



# STAFF REPORT

## Historic Preservation Commission

10/05/2022

HPCA-22-00129

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**Agenda Item:** VI.C.2.  
**Case Number:** HPCA-22-00129  
**Property Address:** 217 NW 31<sup>st</sup> Street  
**District:** Edgemere Park  
**Owner:** Rachel Gallant  
217 NW 31<sup>st</sup> Street  
Oklahoma City, OK 73118

### A. CASE ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Install handrails at front porch (elective).

### B. BACKGROUND

#### 1. Project Description

The work for this project includes the installation of a handrail on both sides of the steps leading into the east side of the front porch.

#### 2. Location

Project site is located on the north side of NW 31<sup>st</sup> Street between N Harvey and N Robinson Avenues.

#### 3. Site History

*Date of Construction:* 1927

*Zoned Historic Preservation/Historical Landmark:* 1977

*National Register Listing:* 1980

*National Register Nomination:* 626-628 Northwest 28th, C. 1928. This two-story Prairie School style residence has wide fascia under eaves. The second story has two large window openings. Original porch columns have been replaced with 3 wrought-iron supports.

#### *Additional Information:*

The 1949 edition of the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps illustrates a 1-story, brick veneered, frame dwelling with a recessed porch located on the eastern portion of the house facing south. A 1-story frame "auto house" is indicated near the east property line with the front face back just beyond the 50% mark of the property depth from the front property line. All structures originally had wood shingle roofs, but in the 1955 map, the roof was changed to composition shingles. The change in roof is the only change indicated on the maps.

#### **4. Existing Conditions**

There are no current handrails at the proposed location. Additionally, there is no indication that there have been handrails installed in the proposed area previously. However, there is evidence that there were two railings under each arch of the front recessed porch facing north. These railings have since been removed.

#### **5. Previous Actions**

Previous applications for Historic Preservation Certificate of Appropriateness (HPCA) filed for this property include:

None.

### **C. ITEMS IN COMPLIANCE**

*Unless noted below in Section D., Issues and Considerations, all other case items of this proposal comply with the Design and Sustainability Standards and Guidelines for Oklahoma City Historic Districts, and with all relevant sections of the Oklahoma City Municipal Code, 2020. \**

None.

### **D. ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

*This proposal may not comply with the Design and Sustainability Standards and Guidelines for Oklahoma City Historic Districts, and with all relevant sections of the Oklahoma City Municipal Code, 2020\* as referenced below:*

#### **1. Item 1, Addition of handrails (elective).**

- a. Description: The applicant proposes an addition of a modest 36-inch-tall handrail on both sides of the steps leading into the east side of the front porch of the unit.
- b. References: *Oklahoma City Historic Preservation Design & Sustainability Standard and Guidelines, 2019*

##### **1.1 Historic Preservation and Design Standards and Guidelines (Excerpt)**

Development and investment that preserve the historic character of Oklahoma City's historic properties and districts, while also enhancing livability, are encouraged.

##### **1.2 Designation and Review Process (Excerpt)**

The Municipal Code establishes a process that ensures changes to HP or HL zoned properties are consistent with the spirit and character of the historic district and the individual properties while meeting owners' and residents' contemporary needs. In the preservation design and review process, plans are examined and evaluated before construction work begins.

##### **3.3 Porches, Canopies, Porte-Cocheres & Balconies**

**Policy:** Historic porches, canopies, porte-cocheres and balconies are important features and are often the dominant characteristic of a building. These features that are visible from the public right-of-way should not be altered.

**Design Justification:** Front porches and canopies connect a building to its

context by orientating the primary entrance to the street. The various components of porches, canopies, porte-cocheres, and balconies, including steps, railings and columns, provide scale and detail to historic buildings.

**Sustainability Justification:** Porches, canopies, and porte-cocheres protect entrances, provide shade, and enhance a building's energy efficiency.

**Porch Elements – Columns & Railings, Ceiling & Flooring, Stairs**

- 3.3.11: If more than 50% of a material or component is deteriorated beyond repair, replacement may be required. When new materials may be introduced, there are likely sustainability considerations.
- 3.3.13: The dimensions and proportions of replacement balusters must match the historic porch. The spacing and height of railing balusters is important to the character of the historic building with typically closely spaced balusters and relatively low railings (30" or less in height). Although this height may not conform with current codes, existing historic railings are permitted to remain until they are too deteriorated to be retained and repaired, therefore it is critical to retain the historic porch balustrade and railings.

c. Considerations:

The applicant indicates that the addition of handrails is for safety and accessibility reasons. Their concern is for individuals with disability or mobility issues to be able to safely enter and exit their property. While there are not specific guidelines for the addition of handrails to historic properties, there are considerations for establishing a balance between maintaining the historic character of historic resources/districts and allowing for livability and meeting contemporary needs as seen in 1.1 and 1.2 of the *Oklahoma City Historic Preservation Design & Sustainability Standard and Guidelines, 2019*. The addition of handrails will allow for better accessibility to the applicant's property for individuals with disabilities/mobility issues, and it will further help with the applicants being able to age in place if they so choose. Additionally, the installation of handrails using materials of a similar nature of those already in existence in the neighborhood, along with a modest design, will allow the handrails to have minimal negative impact on the historic character of the house and neighborhood.

The height of the proposed handrails meets current code requirements, though this likely would not align with the historic railings. There is evidence of railings having once been in place under each of the arches of the porch, but no photographs have been found or supplied to provide a direct comparison. A modest handrail design has little effect on the historic character of the dwelling.

d. Recommended Specific Findings:

1. That the handrails will enhance livability for the applicant by increasing accessibility to the property;
2. That the Standards and Guidelines support changes that increase livability while

maintaining the historic character of the property and district;

3. That the material and the modest design of the proposed handrails will not detract from the historic characteristic of the house or neighborhood.

**E. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

1. **Approve HPCA-22-00129, Item 1, Install handrails at front porch**, with Unique Circumstances, with the specific findings that the proposed work will not have an adverse effect on the historic character of the district or property; that the following unique Circumstances exist; that the items do not strictly comply with all relevant Guidelines or are not addressed by them, but are nonetheless consistent with the spirit and intent of said Guidelines and are in compliance with the relevant sections of the Oklahoma City Municipal Code, 2020\*, as referenced in the Staff Report.

**Specific Findings:**

1. That the handrails will enhance livability for the applicant by increasing accessibility to the property;
2. That the Standards and Guidelines support changes that increase livability while maintaining the historic character of the property and district;
3. That the material and the modest design of the proposed handrails will not detract from the historic characteristic of the house or neighborhood.

*Note: Staff recommendation does not constitute Commission action.*

*\*Relevant Sections of the Municipal Code governing HP/HL Districts are: §59.3300.1-5; §59.4150.4; §59.4250; §59.7250.1-4; §59.7300.1-7; §59.12200.1-4; §59.13300.1-6.*

*Copies of the Standards/Guidelines and Relevant Sections of the Municipal Code, 2020 are available online at [www.okc.gov/planning/hp/index.html](http://www.okc.gov/planning/hp/index.html); at Planning Department offices located at 420 W. Main, 9<sup>th</sup> floor, and each HP Commission Meeting.*

*DGC*