

**Historical Architectural Review Board
COA Final Review Sheet**

HDC-2023-00032

Address: 614 N. Law Street

District: Old Fairgrounds Historic District

Applicant: Raul Disla, owner

Proposal: Legalize vinyl porch railings (violation correction)

Building Description:

This 3-story painted brick residential row home has Queen Anne influences with a front porch. The roofline is Mansard with a slate roof and a single dormer. This home has a single chimney and at the rear of the property is an iron fence. The windows are 2/2 casement with ornamental frames. The main entry is a glazed single door with a transom above and has brick lintels. The front porch is wood with a wooden balustrade railing.

Project Description:

On May 12, 2023, staff issued a notice of violation for the installation of vinyl porch railings where non-original wood railings previously existed. This application seeks to legalize the vinyl railings. Staff notes that the corner porch post has also been recently replaced without a Certificate of Appropriateness.



Front façade of 614 N. Law Street, 2019.
(Google StreetView)



Detail of vinyl railing, 2023.
(HARB files)

Applicable Guidelines:

Chapter 3.7 – Porches & Steps

3.7.3 Repair and restore existing porches and steps whenever possible. Salvage, repair, and reuse existing components including deck floor boards, railings, balusters, posts, and decorative trim. Repair and restore basement level windows or metal grates that are part of the porch base.

3.7.4 Replace individual deteriorated components in-kind with new materials matching the original in material composition, size, shape, profile, dimension, appearance, and finish. Custom fabrication is encouraged and may be necessary to provide an exact match. Where an exact match of the historic element cannot be found or fabricated, the new element should match the original as closely as possible.

3.7.5 Retain and repair original handrails or railings. Replace in-kind if repair is not feasible. Replacement handrails should match the existing in material, size, and appearance as closely as possible. Installation of handrails where they did

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not previously exist is generally not recommended due to the visual and physical impact on historic fabric; however, installation of a simple, compatible design may be acceptable for the purpose of safety and ease of access.

3.7.7 Consider restoration of previously altered porches with historically appropriate elements. Consult historic photographs to identify the original appearance. If the building is part of a pair or an attached row that was designed together, consult nearby buildings for examples.

3.7.8 If in-kind replacement is not feasible, replace with appropriate alternate materials that respect the original appearance and are durable. Composite wood decking is an appropriate alternate for tongue-and-groove wood floors if boards are similar to the original dimensions. Ceramic, tile, carpet, or cementitious coatings over wood are not appropriate floor materials. Steel, iron, and aluminum railings are acceptable replacements. Vinyl railings and trim are not appropriate alternate materials for wood elements. Use of dimensional lumber for visible parts of a porch is not appropriate.

Observations & Comments:

The previous railings consisted of a simple wood picket system and appeared to have replaced historic turned balusters, which are visible in the survey completed when the district was designated. The vinyl railings do not comply with Guideline 3.7.8, which notes that “vinyl railings and trim are not appropriate alternate materials for wood elements.” Staff suggests that painted turned wood balusters be installed in place of the vinyl railings, with some flexibility in design since the historic balusters were replaced several decades ago.

Staff Recommendation:

Denial, pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 3.7 Porches & Steps.

HARB Discussion:

Mr. Huber noted that a portion of a bracket was also missing at the top of the replaced column. He suggested that it be restored as part of the scope to legalize the work, since it appears to have been broken during the replacement of the column. The HARB discussed returning the railings to wood to match the previous railings and commented that the porch column should match the historic column. Mr. Disla agreed to return the porch to its previous appearance and amended the scope of work.

Action:

Mr. Encelewski moved to approve the amended application presented on 6/5/2023 to replace the porch railings and column with appropriate wood railings and a wood column, with the staff to review details, pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 3.7 Porches & Steps. Mr. Lichtenwalner seconded the motion, which carried with unanimous support.