

THE MINUTES OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
OF THE

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

David Hollenberg, Chairman

31 May 1990

Present: David Hollenberg, Architect, Chairman of the Committee
Penelope H. Batcheler, Historical Architect for
Independence National Historical Park
Donald Stevenson, Architect

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

Also: Richard Cole, architect, Society Hill Synagogue
Dr. Daniel Barol, 416 Spruce Street
Joseph Berenholz, owner, South 21st Street properties
Jim Hemmerly, architect, 247 South Van Pelt Street
Fred Denenberg, 425 South Camac Street
Marianna Thomas, architect, College Hall
George Thomas, consultant, College Hall
Joel Spivak, applicant, 301-303 Cherry Street

A Summary of Architectural Committee Recommendations
31 May 1990

Recommendation to Retain Independent Financial Consultant

26-28-30 South 21st Street: The Committee recommended that the Commission retain an independent financial consultant to assess this application for demolition based on claims of financial hardship.

Approval in Concept

247 South Van Pelt Street: The Committee recommended an approval in concept for the proposed roof-top addition as depicted in the preliminary plans and sight-line study submitted. The proposed alterations to the masonry openings, however, will require further documentation.

Approval

Society Hill Synagogue: The Committee recommended approval of a proposal to install an electrical transformer beneath Spruce Street. It also recommended approval of revised plans for the installation of HVAC and ductwork.

College Hall, University of Pennsylvania: The Committee voted the following recommendations:

- approval of the proposed masonry work to the southeast quadrant of the building.
- approval in concept for the proposed alterations to the doors, windows, rear entrances and roof.

Disapproval

301-303 Cherry Street: The Committee recommended disapproval of proposed alterations to the three central bays of this facade.

RECOMMENDATION TO RETAIN INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL CONSULTANT

26-28-30 South 21st Street: Joseph Berenholz, owner. Mr. Berenholz requested approval of a demolition permit application for these three town houses and submitted a report asserting financial hardship. In 1989 he submitted a report to the Committee which examined four possible development proposals. Twice, in letters dated 16 May 1989 and 14 May 1990, the Commission staff wrote to Mr. Berenholz requesting further information to proceed with a review. A report which he submitted on 3 April 1990 provided some of this information. It did not, however, include analysis of the development option which the Committee had recommended as possibly the most viable means of preserving these buildings. The Committee suggested retaining the front forty feet of these buildings in conjunction with new construction in the rear of these properties. Although analysis of this option was requested, the applicant declined, based on his assessment of the present market and the prospect of securing bank financing.

Mr. Tyler suggested that the Committee formally accept the report and request that the Commission retain an independent consultant to analyze the market assumptions of the report and economic viability of the properties. Mr. Hollenberg requested that the applicant clarify his reasons for not examining the option of retaining the fronts of these buildings in conjunction with new construction.

Mr. Berenholz indicated that the real estate market had declined significantly since he acquired these properties in 1986 and 1988. Although he had been interested in developing these buildings for office space, Mr. Berenholz asserted that his plans were not viable in the present market, especially in the Rittenhouse area. He emphasized that it would be particularly difficult to secure financing for such a development. He expressed his vexation with these buildings, which he claimed he could not sell, rent or retain in their present condition. Having lost money on these properties each year, he has taken measures to cut his losses: he has vacated tenants from the buildings, cancelled the property insurance, and shut off all utilities. At present, Mr. Berenholz did not see an alternative to demolition. Later, he hopes to sell the lots, perhaps for the development of a surface parking lot.

Upon the request of the Committee, Mr. Baron offered a description of the surrounding streetscape. To the north of these properties is a parking lot, developed when three adjacent buildings were demolished. To the south is a large apartment building, constructed in the 1960s. However, Mr. Baron stressed that a row of Victorian houses across the street offered an historical context for these buildings.

Inquiry was made into the possibility of upgrading the residential use of these buildings. Mr. Berenholz responded that he had explored that option and dismissed it as too expensive. The Committee also asked if the option of demolition and subsequent development of surface parking would be economically viable. Mr. Berenholz responded that he had not explained this alternative in depth, though estimated that it would allow him to break even.

Mr. Hollenberg indicated that, as in all applications for demolition based on claims of financial hardship, the Committee would recommend that the Commission retain an independent financial consultant to analyze the report and the economic viability of these properties. Specifically, the consultant would be asked to explore the option explicitly unexamined by the applicant, that of retaining the front forty feet of these buildings while allowing development behind them.

In addition, the Committee asked the applicant to prepare a letter to the Commission explaining the objective reasons for not exploring the possibility of new construction at the rear of these properties. He added that this letter also should explain Mr. Berenholz' analysis of the viability of the option of demolition for development of a parking lot.

Ms. Petrillo cautioned the applicant regarding his cancellation of the insurance policies for these properties. She stressed that he would bear the responsibility of any problems arising from this action. Mr. Berenholz acknowledged the validity of these observations.

APPROVAL IN CONCEPT

247 South Van Pelt Street: Jim Hemmerly, architect. Mr. Hemmerly represented Fred Denenberg, who may acquire this property in the proposed Rittenhouse Fittler Historic District. The plans indicate the addition of a third story to an existing two-story brick carriage house and the alteration of masonry openings on the facade. The architect provided a sight-line study which illustrates that the roof-top addition would not be visible from the street.

The Committee recommended an approval in concept for the proposed roof-top addition as depicted on the plans and the sight-line study. A larger addition, which would be visible from the street, would not be acceptable. With regard to the masonry openings, the Committee requested further documentation of the historical appearance of the openings.

APPROVAL

Society Hill Synagogue, 418 Spruce Street: At its meeting of 26 April 1990, the Committee convened at Society Hill Synagogue to examine a concrete pad and wall constructed in preparation for the installation of an electrical transformer for the synagogue. Though an electrical permit was obtained, the application had not been reviewed by the Historical Commission or its Architectural Committee. The Synagogue also cut two holes for HVAC and ductwork in the south wall of the building, without a building permit.

Many neighbors objected to this installation based on its adverse impact on the aesthetics of the adjacent Lawrence Walkway, and the potential hazard posed by this high-voltage transformer to the children of the neighborhood.

The Committee considered this work unacceptable and offered suggestions regarding the placement of the transformer. Subsequent to the April meeting of the Architectural Committee, revised plans were submitted. Consequently, at the 9 May 1990 meeting of the Commission, Mr. Hollenberg requested a deferral of this matter to allow the Committee to review the plans at a public meeting. Following the Commission meeting, Mr. Tyler contacted PECO to discuss this installation.

Richard Cole, architect, represented the Synagogue, though clarified that he was not the architect for the installation. He reminded the Committee that representatives of PECO previously objected to the installation of a transformer underground for reasons of emergency egress and water collection problems. At present, however, PECO indicated that it would install a transformer beneath the sidewalk on Spruce Street. The Committee commended this proposal and requested the adaptation of this approach to other transformer installations near historic buildings. Mr. Cole expressed his appreciation to the Commission and its staff for meeting with PECO.

Mr. Cole next presented revised plans for the installation of HVAC and ductwork. He noted that the holes cut into the historic building would be patched with the bricks that were removed. Part of the split system HVAC would be installed on the roof of the new building, and would not be visible from Lawrence Walk. These units would be connected by three pipes to another portion of the system in the attic above the sanctuary of the synagogue.

The Committee voted to recommend approval of these revised plans for both the installation of the transformer and the installation of HVAC and ductwork.

College Hall, University of Pennsylvania: Marianna Thomas, Marianna Thomas Architects; George Thomas, Clio Group, Inc. Mrs. Thomas explained the scope of the entire project and that of the present application. The University of Pennsylvania has undertaken a comprehensive study of this building and has planned for the restoration and reconstruction of its doors, windows, roof and walls. The present application, however, is only for the southeast quadrant of the building, excluding the mansard roof.

Mr. Thomas provided an overview of the history of College Hall, which has been altered substantially since its construction in 1871. Two towers were removed from the building in the early 20th century, and the original vibrant colors of the building have been muted as original stone has been patched and repaired.

Mrs. Thomas explained the most pressing problems of the building at present. Its walls, constructed of an interior width of rubble schist with an exterior cladding of green serpentine stone, have suffered considerable deterioration. Mrs. Thomas proposes to rebuild the interior walls from the inside of the building and to restore the stone exterior cladding, piece by piece, using several methods which include re-pointing, stone consolidation, stucco patching, and replacement with cast stone units. The green walls will be re-pointed with mortar of a red hue to match the original colors of the building. Mrs. Thomas noted that through the history of the building that it has been maintained through several different methods. As an example, she indicated that when the towers were removed, the walls of that section were stuccoed from top to bottom.

Following this detailed explanation of the scope of work, the Committee indicated that it would be willing to recommend an approval for this application to treat the southeast quadrant of the building. The Committee added that a test patch should be prepared for staff approval. Further, if the proposed treatment for the rest of the building did not differ significantly from the current proposal, the architect would not need to make a complete presentation of subsequent phases.

Mrs. Thomas next explained several other aspects of the plans for restoring College Hall. First, the slate mansard roof would be replaced with blue-tinted slate, and the rest would be roofed with turn-coated steel painted tinnern's red. Second, the doors of the main entrance would be restored to their original appearance with the modification of glazing the space once filled by solid wood panels. Third, she presented plans for the many different types of windows on College Hall. The window frames will be restored and the existing sash replaced with new sash with insulated glass. The muntins of the windows will be widened to carry the double glazing and the window elements will be painted a light brown to approximate, from afar, the original wood

grain finish. Fourth, Mrs. Thomas proposed to remove the existing brick stairs at the rear entrances of the building. A second door will be installed to allow for more efficient egress from the existing stairwell.

The Committee commended the applicants for a thorough presentation and for a comprehensive plan for restoring an extraordinary and difficult building. The Committee indicated that a copy of all record drawings should be submitted to the Commission office for placement on file. These drawings should include a description of the masonry techniques used throughout the project. Subsequent to these comments, the Committee voted an approval in concept for the proposed alterations to the doors, windows, rear entrances, and roof of College Hall.

DISAPPROVAL

301-303 Cherry Street: Joel Spivak, owner. Mr. Spivak proposed alterations to the three central bays on this facade. The present door and casement windows which fill these bays closely approximate the originals. The applicant has proposed replacing them with elongated, single-pane display windows. This alteration would require lowering the cast-iron window lintels and removing the historic basement entry-ways. The applicant's intent is to make the objects in the showroom more visible from the street. Considerable discussion ensued and the Committee carefully examined historic photographs and insurance surveys. The Committee objected to the removal of design features such as the central door, the decorative casement type window and the basement entrances. They also objected to the impact of the proposal on the remaining historic fabric. They suggested the construction of a slightly raised platform inside the building to offer greater visibility for displays. The Committee recommended disapproval of the proposed alterations. The Committee noted that the restoration of several small details such as the Venetian arch transoms and the muntin of an upper window were acceptable.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at
4 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary