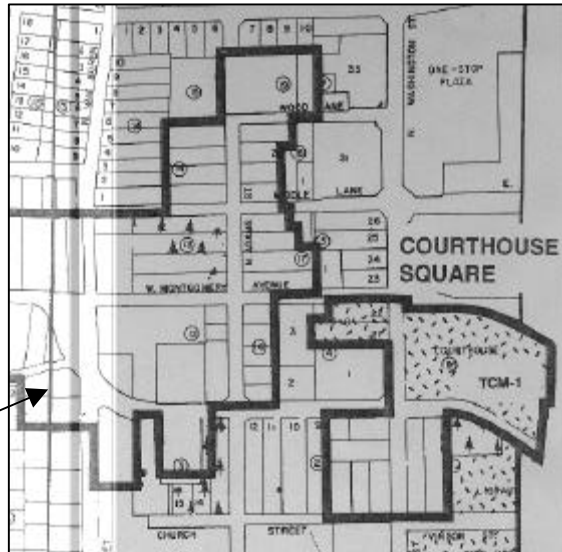


**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT**

**April 16, 2002  
MEETING NO. 04-02**

**APPLICATION:** HDC02-0217  
**DATE FILED:** March 25, 2002  
**APPLICANT/  
OWNER:** Aaron Fein  
200 West Jefferson St.  
Rockville, MD 20850

200 W. Jefferson St.



**PROPERTY DESCRIPTION:**

The subject property is a single-family residence located at the junction of West Jefferson Street and South Van Buren, a few yards southeast of Falls Road. It is a large three bay by three bay frame house that was built in 1892. It is known as the Sophia Higgins house and is named after its original owner.

**PREVIOUS ACTIONS AT THIS ADDRESS:**

- HD-157-86 Remove hemlock tree and replace with shrubbery, approved 5/21/86
- HD-134-85 Construct small pond, walkways, landscaping, patio, and exterior lighting and replace fence, approved 9/17/85
- HD-111-84 Demolish shed and fence; construct one-car garage, approved 3/7/85

**REQUEST:** The Applicant requests a Certificate of Approval to remove second story gutters and install French drains along the left and right sides of the house, under the drip line of the roof. Gutters will remain on the rear addition and side porch.



## **STAFF COMMENTS/RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Historic, archeological, or architectural value and significance of the site or structure and its relationship to the historic, archeological, or architectural significance of the surrounding area.*

This house was the last home of one of the most interesting women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Rockville. Sophia Dorothy Barnard Higgins was raised in a wealthy Georgetown banking family. In 1847, she married John H. Higgins, a prominent Unionist and one of the first Town Commissioners. In 1871, after her husband had died, Sophia purchased 13 acres of land on Falls Road and built a house. Her sons built adjoining houses and the area became nicknamed "Higginsville". Sophia took over the family business, a general merchandise store, and ran it with her sons and sons-in-law. The company went out of business in 1888, owing many debts. To raise money, Sophia sold her property on Falls Road. She purchased a 1/3-acre lot opposite the Baptist Cemetery on Van Buren Street and built this large new house as a residence for herself and her three unmarried daughters. The site was in the midst of the rapidly developing area of newer homes in the fashionable Queen Anne/Eastlake style. The house remained in her family until 1936.

- 2. The relationship of the exterior architectural features of the structure to the remainder of the entire structure and to the surrounding area.*

The three-bay by three-bay house has a high brick foundation which makes it appear taller than its 2 ½ stories. The ridge line of the steep gable asphalt-shingled roof runs east to west, with a central brick chimney. There are smaller gables on the front and sides of the house. The main (east) façade has a secondary gable with a second-story projection below. This projection now appears to be unsupported as the original covered porch was removed many years ago. A covered porch with a railed balcony is attached to the north-northeast corner of the house and there is a one-story shed-roofed addition on the rear (west) façade.

Two alterations, in the 1940s and 1970s, resulted in the loss of most exterior trim and ornamentation. Besides removal of the front porch, the side porch was enclosed, shutters and window trim were removed, new asphalt roofing material and aluminum siding were added. The house was divided into apartments for several years until purchased by the Feins as their residence in 2000.

- 3. The general compatibility of exterior design, scale, proportion, arrangement, texture, and materials proposed to be used.*

The Applicant claims that the gutters detract from the appearance of the house because they are oversized and project out abnormally. Decorative molding on the fascia boards make it necessary to hang the gutters from roof-mounted hangers. The gutters tend to sag and bend as the hangers age and break. They are difficult to maintain because of the height of the roof. The gutters have caused damage to the wood behind them.

The Applicant's proposed solution is to remove the second story gutters and leave the gutters on the rear addition and side porch. French drains would be installed along either side of the house under the drip line of the roof to carry water downhill toward the back of the house. (The house already has French drains under the floor of the basement which flow into two sumps.) As proposed, a trench will be constructed, 10 inches wide and 8 inches deep, lined with landscape fabric and a two-inch layer of gravel. A 4-inch diameter pipe, perforated along the bottom, will be placed on the gravel inside the trench and buried under another 3 inches of gravel. This will be covered with landscape fabric and hidden under another 2-inch layer of gravel. The pipe will surface unobtrusively in the rear yard.



Staff agrees that replacing the gutters with French drains would improve the appearance of the house, particularly on the east and north facades, which are most visible from the right-of-way. The existing gutters and hangers are unattractive and inefficient. It appears that the gutter on the front elevation could be removed as the short roof projection beneath the gable was probably designed to direct water away from the house without a gutter. Staff has some concerns about the proposed solution of removing all of the second story gutters and replacing with French drains. The structure, location and capacity of the drains must be adequate to keep water away from the house.

*4. To any other factors, including aesthetic factors, which the Commission deems to be pertinent.*

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends consideration of alternative solutions to the problem. If a better solution can not be found, approval of HDC02-0217 to replace gutters with French drains may be recommended if the Applicant can demonstrate that the drains will work properly and will prevent water damage to the property.**