

**ADDRESS: 304 S PHILIP ST**

Proposal: Install HVAC ductwork

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: Adam and Stephanie DeBusk

Applicant: Stephanie DeBusk

History: 1810; Restored c. 1965

Individual Designation: 4/30/1957

District Designation: Society Hill Historic District, Significant, 3/10/1999

Staff Contact: Randal Baron, randal.baron@phila.gov, 215-686-7660

**BACKGROUND:**

The application proposes to replace traditional central air conditioning with a ductless system. This will require installing horizontal plastic ducts on a stuccoed side façade of the building, which faces a parking area. The application proposes to hide the ducts with paint and a trained ivy vine. The paint might trap water in the wall and the vine might damage the masonry. The applicant claims that the ducts cannot be run through the house to the back wall. The wall where the ductwork would be installed stands on the property line and the ducts may, in fact, be installed on the neighboring properties at 214 and 218 Spruce Street. If that is the case, then the application requires the authorization of the neighboring property owners.

**SCOPE OF WORK:**

- Install "ductless" HVAC system.
- Paint side wall.
- Install vines on side wall.

**STANDARDS FOR REVIEW:**

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines include:

- *Standard 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old, but will be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.* Neither the proposed ducts nor the paint or vines protect the historic integrity of the property or its environment. An alternative exists by re-installing a conventional central air conditioning system which allows the ducts to be hidden internally.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Denial, pursuant to Standard 9.

June 10, 2019

The Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch St.  
13th Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dr. Adam and Mrs. Stephanie DeBusk  
304 S. Philip Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear members of the Commission:

On behalf of the members of my household, I respectfully request your consideration of the below described alteration to my home located at 304 S. Philip Street, owned jointly by my husband and me. A photo of the existing conditions is attached as Exhibit A. We purchased the home in April of 2018. The title has been properly recorded; however, the city of Philadelphia has not updated its records, which currently list Janet Larson as the owner. Our family cherishes the beauty of our neighborhood, Society Hill. We are sensitive to the history and charm of the area, and we would like to continue to preserve the look and feel of the neighborhood, while modernizing to today's standard creature comforts. We respectfully request the Commission's permission to run two small ducts horizontally along the north wall of our home. A rendering of the proposed conditions is attached as Exhibit B, an alternative rendering is attached as Exhibit C. In Exhibit B, the ducts are the same color as the gray wall. Exhibit C is meant to convey the idea of painting the side wall the same color as the masonry, as suggested in the Society Hill historic property ownership manual. We would also be open to camouflaging the ducts with a trained vine, like the picture in Exhibit D.

After moving in, we quickly realized the two HVAC units with their retrofit ducting were not adequately controlling the temperature inside. Unfortunately, the temperature variations and humidity have caused the floorboards and wood panel walls to expand and contract more than would be typical. The plaster on the walls has also suffered from the unchecked temperatures. The retrofit ducting and existing HVAC system were not salvageable. We chose to purchase a ductless HVAC system, a much more efficient and aesthetically pleasing option for our home. The units hang on the wall and a set of electrical and other mechanical lines run from the unit to the condensers, which sit on our rear roof. Attached is Exhibit B, a photo of the exact units we purchased.

This ductless system is comprised of several components. The condensers, the internal units, a series of wires and tubes that connect the condensers and the units (the "line sets") and line set covers. These components are pictured in Exhibit E. The indoor units are hanging in each room on the north wall of our home, the large gray stucco wall in the photos. The line sets require drilling an approximately 4-inch hole through the exterior stucco wall and will be secured by typical anchoring appropriate for the weight of the line sets. Then, the line sets will be covered with a duct that looks much like rain guttering. The renderings in Exhibits B and C are as close to scale as I could do with the tools at hand.

No solution except the proposed is workable for units on two levels. Running the line sets down the rear (west side) of the home was, of course, the first option we explored, but unfortunately not feasible for these two floors. As you can see, the line sets look identical to rain guttering but will run horizontally. Because the coloring of the ducting will match the wall, the final product should be very

discreet and if covered with a vine could be completely invisible. The north side of our home should look better than it does currently after the installation of the ducting, painting and planting.

I certainly appreciate the Commission's efforts to ensure the neighborhood retains its beauty. We are one of many families benefiting from this hard work. If I can provide any further information, I am happy to do so. Thanks for in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stephanie DeBusk', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Stephanie DeBusk

On behalf of the DeBusk Family  
Adam, Stephanie, Evie and Lily

Exhibit A

304 S. Philip Street Exterior

Current Conditions





Exhibit B

304 S. Philip Street

Proposed Changes



Exhibit C

304 S. Philip Street

Proposed Changes Alternate





Exhibit D

Trained Climbing Ivy

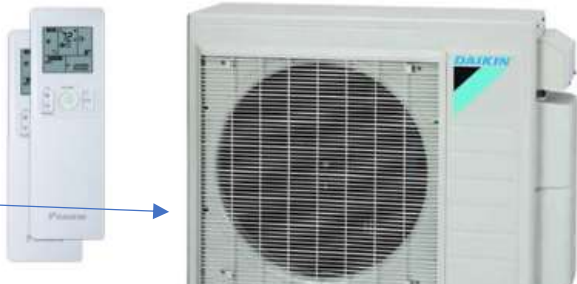


Exhibit E  
Ductless HVAC Unit Photo

Interior Units



Exterior Condenser  
(not visible from the road)



Line set cover

lineset ducting. Simple, rugged protection.



Architectural grade polymer



Line set and  
installation example