

**REPORT OF THE HISTORIC DESIGNATION COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
26 July 2000**

**One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor
David Brownlee, Chair**

Present

David Brownlee, Ph.D., Chair
David Baldinger, City Planning Commission
Janet Klein
Bruce Lavery
Hyman Myers
Stephanie Wolf, Ph.D.

Julianne Dunn, Historic Preservation Planner
Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also Present

Sheryl Jaslow, Powers & Co., Inc.
Deena Parham, City Planning Commission
Robert Powers, Powers & Co., Inc.
Allan Rubin
Miguel Santiago
Barbara M. Wolf

Spring Garden Historic District

Mr. Brownlee called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. and stated that this meeting would serve as the Committee's second public hearing to discuss the designation of the proposed Spring Garden Historic District. He indicated that at the Committee's 11 July 2000 meeting, discussion of the statement of significance and the boundaries took place. At today's meeting, the Committee would review the inventory of the district specifically with respect to the categorization of the district's buildings as significant, contributing or non-contributing. Mr. Brownlee indicated that the Committee itself does not create the district, but rather provides a recommendation to the Commission. Mr. Brownlee stated that the meeting would begin with a discussion of unfinished business from the 11 July 2000 meeting. The Committee would first evaluate the status of the proposed district's northeastern boundary.

Mr. Brownlee introduced Laura Spina of the Historical Commission. Ms. Spina indicated that, along with Richard Tyler and Julianne Dunn, she visited the northeast corner of the district to assess the historic integrity of the buildings located at the border. Ms. Spina presented photographs to the Committee and stated that several vacant lots, a garage and stuccoed buildings formed the northeast corner. In addition, she recognized that four buildings with historic integrity exist on the northern portion of North 15th Street. Ms. Spina stated the concern of the Historical Commission staff that the boundary of the district consists of a strong, historic border. By drawing a straight boundary to include the four properties on North 15th Street, the non-

contributing vacant lots and stucco buildings would also form a part of the district. Ms. Spina expressed the opinion of the Historical Commission staff that the non-contributing buildings at the northeast corner of the district not be included in the district's boundaries. Mr. Tyler reiterated that the boundary should be redrawn to exclude the northeastern portion of non-contributing buildings.

Discussion among Committee members ensued with respect to the northeastern boundary. Mr. Brownlee suggested that the border of the district could be drawn to include the four historic properties while excluding these non-contributing properties. He concluded, however, that gerrymandering the border would present an awkward boundary. Ms. Klein suggested that the corner of the district would be stronger if these properties were removed and the boundary followed rear property lines. Mr. Tyler reiterated the necessity for a high degree of historic integrity at the edges of an historic district. He reminded the Committee of the rationale used at the 11 July 2000 meeting to eliminate the northwestern corner of the district. He stated that this rationale for eliminating properties of weak integrity at the borders should be followed in this case as well.

Mr. Brownlee invited the audience to participate in the Committee's discussion. Barbara M. Wolf, a resident of North 15th Street, spoke on behalf of some of the neighbors living on North 15th Street. Ms. B. Wolf expressed their concern over excluding the four properties with historic integrity at the northern border of the district. She stated that if one of the stucco houses were to be demolished, two vacant lots would be adjacent to one another; if a developer purchased the lots he would not be subject to the Commission review process. Ms. B. Wolf stated that the Commission review process would be beneficial in such instances and emphasized the importance of including the stucco buildings and the vacant lot in the district. In addition, she expressed her desire to include the four houses at the northern end of the district. Ms. B. Wolf agreed that the border of the district could be construed as having weak historical integrity. She concluded, however, that there is potential for the properties to fit into the streetscape of the district in the future. Mr. Brownlee and Mr. Lavery asked for clarification with respect to which houses Ms. B. Wolf would like included within the district. Ms. B. Wolf indicated on the Spring Garden Historic District map that the properties from 670 to 676 North 15th Street should be included.

Allan Rubin, a resident of the 1900 block of Brandywine Street, addressed the Committee with respect to the northeastern boundary of the district. Mr. Rubin gave an example to the Committee of how the lack of a review process can result in unsympathetic development of empty lots. He stated that future development on empty lots should be reviewed by the Commission to ensure the integrity of the neighborhood. Mr. Rubin reiterated that the neighborhood needs to control the use of empty lots or unsympathetic development will occur. He stated that development in the area encompassed by the Spring Garden Historic District is moving eastward quickly. Empty lots are being acquired and the neighborhood cannot be confident that new buildings will be sympathetic to the current streetscape. Mr. Rubin asked that the Committee not be shortsighted in their goals; he asked that, despite the current lack of integrity at the border of the district, the Committee should recognize that the review process could benefit the neighborhood in the future. He stated it would be a lost opportunity not to include the buildings Ms. B. Wolf represented on North 15th Street.

Mr. Brownlee asked the Committee to comment on the presentation of Ms. B. Wolf and Mr. Rubin. Mr. Brownlee stated that having regulatory authority over vacant lots where the Committee believes these lots are essential to preserving the historic character of the neighborhood could be positive. Mr. Myers then proposed a solution to the Committee that

would draw the northeastern boundary of the district to encompass the houses on North 15th Street but exclude the other non-contributing properties. He stated that a boundary that includes the North 15th Street properties in question would show that the Committee made a rational assessment of the area. Ms. S. Wolf and Mr. Lavery agreed with Mr. Myers and commented that his boundary would strengthen the corner of the district. Ms. Klein questioned how the district boundaries appear on the National Register. Mr. Tyler stated that the boundary of the municipal historic district would exceed the boundary of the National Register district, which stops at Melon Street. Ms. S. Wolf stated, in agreement with Mr. Myers, that inclusion of the properties on North 15th Street might encourage the property owners of the stucco houses, as well as owners in the surrounding area, to restore their houses to reflect the historic character of the neighborhood. Mr. Brownlee then questioned whether or not the stucco houses on North 15th Street would, in fact, be contributing buildings. He indicated that the shell of the houses and the fenestration patterns were consistent with the historic character of the proposed district. Ms. Spina noted that the Ordinance limited the Commission's design jurisdiction over new construction on undeveloped parcels in historic districts at the time of designation to forty-five days for review and comment. Ms. Spina also stated that the Section 106 process applies to projects that receive federal funding whether or not they are located within a municipal district. Ms. B. Wolf and Mr. Rubin acknowledged that they were aware of the Commission review process and still believed that the district could serve as a tool to review the use of the vacant land. Ms. Spina also added that the owners of the four properties on North 15th Street had not received notification letters from the Commission with respect to the creation of the district and this could prevent the Commission's voting on the Spring Garden Historic District until its meeting on 11 October 2000. She also stated that the inventory would be expanded to include information on the four properties.

Ms. S. Wolf made a motion to include 670 through 676 North 15th Street in the Spring Garden Historic District making 676 North 15th Street the northeastern-most building in the district and excluding the garage and vacant lots on Melon Street and North Sydenham Street. Ms. Klein seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Mr. Brownlee asked Ms. Spina to address the Committee with respect to the classification of the district's buildings. Ms. Spina first stated that the inventory for the Spring Garden Historic District gives a brief visual description and historical background of each building located within the district. Ms. Spina then presented slides to the Committee and explained the difference between significant, contributing and non-contributing buildings to the audience. The first set of slides illustrated significant buildings located within the district.

Miguel Santiago, the owner of a significant property at 1601 Mt. Vernon Street, expressed his support of the district to the Committee. Mr. Santiago indicated his desire to restore the property and possibly dedicate a small museum on the neighborhood and Robert Purvis, a significant leader in the African-American community who lived at 1601 Mt. Vernon Street.

Ms. Spina presented slides to the Committee of properties with questionable classification. Mr. Brownlee explained to the audience the Committee's method of classifying properties. He said that the Committee considers three aspects of a building's physical condition. They include the scale and massing of a building, its materials, and the rhythm of its facade. If a building conforms to the character of the district by two of these three measures, it should be listed as contributing in the inventory. Mr. Lavery introduced age as a factor. Mr. Brownlee referred to the nomination's statement of significance which establishes a terminal date of 1930. By definition, buildings erected before that date may be presumed significant or contributing and

buildings constructed after that date non-contributing. Ms. Spina presented slides to the Committee of buildings that were constructed before 1930 but were modified after 1930. Mr. Myers suggested applying the two-thirds standard to them.

The Committee continued to review slides of buildings that Ms. Spina considered of questionable categorization. The Committee classified the majority of the buildings as non-contributing.

Discussion among Committee members ensued regarding 2102 Mt. Vernon Street. Mr. Brownlee stated that the height of the building was original and that it had been refaced with brick, an original material. He proposed that the building be deemed contributing on the basis of the two-thirds rule. A majority of the Committee agreed.

The Committee discussed the classification of 1531 Brandywine Street and asked if the building was constructed as a carriage house. Mr. Rubin stated his belief that the property was originally a carriage house. Discussion on the matter was deferred as Mr. Tyler conducted further map research which showed the building as a stable in 1895. Based on this finding, the Committee classified the structure as contributing.

The Committee took up the categorization of 2101 Brandywine Street and discussed its possible original use and appearance. After discussion, the Committee decided to keep the building classified as contributing.

The Committee discussed the building at 2000 Fairmount Avenue and speculated on its date of construction. After some deliberation, Mr. Brownlee suggested that the vote be delayed for one week pending a site visit. Ms. Spina offered to conduct a phone survey of the Committee members during the week of 31 July 2000.

With regard to 2046 Fairmount Avenue, the Committee discussed the three components of the two-thirds rule. Mr. Brownlee stated that the building retained its original massing. He noted the loss of the fenestration, and Mr. Myers added that the facade no longer possessed original materials. Ms. Klein thought that the building did compose an important portion of the streetscape of the block. Mr. Brownlee concluded that the building met one out of three criteria and the Committee determined the building to be non-contributing.

Ms. Spina concluded her slide presentation and stated that she would review the inventory and categorize all buildings constructed after 1930 as non-contributing. She added that she would use the Committee's votes as the standard for determining the categorization of additional buildings.

Robert Powers of Powers & Co., Inc., the firm that prepared the district's nomination, asked the Committee about the classification of 2322-32 Green Street, the St. Francis Xavier Convent built in 1948. The 1895 property atlas showed the original site of the convent to be the St. Francis Xavier School. Despite this original use of the land, the Committee deemed it non-contributing owing to its post-1930 construction date.

Ms. Klein made a motion to approve the inventory of the Spring Garden Historic District to be shaped by the Committee's guidance at the meeting and Mr. Brownlee's final review. Ms. S. Wolf seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Ms. Klein made a motion to recommend the designation of the Spring Garden Historic District by the Commission. Mr. Myers seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

The Committee concluded by discussing other minor points of business. Ms. Spina requested that Committee members submit their comments regarding the possible Penn-Knox District. Mr. Brownlee stated that the statement of significance for FDR Park would be amended to reflect Ms. Spina's further research.

Ms. S. Wolf made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Baldinger seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Julianne L. Dunn