



# Milwaukee Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report

LIVING WITH HISTORY

HPC meeting date: 5/7/2018  
Ald. Nik Kovac District: 3  
Staff reviewer: Tim Askin  
PTS #114498 CCF #180021

**Property** 2623 N. WAHL AV.

<b>Owner/Applicant</b>	JEFFREY LESWING & KRISTI HW 2623 N WAHL AVE MILWAUKEE WI 53211	Jeff and Kristi Leswing 2623 N. Wahl Ave. Milwaukee, WI 53211
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**Proposal** Reconfigure front lawn to restore berm as mandated by the Commission last fall, particularly eliminating visible compost sock. All work on the approach stairs and the house itself were approved as completed. Applicant is presenting six designs for redesigning the front yard.

**Background** Applicant is currently using the terraced front yard as a victory garden. Staff would like to make it clear that given the low-lying plants that appear to be very leafy varieties of vegetables, that there is no objection to the use of the front lawn for the purpose. The food plants function as adequate ground cover that blends in with the streetscape. The only objection is to the terracing itself, the front retaining wall, and the compost socks, which do not meet the North Point North guidelines nor the citywide guidelines.

## **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.*

Terracing is prohibited in the citywide preservation guidelines published in *Living with History* in 1997. It is prohibited because it interferes with the cohesive streetscape established by the continuous roll of berms along the street face.

In the spirit of compromise, staff indicated to applicants that retaining the lowest retaining wall could be acceptable as its height is limited and it can be screened by plantings. It does not create the major terracing effect that the compost socks have created on the upper portion. Staff also has no major concerns about the existing plants or any of the plants proposed in any of the plans. It primarily the terracing that is the subject at hand. Citywide guidelines require the retention of berms and they are particularly important on park front property in North Point North. The berms were designed to carry the formal character of the park across the street into the front lawns with a formal entry to the homes. The terracing creates a substantial visual break in the streetscape.

## Designs

### Design Groups

The designs all retain the lowest wall but replace the compost sock cap with a rock ledge. Overall, they wall into three distinct groupings as outlined here.

#### *Two Walls*

1. Frank A. two layers of terraces, less distracting than compost socks and walls will be hidden by plantings for a portion of the year. It is more attractive and is a fine, distinctive design, however, is not appropriate and does not meet the intent of the guidelines.

#### *Outcropping rocks at second level*

2. Frank B. Rock outcroppings at the crown of the berm to maintain erosion control without being strictly a wall. It is less formal than Frank A as the outcroppings are less distinct and do not create solid lines. Very similar to Green Team in topography.
3. Green Team. Rock outcroppings at the crown of the berm to maintain erosion control without being strictly a wall. Stones are mostly buried into the berm but will remain visible.

#### *One low wall*

4. Wasserman. Retains lowest retaining wall with low-lying junipers holding up the rest of the slope for maximizing planting beds at the top level.
5. Crawford. Retains lowest retaining wall with low-lying junipers holding up the rest of the slope for maximizing planting beds at the top level.
6. Frank C. Plants with deep root structures are placed at the top of the berm to help with erosion

## Neighbor Concerns

In addition to these proposals, the immediate neighbor on each side has complained about the drystack stone retaining walls adjacent to the driveways on each side of the Leswings' house. They request the Commission that they be ordered to be removed and returned to a natural state. Staff is neutral on this neighbor commentary. Given the narrowness of the driveways and steepness of the berm, it is difficult to find a complete solution.

Eliminating the stones at the sidewalk corner on the south side should be feasible. They appear more decorative than functional, but they are likely protecting the plants.

Eliminating the wall on the north end is more challenging, there would likely be significant erosion issues without some sort of wall unless the stairs were moved farther south. However, staff believes it could be lowered and inset farther from the property line the property line farther from the property line could be considered in the spirit of peacemaking with the neighbor

## Recommendation

Recommend HPC Approval of the following designs:  
Frank C or Wasserman as proposed. Crawford without accent boulders

## Conditions

Eliminate or lower stones at south driveway corner. Lower stones at north driveway corner.

## Previous HPC action

## Previous Council action