CITY OF ALLENTOWN

30962 ***RESOLUTION*** ***R199 – 2024***

Introduced by the Administration on November 20, 2024

Certificate of Appropriateness for work in the Historic Districts:

- 728 Liberty St.
- 1118 Chew St.

Resolved by the Council of the City of Allentown, That

WHEREAS, Certificates of Appropriateness are required under the provisions of the Act of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania No. 167, June 13, 1961 (P.L. 282) and City of Allentown Ordinance No. 12314; and

WHEREAS, the following properties whose respective owners applied for and were granted approval by the Allentown Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) to undertake specific exterior alterations on said properties as indicated in the attached Final Review Reports, which form part of this resolution:

- 728 Liberty St. (Katherine Caceres and Yasel Corporan, Applicants)-Installation of rooftop solar panels.
- 1118 Chew St. (Madrag LLC DBA 101 Mobility, Applicant)-Installation of vertical platform lift, porch overbuild, and concrete pad to provide ADA accessible entry.

WHEREAS, on November 4, 2024, the Allentown HARB recommended approval of the above applications, or offered modifications which were subsequently accepted by the property owners, to City Council; and

WHEREAS, after reviewing the attached final review reports, it is the opinion of City Council that the proposed work is appropriate.

	Yea	Nay
Candida Affa	X	
Ce-Ce Gerlach		
Daryl Hendricks	X	
Santo Napoli	X	
Natalie Santos	X	
Ed Zucal	X	
Cynthia Y. Mota, President	X	
TOTAL	6	0

THIS IS TO CERTIFY, That the above copy of Resolution No. 30962 was adopted by the City Council of Allentown on the 20th day of November, 2024, and is on file in the City Clerk's Office.

City Clerk

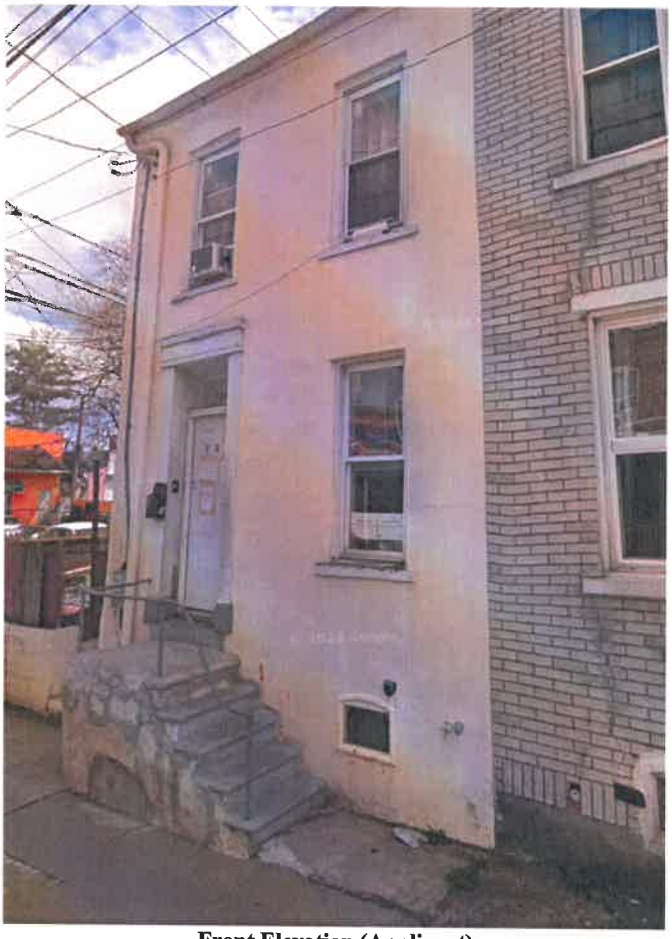
Historical Architectural Review Board
COA Preliminary Review Sheet

HDC-2024-00094
Address: 728 Liberty Street
District: Old Allentown Historic District
Owner: Juan and Claudia Montero
Applicant: Katherine Caceres and Yasel Corporan
Proposal: Solar Panel Installation

Building Description: This 2½-story row house ca 1870 is Federal in style. The roof has slate shingle, snow catchers and single chimney. The windows are 2/2 sash with shutter brackets and flat lintels. The front entry is a single panel door with a transom. There is a concrete stoop and steps with a pipe railing and a visible basement window grille. The side yard has concrete steps leading up to it and chain link fencing surrounding it. The 2nd floor front windows have window boxes and the 1st floor front window has paneled shutters. The 2nd floor rear has been enclosed with asbestos siding and there is a shed roof covering the side yard door.

Project Description:

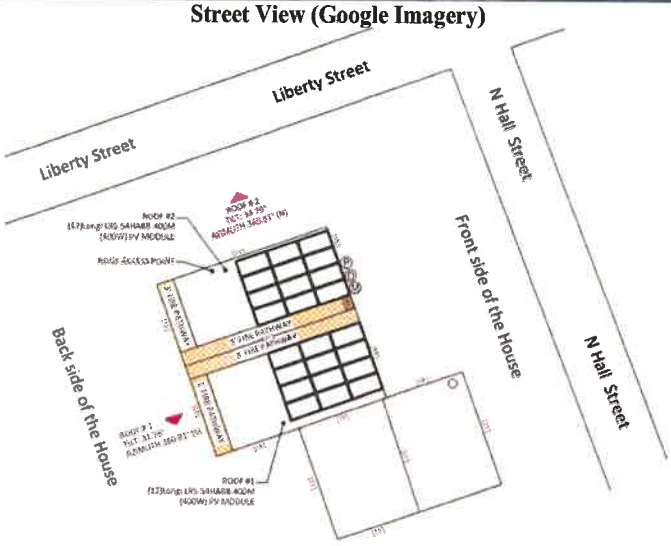
The proposed work is install rooftop solar panels over the entirety of the roof.



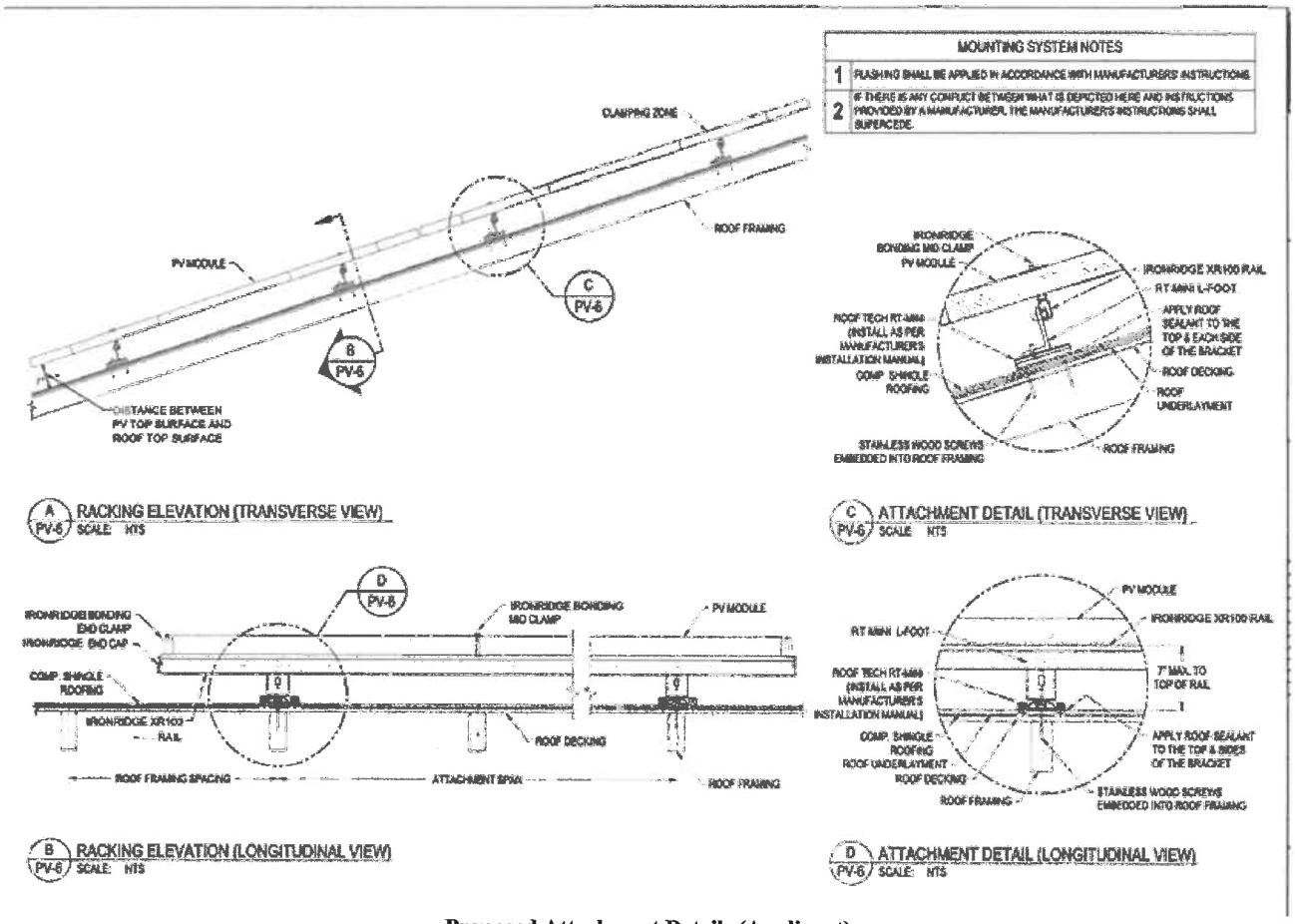
Front Elevation (Applicant)

Historical Architectural Review Board
COA Preliminary Review Sheet

Street View (Google Imagery)



Roof Plan (Applicant)



Proposed Attachment Details (Applicant)

Applicable Guidelines:

Section 3.10 – Solar Energy and Energy Improvements

3.10.1 Conduct an energy audit to understand the building's thermal performance. This helps the new system perform most efficiently and can identify other minor building repairs to reduce energy loss.

3.10.2 Preserve the historic character of a building when planning a solar or alternative energy system. Avoid removing, covering, or altering significant and character-defining features of a building to accommodate solar energy systems, including roof slopes, dormers, chimneys, windows, and exterior wood and masonry walls.

3.10.3 Minimize visibility of solar panels, mounting equipment, and necessary mechanical equipment from the public right-of-way. For pitched roofs, locate solar collectors on rear roof slopes whenever possible. For pitched roofs where all slopes are visible, locate collectors as far back from the street as possible. For flat roofs, locate collectors as far back from the top of street-facing facades as possible.

3.10.4 Attach solar collectors or other equipment in the least invasive method feasible so that the alteration is reversible in the future.

3.10.5 Install solar collectors or equipment as flat as possible to the surface where they are installed. Placement parallel to the roof surface is encouraged. If a horizontal or vertical tilt is required for functionality, adjust the pitch to use the smallest angle possible.

3.10.6 Choose energy systems, mounting equipment, and necessary mechanical equipment in a color compatible with existing roof materials whenever possible and with non-reflective finishes.

3.10.7 For architecturally integrated solar systems, choose low profile materials in a compatible and non-reflective color and that match historic materials as closely as possible. Such systems include solar shingles or integrated into standing seam metal roofs. Installation on primary facades may be appropriate where metal roofing exists and no visual change occurs; other systems must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis based on visual impact and physical characteristics.

Observations & Comments:
While solar panel installation is typically a staff-level review, staff recommended this application is reviewed by the HARB, given the extent of roof coverage. The application indicates that the 24 solar panels would be installed over the front and rear roof slopes, with nearly full roof surface coverage. Guidelines Section 3.10.3 states to minimize visibility of solar panels, locating collectors on rear roof slopes whenever possible, and/or as far back from the street as possible, and to avoid locating panels on roofs facing the street or the main façade. In reviewing view angles from the public right-of-way, the existing roof surface is not visible. This visibility may change when the panels are installed. The proposed installation calls for mounting the panels parallel to the roof surface, which is appropriate per the Guidelines, and that there is a maximum 7" from the existing roof surface to the top rail of the panel installation.

Considering the installation parallel to the roof, and low visibility of the rooftop itself from the public right of way, the visual impact of the installed panels on the streetscape may be minimal.

Additional information which may be helpful in evaluating this proposal include:

- In the submitted drawings, the "top rail" does not appear to align with the top of the solar panel itself. What is the expected total height of the system from the surface of the existing roof?
- Was there consideration for installing panels on the rear slope of the roof only?

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommend approval for the full roof installation if the total height of the solar panel system does not adversely affect the streetscape.

Presenters:
- Ms. Baade presented the application.
- Yasel Corporan and Jose Amarante represented the application.

Discussion: The applicant noted they submitted revised plans for the project that address some of the staff recommendations related to the visibility of the panels from the front of the structure. They reduced the number of panels from 24 to 15. The applicant noted 6" is the distance between the roof and panels (7" is the maximum distance permitted.) They are also proposing to move the electrical equipment indoors to the basement, instead of at the northeast corner of the property on the exterior. The applicant would like to know if solar panels are acceptable on the front slope of the building; the applicant thinks visibility will be minimal, due to the footprint of the building. The power disconnect will be located on the exterior of the building per NEC rules and the conduit will run up the side of the house. Mr. Huber noted that the preference would be to run this on the back of the house, which is not visible from the right-of-way.
The applicant noted that they will also replace the roof to provide a solid foundation for the panels. Mr. Jordan asked what the existing roof material is; it was noted that slate is the current material that will be replaced with shingles. It was noted that roof replacement was not part of the application, so a separate application for the roof replacement will be needed.

Actions:
Mr. Jordan moved to approve, with conditions, the application presented on November 4, 2024 for the installation of solar panels at 728 Liberty Street with the following conditions agreed to by the applicant following the Guidelines for Historic Districts: Chapter 3, Section 10 – Solar Energy and Energy Improvements and find no circumstances unique to the property:
- Conduit placed on the back of the house, not the along side.

- Alternate configuration utilizing only the rear surface of the roof, as presented, be installed.

Mr. Huber seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Historical Architectural Review Board
COA Preliminary Review Sheet

HDC-2024-00087
Address: 1118 Chew Street
District: Old Allentown Historic District
Owner: Johnny Ibraheem
Applicant: Madrag LLC DBA 101 Mobility
Proposal: Vertical platform lift and porch overbuild.

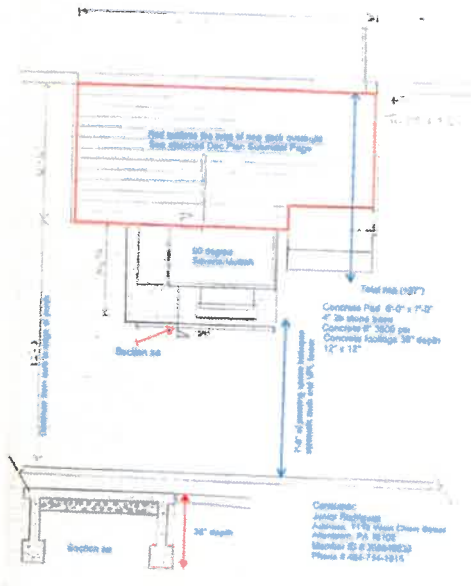
Building Description: This 2½-story brick row house, ca 1892 is Eastlake in style. The gable roof has a dormer with scalloped wood above the window, asphalt shingles and a single chimney. The windows are 1/1 sash with Eastlake lintels and a fan shape of bricks topping the lintels. The main entry is a single modern door. The front porch is wood on concrete with metal railing and shingle roof.

Project Description:

The application is for modifications at the front of the house to create an accessible entry, including the installation of a vertical platform lift, porch overbuild, and concrete pad.

Front Elevation (Applicant)

Existing Entry (Applicant)



Proposed Plan (Applicant)

Proposed Lift (Applicant)

Historical Architectural Review Board
COA Preliminary Review Sheet

Applicable Guidelines:

Section 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 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.

3.7.6 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.

3.7.7 Replace porches only if repair and select replacement is not feasible. A full demolition and rebuild is rarely necessary except in cases of severe deterioration and life safety concerns. Replicate the original design as closely as possible, allowing for structural and code requirements. Install flashing and waterproofing at all connections between the porch and main building.

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.

3.7.9 Avoid enclosing historically open porches on primary and highly visible facades. Enclosure with glass or screens at rear or non-visible features may be acceptable. Enclosure with walls or opaque materials is not recommended. Avoid removing, altering, or covering historic details.

3.7.10 Avoid removing a historic porch roof or full porch. Removal will negatively impact the building's historic character. Consult with Planning Staff and HARB about the reason for removal (i.e. cause of deterioration). A porch that was added after the original construction of a building may have gained significance in its own right. Porches can be appropriate for the building as a reflection of its development over time and as an expression of a later architectural style.

Observations & Comments:

This application began as a staff review. Given the modifications proposed to the porch on the primary façade, staff recommended HARB review to come to appropriate solution that assists in creating barrier-free access to the entry.

Providing an accessible entry at the primary entrance to the building is appropriate and recommended. The existing railing is called to be removed to accommodate the lift installation, and the applicant noted that the railing will be salvaged and reused. 1"x 4" pressure treated decking with dimensional framing below is proposed to raise the existing porch height to be in line with the doorway and lift. Guidelines Section 3.7.8 says "composite wood decking is an appropriate alternate to tongue and groove wood floors… Use of dimensional lumber for visible parts of a porch is not appropriate."

The proposed 1"x4" pressure treated decking would not be appropriate per the Guidelines. Salvaging and reinstalling the existing porch decking would be most appropriate. Alternatively, composite decking to match the original profile and dimension as closely as possible would be appropriate.

Reinstalling the existing railing is appropriate and maintains the historic character of the primary façade and porch. Reinstalling the railing to maintain the existing dimension from top of porch to top of railing would be appropriate.

Staff Recommendation:
Staff recommend approval with the following conditions:

- The existing porch decking is removed and reinstalled at the new raised height. Alternatively, composite decking to match the original in dimension as close as possible would be appropriate.
- The existing railing is reinstalled at the new raised height to maintain the existing dimension of railing height relative to the to porch floor.

Presenters:

- Ms. Baade presented the application to HARB
- Michel Ragland and Lauren Ragland represented the application.

Discussion:
The applicant noted that they would prefer to use the composite decking, rather than reusing the existing decking, since they do not know the current condition.
Mr. Jordan noted that the HARB is not ruling on the lift itself, but rather the impact of the existing structure. The applicant noted that the decking will need to be raised in height to be flush with the door threshold. A railing will also be installed at the new height.
The applicant noted that this is a service they are providing for Pennsylvania Medicaid, who will also review whatever is decided.
Mr. Jordan asked if ramping was explored, but the applicant noted that a ramp was not feasible given the rise. Mr. Huber asked if any other solution was explored that might not impact the historic materials. Many alternative options were discussed in lieu of the proposed design. Ms. Baade recommended removing the entire section of railing, rather than altering the railing in one small section. In preserving as much of the existing historic material as possible, maintaining the existing railing at the existing height, and removing only the section required to accommodate the liftgate was viewed as the best solution.
If height of handrail needs to be extended, a simple handrail extension behind the historic railing at the appropriate height that could be removed at a later date.

Actions: Mr. Jordan made a motion to approve, with conditions, the application presented on November 4, 2024 for the front porch modifications to accommodate an accessible lift at 1118 Chew Street, with the following conditions agreed to by the applicant, following sections of the Guidelines for Historic Districts: Chapter 3, Section 3.7 Porches and 3.14 Accessibility and Code Required Work, and find no circumstances unique to the property:

- A composite decking to match the original in dimension be installed without affecting the surrounding railings.
- The existing configuration and materials of railings outside the liftgate entrance be preserved.
- Any code-required handrail height adjustment be addressed through the installation of a simple, reversible handrail extension mounted to on the porch-side of the existing railing and be submitted for staff review and approval based on Guidelines Chapter 3, Section 3.7-Porches and Steps.
- The composite decking material sample submitted for review and approved by staff based on Guidelines for Historic Districts Chapter 3, Section 3.7-Porches and Steps.

Mr. Hart seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.