



Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

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HPC meeting date: 6/2/2025
Staff reviewer: Andrew Stern

CCF # 250127
Ald. Brower

Property 2591 N. Summit Ave. North Point North Historic District

Owner/Applicant Chris Sanger and Alicia Chen
2591 N. Summit Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53211

Proposal

The applicants are proposing landscaping modifications and a new 3' 6" tall Lannon cut stone retaining wall along the rear yard on E. Bellevue Place. Smaller Lannon stone walls are shown on the landscape plan as optional and located in the berm adjacent to the house and in the front yard. These are both located within the right of way, not on the subject property. A mix of decorative plants and shrubs are proposed to be planted between the retaining wall and the sidewalk and decorative grass and flowers on top of the retaining wall in front of the existing fence.

The applicants wish to install the new landscaping material and a retaining wall to alleviate runoff and drainage issues that have arisen along E. Bellevue Pl. following disconnection of their downspouts from the storm sewer standpipe.

Staff comments

The August Rohm House is a Tudor Revival house constructed in 1909. The house is located on the southwest corner of N. Summit Ave. and E. Bellevue Pl. The house sits on a raised yard with a grass lawn and berm along N. Summit and a berm consisting of shrubs and groundcover along E. Bellevue. The rear yard is enclosed with a decorative wooden fence and is accessible from E. Bellevue via a narrow flight of concrete steps.

North Point North: Guidelines for Streetscapes

The streetscapes in North Point North are visually cohesive because of the intact building stock and the retention of period street and landscaping features. The traditional landscape treatment of the building lots and the period streetlights contribute to the maintenance of the district's traditional residential character.

1. Maintain the height, scale, mass, and materials established by the buildings in the district and the traditional setback and density of the block faces. Avoid introducing elements that are incompatible in terms of siting, materials, height, or scale.
2. Use traditional landscaping, fencing, signage, and street lighting that are compatible with the character and period of the district. Avoid introducing landscape features, fencing, street lighting, or signage that are inappropriate to the character of the district.

Retaining walls are officially discouraged throughout all our historic properties and in the North Point districts in particular, where berms are a significant character-defining feature of the district. They were intended to emphasize a natural connection to the surrounding parkland. While the proposed retaining wall is on a secondary elevation, the wall would run approximately forty feet, a considerable length in the district. There are no retaining walls present on either side of E. Bellevue Pl. in the surrounding blocks, despite properties having a berm of the same pitch as the subject property. Staff recommends denial of the retaining wall. Staff recommends the applicant work with their landscape contractor to plant the berm with deep-rooted vegetation that will slow the water runoff and to redirect the downspouts to more gradually drain down the berm. *Living With History* suggests planting pachysandra, a broadleaf evergreen, herbaceous perennial or ground cover in the boxwood family, on steep berms. A recent Google streetview shows a neighboring property's downspout pointed directly into the subject property's backyard and this should be addressed as part of the drainage issue.

Recommendation Recommend HPC Denial

Conditions

Previous HPC action

Previous Council action