

Historical Architectural Review Board
COA Preliminary Review Sheet

HDC-2025-00008

Address: 1528 Linden Street

District: West Park Historic District

Owner: Allentown Masonic Temple Association

Applicant: Robert B. Kehm

Proposal: Violation correction - Vertical platform lift installation with landing infill and railings.

Building Description: This five-story structure is made of limestone and was erected on a reinforced concrete foundation, designed in the Neoclassical style. The structure is ninety-seven feet, six inches wide and one hundred fifty feet deep, featuring elaborate stone and terra cotta trim, and four large imposing fluted columns at its main entrance. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

Project Description:

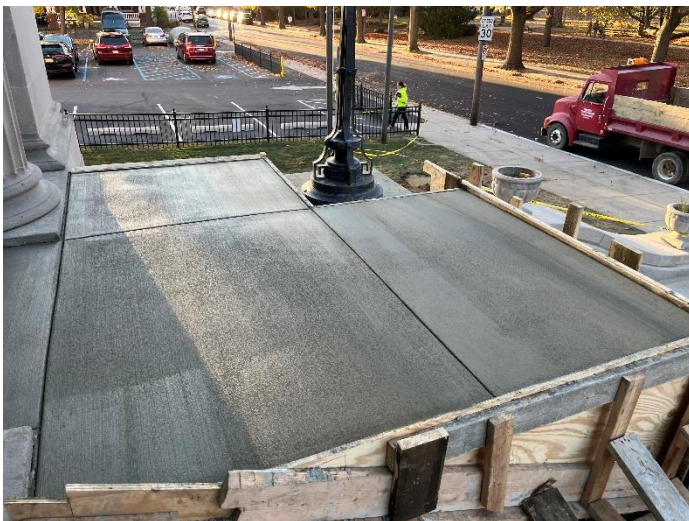
The project included the installation of an accessible lift at the front of the building, a new sidewalk, and top landing and railings at the west side of the front entry.



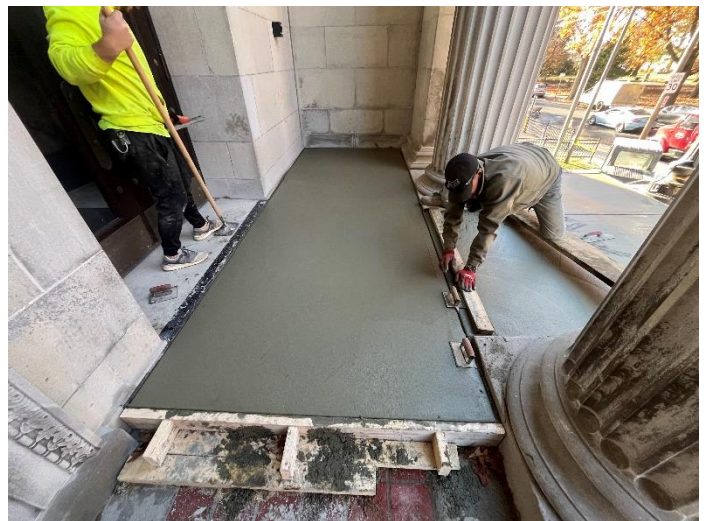
Original Front Elevation (Applicant)



Original Top Landing Area (Applicant)



Top Landing (Applicant)

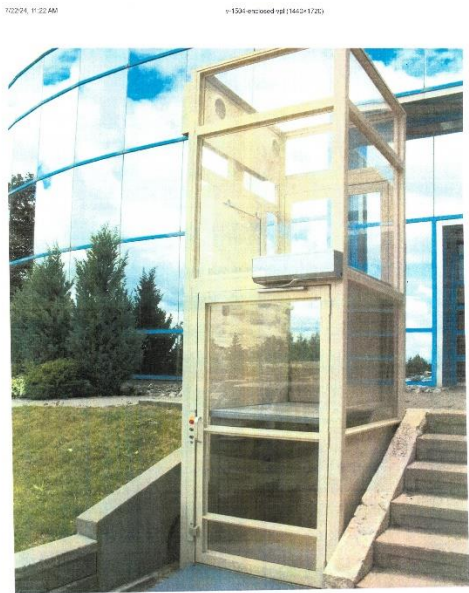


Entry Landing (Applicant)

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New Sidewalk (Applicant)



Proposed Lift (Applicant)



Current Condition – Front Elevation (Staff)



Current Condition – Railing/Top Landing (Staff)

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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:

The completed work to date includes a new at-grade sidewalk, a formed concrete landing over the top of existing stairs, metal railings at this new landing, and concrete fill over existing tiles at the existing entry door.

While providing an accessible entry at the main entry is desirable, the top landing does affect the composition of the front elevation and the original historic entry. Given that the first floor is quite elevated above grade and there are limited access points to the building, providing an accessible entry would be challenging. More information from the applicant would be helpful to understand the process for coming to this solution and if other options were explored, such as a ramp, and if there were dimensional requirements that resulted in the top landing extending past the lamppost.

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The Guidelines recommend considering provisions for reversibility so that modifications can be easily removed without damaging historic fabric in the future. It appears in the photos that concrete was built up over the existing stairs and tiled entryway. Any future removal of this concrete may compromise the integrity of the historic materials.

The new railings at the top landing are similar to the existing stair railings in materiality and finish but appear to have a different profile.

Information has been submitted regarding the configuration of the lift. The metal components in the sample image appears to be a buff color. A color that complements the existing surrounding stone would be appropriate. It would be helpful for the applicant to confirm the intended finish color of the lift.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommend denying the application.

Presenters:

- Ms. Baade presented the application.
- Bob Kehm represented the application.

Discussion:

Mr. Kehm presented a printed document that addressed several staff comments, including conditions and configurations of other access points to the building. He explained the process and reasoning for a lift located at the front, and the new top landing. Mr. Kehm stated that other options were not feasible, due to physical constraints of the building and/or cost.

There was a discussion among the HARB and with the applicant regarding the configuration, location, massing, and strategies of construction for the accessible entry provisions. While providing an accessible entry at the front of the building was seen as a merit, the following points summarize the challenges:

- The Guidelines recommend including provisions for reversibility of modifications. Existing steps were removed and concrete poured in their place, and concrete was poured directly on existing tile at the front entry, compromising the integrity of the existing historic materials.
- The massing of the new landing disrupts the overall symmetry of the front entry.
- The finishes of the new landing areas should balance blending in and being complementary of the existing building finishes, without creating a “false history,” that is, to not replicate the original building so much as to make it look original when it was not.

Mr. Jordan noted the applicant’s willingness to correct the violation. Mr. Hart noted that the mission of the modification, to provide accessible entry, may be more important than preserving the symmetry of the façade, and that further modifying the front to maintain the symmetry may not be the most appropriate approach. The HARB suggested the applicant develop options to minimally visually impact the modification, and recommended consulting an architect, and that these options could be reviewed at the next HARB meeting.

Actions:

Mr. Hart moved to table the application for one month to the April meeting to allow the applicant to develop options for the finishing, treatment, or design of the new accessible entry that respond to discussion comments.

Mr. Jordan seconded the motion, which carried with unanimous support.