

Historic District Commission News

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A Warning About Contractors!

Fortunately, most contractors are honest. However, some recent cases at the Historic District Commission (HDC) lead me to caution owners to be alert when using a contractor.

Contractors said they would get permits, but didn't, and created expensive problems for owners.

In one case, a contractor signed a contract that specifically said he would get replacement windows approved by the HDC, then did not! They installed vinyl windows that were inappropriate. In another case, the contractor told the owner that a kind of inexpensive vinyl window was a kind approved by HDC. They were not! This contractor also did not get a permit.

The owners had to incur the expense of removing the vinyl windows and installing appropriate wood windows. In both cases, the contractor was long gone! In one case, the house had good repairable windows and did not even need replacements. Wasted money.

What to do?

Always insist that a contractor show you copies of both a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the HDC and a Building Permit from the Department of Buildings, Safety, Engineering and Environment (BSEED). And you should insist on seeing them **before** the contractor begins any work. A COA shows that HDC approved the work. A Permit means that BSEED will inspect the finished work to ensure that it has been completed according to code.

A precaution: a prudent thing is not to pay a contractor anything until they show you these documents. Often a contractor wants a portion of the contract before work begins. That's OK, but be sure the contract says that the contractor will get a COA and a Building Permit, and just don't pay anything until the contractor shows you the COA and the Permit. **Don't settle for a promise** that the contractor will get them. Likewise, it's prudent not to allow the contractor to begin work until you see the COA and the Permit. Then you are protected.

Owners always can reach out to HDC staff to check whether contractors have gotten COAs: hdc@detroitmi.gov or 313-224-1762.

Honest contractors will show you a COA and a Permit and will post them on the front of the property as required. But when a contractor does not or will not do this, beware. Step back. Consult HDC on how to get things on track and keep everything legal. Don't get stuck with added expense.