduce a wood lintel and sill, and install a window.

The window is made of vinyl, a material that is almost never approved on the front of a contributing property, contrary to the window regulations, because of its finish and its typical boxy profile.² In addition, rather than being a traditional, horizontal, basement window such as a hopper or awning window, this is a double-hung window turned on its side.

The installation was not very careful. Windows are traditionally set into masonry openings, and surrounded by a brick mold, rather than coming flush or beyond the exterior plane of the wall. Inexperienced installers will sometimes put in the window flush or try to add a casement around a brick opening. In this instance, the installer appears to have tried to fill gaps with cement sloped over the surrounding masonry. Even if the owner tries to cover this with paint to match the rest of the porch, it will not completely obscure it.

¹ The applicant still has some 2010 work that was cited and has not been wholly resolved, and there have been a number of violations in the past.

² Another problem with many vinyl windows is false, between-the-glass muntins. Vinyl windows are occasionally approved for basements, even at the front of buildings, when they are very close to grade or even reach below it, as in a window well. This new opening is, however, high enough above grade to free of rising damp, most snow accumulation or backslash from rainfall.

The design guidelines discourage changes to porches. Of course, here, the damage is already done. There's no perfect solution. The best solution would be to fill in the opening with matching brick and then painting it to match. The second best would be to start over with a better window and a better installation.

Porch partition

Several years ago, the applicant constructed, without a permit, a partition at the north end of the front porch, presumably to visibly screen his porch from his immediate neighbor's. He recently put new siding on this partition and was cited for that action in addition to the window. It is sided on the interior with painted wood or Masonite and on the exterior with vinyl.

The historic preservation design guidelines for front porches do not contemplate the enclosure of porches with solid walls.

Enclosing a front porch is rarely acceptable because it drastically alters the appearance of the porch and the main facade of the building. Adding screens to open front porches may be acceptable if the screen is designed and installed in such a way that the open appearance of the porch is retained.... If a front porch has been enclosed or screened in the past, the property owner should consider returning the porch to its original open design.

A fundamental character of traditional front porches is openness. It is all the more important to retain this character, i.e., the view and rhythm through and along a series of similar porches on a row.

Further, the design guidelines strongly discourage vinyl on primary elevations: "Certain types of vinyl siding may be appropriate *for secondary elevations that are not visible from a public street if their reflectivity, finish, size, profile and other visual characteristics simulate the existing wood* and it is installed in a manner so that the depth and character of window and door surrounds remains the same."

The staff recommends that the Board advise the Mayor's Agent that the work proposed and already completed is inconsistent with the purposes of the Act and that the Board recommend that a permit not be issued for the present work.