



Agenda Item #2

Applications 2024-54-CA

DETAILS

Location:

2255 Ashland Place Avenue

Summary of Request:

Rebuild front steps; paint unpainted brick

Applicant (as applicable):

Cochran Investments, Inc.

Property Owner:

John and Lillis Pipes

Historic District:

Ashland Place

Classification:

Noncontributing

Summary of Analysis:

- While the removal and relocation of existing porch features do not comply with the *Guidelines*, the proposed porch stair is based on original architectural drawings and satisfies the requirement that alterations be appropriate to the style, composition, and proportion of the structure.
- The *Guidelines* generally discourage painting unpainted historic brick.

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PROPERTY AND APPLICATION HISTORY

Ashland Place Historic District was listed in the National Register in 1987 under Criteria A (community planning) and C (architectural significance). The neighborhood initially was platted in 1907 and centered around land once occupied by the Augusta Evans Wilson homestead. The neighborhood was an early streetcar suburb along the Springhill Avenue trolley line. The district is significant for its concentration of architectural types and styles popular between 1900 and 1955, including Georgian and Federal Revivals, Colonial and Classical Revivals, Craftsman, Mission Revival, and Tudor Revival.

The subject property was constructed c. 1967 and in 1987 was listed as noncontributing within the Ashland Place Historic District. It should be noted that the Georgian Revival residence is now 57 years old and considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. If the Ashland Place Historic District were resurveyed today, the subject property would likely be listed as contributing to the district. The Georgian Revival residence fits in well with the 20th-Century revival styles that characterize the Ashland Place neighborhood. The residence is also in excellent condition and retains its original character defining features.

The raised ranch-type dwelling features a symmetrical main block with an asymmetrical wing on its east side. The prominent wood cornice, neoclassical entry porch, 9-over-9 windows, and red brick cladding mark the residence as belonging to the Georgian Revival school within the broader Colonial Revival movement. The curved stairs on either side of the entry porch are less indicative of the Georgian Revival style and, with their decorative iron balustrades, appear to be a mid-20th-Century expression of the French Colonial architecture of the Gulf Coast Region. A drawing completed in 1967 for Isabel Pope, the original owner, depicts a residence that is remarkably similar to the existing dwelling. However, the c. 1967 drawing depicts a finished floor height that is approximately half that of the existing dwelling. The drawing also depicts a simpler single stair centered on the north elevation of the entry porch, rather than the mirror-image curved stairs that currently exist. It is possible that the two deviations from the original drawing are related. Site considerations may have required raising the finished floor level, and the original owner may have seen this as an opportunity to create a grander entry porch. At some point after construction, a covered breezeway between the residence and the rear detached garage was infilled to create additional living space. As there is no record of this alteration having appeared before the Architectural Review Board (ARB), it is assumed that it occurred prior to 1990.

This property previously appeared before the ARB in September 1990, when an application was presented to construct a 6' masonry wall enclosing the rear yard. The application was approved. The property appeared again in March 1991, when an application was presented for after-the-fact review of an increase in wall height, which the ARB also approved.

SCOPE OF WORK

1. Remove existing porch stairs and construct new single porch stair
 - a. Demolish existing porch stairs. Existing railing to be salvaged for reuse.
 - b. Construct new single stair.
 - New stair would be centered on the north elevation of the entry porch.
 - Stair would be graduated, so that the top step is narrower than the bottom step. The difference in width between adjacent steps would be uniform.
 - The width of the bottom step would not exceed the width of the entry porch.
 - While the c. 1967 drawing depicts only 3 steps, the increased floor height of the existing porch would require at least 6 steps. Step widths would be modified as necessary to achieve a similarly graduated stair with a bottom step that is not wider than the entry porch.
 - Portions of the salvaged wrought iron railing would be reinstalled on either side of the stair, in line with the railing placement shown in the c. 1967 drawing.
2. Paint exterior brick

- a. Brick would be painted Benjamin Moore HC-172, Revere Pewter.

APPLICABLE STANDARDS (*Design Review Guidelines for Mobile's Historic Districts*)

1. **5.3** Preserve the key historic walls of a building.
 - Maintain significant historic façades in their original form.
 - Maintain historic façade elements.
2. **5.4** Preserve original building materials
 - Remove only those materials which are deteriorated and beyond reasonable repair.
 - Do not remove original materials that are in good condition.
3. **5.8** Preserve and repair original masonry materials.
 - Preserve masonry features that define the overall historic character, such as walls, cornices, pediments, steps and foundations.
 - Take particular care with historic masonry. Consult Staff for guidance when repairing and replacing mortar joints and masonry.
 - Unpainted 19th Century imported Philadelphia and locally manufactured brick may not be painted. In cases where historic brick has been previously painted, the paint color should be of a suitable color to match the age and architectural style of the structure.
4. **6.4** Preserve an original porch or gallery on a house.
5. **6.6** If replacement is required, design it to reflect the time period of the historic structure
 - Replace a historic porch element to match the original.
 - Use replacement materials and elements that are appropriate to the style, texture, finish, composition and proportion of the historic structure.
 - Do not completely replace an entire porch or element unless absolutely necessary. Only replace the element or portion of an element that requires replacement.
 - Do not relocate an original front stairway or steps.
 - Remove only those materials which are deteriorated and beyond reasonable repair.
 - Do not remove original materials that are in good condition.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The property under review is considered noncontributing to the Ashland Place Historic District. However, it should be noted that, were the district resurveyed today, the subject property would likely be considered contributing.

This application seeks approval to remove the existing porch stairs and replace them with a simpler single stair. In their request, the applicant expresses safety concerns in regard to the existing curved staircases. The applicant proposes replacing these stairs with a single broad stair centered on the north elevation of the entry porch. The application proposes adapting the original design for the porch stair, as seen in a c. 1967 architectural drawing, which featured a simple graduated brick stair in keeping with the restrained ornamentation of the Georgian Revival dwelling. The original design would need to be modified to fit the as-built residence, given the higher finished floor height of the extant dwelling compared to that shown in the c. 1967 drawing. The applicant has not provided details for modifications, but it appears that the proposed stair would require at least six steps instead of the three shown in the c. 1967 drawing.

The Guidelines strongly discourage replacing original porches or porch elements “unless absolutely necessary” and specifically warn against relocating a porch stair. If alterations are deemed necessary, the Guidelines state that replacement elements and materials should be “appropriate to the style, texture, finish, composition and proportion of the historic structure.” While the proposed work would violate both of the aforementioned directives, the new design would be wholly in keeping with the style of the historic structure. The applicant proposes a brick stair, which replicates existing materials, and would reuse portions of the existing wrought iron

railing to create the handrails at either end of the proposed stair. Moreover, the existence of the original drawing ensures that a graduated central stair on the north elevation of the entry porch is perfectly in keeping with the architect's original design intent. (5.4, 6.4, 6.6)

The application further proposes to paint the brick veneer. Red brick masonry is highly indicative of the Georgian Revival style. Painting the brick would, therefore, detract somewhat from the original design intent. The *Guidelines* are vague about the appropriate treatment for unpainted historic 20th-Century brick. The *Guidelines* state that one should "preserve masonry features that define the overall historic character" of the structure and do specify that historic 19th-century brick should not be painted. The *Guidelines* further indicate that painting historic brick that has been previously painted is allowable given the paint color is suitable to the "age and architectural style of the structure." While providing no explicit guidance on whether or not unpainted historic 20th-century brick may be painted, the *Guidelines* do indicate that paint can impact the architectural integrity of a historic brick building and that visual material characteristics, such as color and texture, should be considered when determining whether or not to paint historic brick. (5.3, 5.8)

It should be noted that, while vapor-permeable masonry paints are unlikely to damage 20th-century extruded brick, paint is not easily reversible. Sandblasting methods can irreparably damage the brick's protective fire skin. More gentle removal methods, such as chemical paint strippers and micro-abrasives, can be costly.¹

¹ Robert C. Mack, AIA, et. al., "Assessing Cleaning and Water-Repellent Treatments for Historic Masonry Buildings," *Preservation Briefs* 1 (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2000).

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD VICINITY MAP



APPLICATION NUMBER 2 DATE 4/1/2019

APPLICANT Cochran Investments, Inc.

PROJECT Rebuild front steps; paint unpainted bricks.



Site Photos – 2255 Ashland Place Avenue



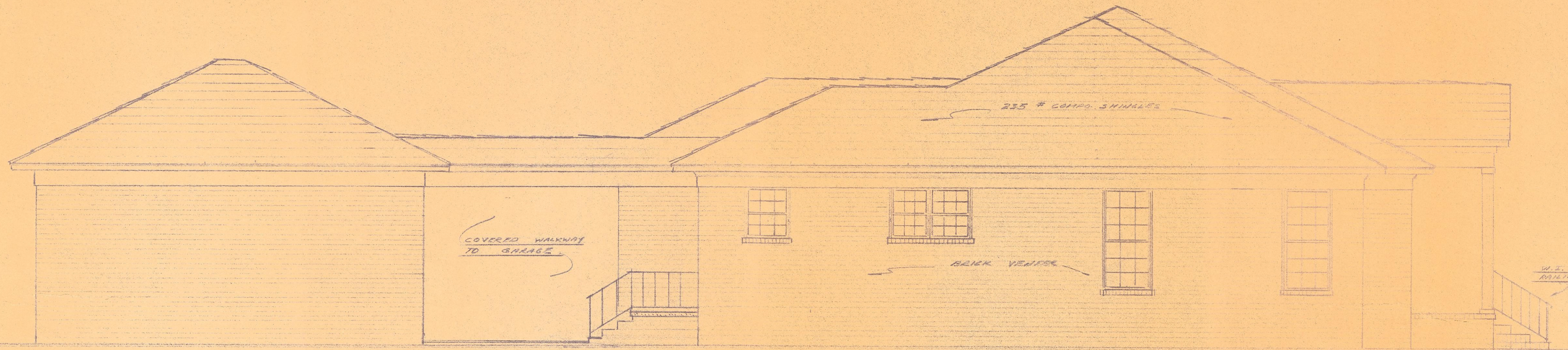
1. Primary façade, looking southwest



2. View of entry porch and existing stairs, looking south

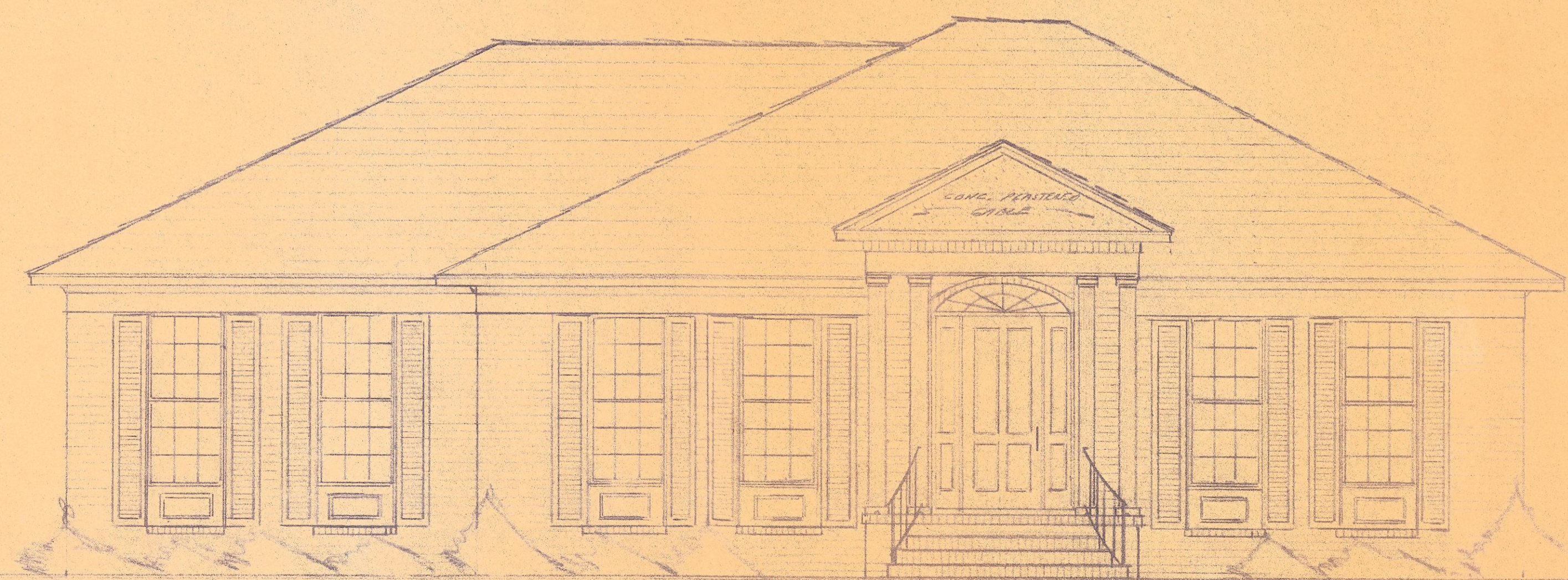


3. Detail of east stair, looking southeast



LEFT SIDE ELEVATION

SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



FRONT ELEVATION

SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

MISS ISABEL POPE
 1122 PORTA FINE
 HIGHLAND PLACE
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