

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

HDC-2023-00016

Address: 616 N. 6th Street

District: Old Fairgrounds Historic District

Applicant: Maria Tavarez, owner

Proposal: Legalize tile on front porch (violation correction)

Building Description:

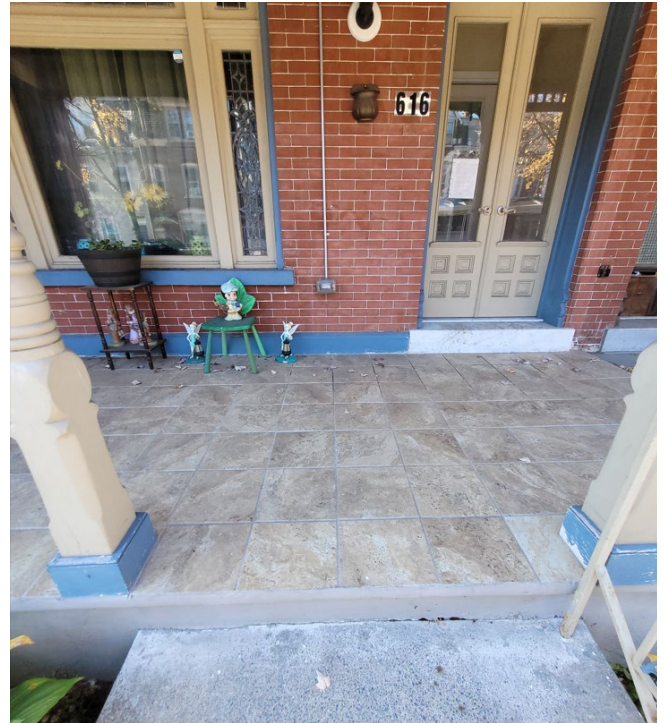
This 3-story brick row house, c. 1925, is a Queen Anne porch style. The mansard roof has shingles, a bay window on the 3rd floor consisting of 3 double hung 1/1 windows with a flat roof (previously had a turret on it), a single arched dormer window with a gable roof to the right of the bay, decorative cornice. The second floor has a bay window with three 1/1 double hung windows and an arched window to the right with an arched brick lintel over the top and a brick course across the wall and corbelled panels between the houses from the 3rd floor down to the 2nd floor. The porch roof has a pediment at the entry. The porch has concrete steps with a landing, the front door is a double 1/2 –glass window, the columns are curved, wooden railing, fan and brackets between the columns and wrought iron fencing at the two sets of stairs.

Project Description:

This application seeks to legalize the installation of tile on the front porch of the property at 616 N. 6th Street. The porch historically had tongue and groove wood floorboards and was changed to concrete at some point in the past. The tile was installed over the concrete between 2017 and 2018. At the time, a new railing was also installed, though the railing has since been removed.



Front façade of 616 N. 6th Street, 2021.
(Google StreetView)



Detail of porch, 2023.
(City of Allentown)

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Detail of porch, 2023.
(City of Allentown)



Concrete porch slab in 2012.
(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.

3.7.6 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.

3.7.8 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:

In 2012, the Housing Association and Development Corporation received Certificates of Appropriateness to rehabilitate the building and convert the property from multi-family to single-family. The project including installing new windows, restoring wood elements, replacing the roof, rebuilding the turret, and restoring the cedar shakes at the front bay. This scope originally included restoring the front porch floor, railing, and balustrade; however, the applicant never completed this part of the scope.

Guideline 3.7.8 notes that alternate porch materials, such as composite wood decking, may be appropriate if similar to the appearance of the original floorboards. The guideline specifically notes that ceramic tile, carpet, or cementitious coatings over wood are not appropriate floor materials. Staff contends that the tile is not an appropriate porch material whether installed over wood or concrete and recommends removing the tiles and repairing the existing concrete slab to better comply with the design guidelines.

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Staff Recommendation:

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

HARB Discussion:

The owner's daughter stated that her mother, Ms. Tavaréz, purchased the home from Community Action, and at the time of purchase the wood porch had already been replaced with concrete. After purchase the owner added the tile in hopes of improving the aesthetic look of the rough concrete. The owner and contractor had not obtained City of Allentown permits prior to tiling the porch.

Mr. Jordan questioned what an appropriate solution would be, noting that the concrete porch was a past violation from a developer and that the current owner then installed tile to create a second violation. He stated that it creates a very difficult situation without a clear solution. He then stated that the HARB must approve applications that meet the Guidelines for Historic Districts.

Mr. Lichtenwalner agreed with Mr. Jordan, stating that to satisfy the guidelines the HARB would need to recommend that the porch be returned to wood, but noted that that would not be a reasonable request. The HARB then discussed the possibility of removing the tile, noting that it may cause significant damage. The HARB stated that the tile on the porch did not meet the Guidelines for Historic Districts and that it would need to recommend denial of the application but added that City Council would have the authority to consider the implications of reversing the work, and whether the tile could be legalized owing to the unique circumstances.

Action:

Mr. Lichtenwalner moved to deny the application presented on 5/1/2023 for the legalization of tile on the front porch of 616 N. 6th Street, pursuant to Chapter 3, Section 3.7 Porches & Steps. Mr. Hart seconded the motion, which carried by a vote of 4-0. Mr. Encelewski abstained.