

THE REPORT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

David Hollenberg, Chairman

Commission Conference Room

31 October 1991

Present

David Hollenberg, Chairman
Penelope H. Batcheler, Historical Architect,
Independence National Historical Park
William Cornell, J.S. Cornell & Sons, Inc.
Herbert W. Levy, Fellow of the American Institute of Architects
Donald Stevenson, Architect

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

Also

Greg Belanger, architect, proposal for 1424-26 Chestnut Street
Peter Richardson, John Milner Associates
John McGaw, Administrator, City Hall Restoration Program
Department of Public Property
Lorenzo Cruger and Lane B. Fike, Streets Department
Missy Maxwell, Susan Maxman Architects
Hy Myers, Simon M. Langberg, Nan Gutterman and
George C. Skarmeas, Vitetta Group
Vincent Maiello, Kelly/Maiello Architects
R. Williams, Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority

Approval

Jacob Reed Store, 1424-1426 Chestnut Street: Architect George Belanger presented plans to install a banner extending from inside the arch of this 1903-04 former clothing store, designed by Price and McLanahan in the Arts & Crafts style. Barnes & Noble Bookstore, which occupies its first floor, was among those businesses closed for several months in the wake of the tragic fire at One Meridian Plaza. The extended closing of this block resulted in a decline in business. Since the store re-opened a few months ago, business has begun to return. In conjunction with this re-opening, the store has undertaken considerable interior alterations to promote this location as a "super-store." Barnes & Noble adopted a new graphics program throughout the store to call attention to this change. Now, they want to project this image to the street, by installing an 8' x 12' banner which would extend two feet out over the sidewalk.

The staff suggested hanging two smaller banners from flagpoles affixed to balconies which flank the arch. This design seemed more appropriate and less likely to hide the decorative Mercer tile which spans the arch. The staff noted that either proposal requires a zoning variance to permit a projecting sign within the

Center City Special Controls District. Mr. Simcox added that the Art Commission is unlikely to approve a banner intended as a permanent sign. Generally, their approvals of banners have been contingent upon a temporal limitation of 6-12 months. A banner exposed to the exhaust of Chestnut Street for a period longer than that would assume a sooty appearance.

Mr. Belanger stated that the landlord was unlikely to permit the store to hang two banners. Hanging only a single banner from one balcony would be asymmetrical. He added that neither balcony retains a flagpole. For these reasons, he requested approval of the initial design. The Committee indicated that if only one banner were permitted, a central location would be preferred. The Committee also suggested a greater projection for the banner, so that it hangs further out from the arch. The Committee recommended approval of this banner, installed in a central location, provided that the pole is affixed to the brick inside the arch and not to the decorative Mercer tile.

City Hall: In November 1990, the Committee reviewed plans for interior alterations for emergency egress from this National Historic Landmark, built 1871-1901 from plans of John MacArthur. At its next meeting, the Commission adopted the report of its Committee and approved these plans in concept. The Department of Public Property retained John Milner Associates (JMA) of West Chester to devise solutions to several Fire Code violations. In refining its plans, JMA has met with the Fire Department Board of Safety (Board) and the Department of Licenses and Inspections. Mr. Hollenberg, a principal with JMA in Philadelphia, abstained from the ensuing discussion and vote. Mr. Levy assumed the chair for this presentation of the final plans for this project.

Because of the City's expressed intention to prepare a Restoration Plan for City Hall, the architects designed the proposed alterations in a manner which would minimize damage to historic materials and would be reversible. Upon restoration, the Board probably will require compliance with the Code requirements for high-rise buildings, which require sprinkler installation. The primary elements of the JMA plan include:

- rated fire assemblies just beyond the elevators near the corner stair towers;
- smoke barriers near the midpoint of each corridor; and
- rated fire assemblies in corridors near other stairs.

Rated Assemblies at the Corner Stair Towers: The doors at the corner stair towers are not rated for fire protection and fail to comply with the Code. At present, smoke could spread rapidly through the building via the elevator shafts. New two-hour-rated door assemblies on floors two through five will enclose the elevators and corner stairs within

protected areas and impede smoke from diffusing through the elevator shafts or stair towers. Further protection will accrue from pressurization of the shafts and provision of elevator recall to the first floor in event of a fire.

Corridors: Smoke barriers installed near the midpoint of each hallway will contain smoke in its quadrant, rather than allowing it to move swiftly down the long corridors. These unrated barriers will be glazed with double doors. The division of floors two through five into quadrants ensures protected egress from these levels. Floors six and seven will not have barriers; protected egress will follow a path from protected single-story stairs to a corner stair tower.

Rated Assemblies at Other Stairs: Other two-hour rated assemblies will be installed in corridors near the:

- interior stairs linking floors two through seven;
- single-story stairs connecting floors six and seven;
- straight, single-story stairs from seven to eight; and
- entrances to the Tower at floors seven and nine.

Tower: Measures to promote safety in the tower include:

- installation of new fire detection and alarm systems as well as emergency lighting;
- removal of combustible materials;
- installation of fire extinguishers at each Tower level;
- repair to the tower staircase; and
- establishing a limitation on Tower occupancy.

The Committee offered the following remarks:

- Mrs. Batcheler suggested differentiating the trim of the frames of the new door assemblies from nearby ornamentation, while remaining within the same style.
- Mr. Tyler encouraged further exploration of the smoke barrier installation on the fourth floor, near the City Council gates, chambers and caucus room. He suggested placement of the doors behind existing gates, retaining an unobstructed view down this significant corridor.
- Mr. Levy suggested verification that the proposed doors were sufficiently wide to comply with the American Disabilities Act, to ensure wheelchair access.
- Mrs. Batcheler encouraged a clear distinction of the door to use for egress.

The Committee voted to recommend approval of this proposal.

Mr. Hollenberg abstained. Following this vote, Mr. Hollenberg reassumed the chair.

Strawberry Mansion Bridge, Fairmount Park: In March 1991, the Commission approved conceptual plans, submitted by the Streets Department and Susan Maxman Architects, for alterations to this bridge built 1894-96. The Department retained consultants in the fields of bridge construction and historic preservation to assist them in achieving a sympathetic design for this improvement while addressing legitimate safety concerns. Through 1946, the Bridge conveyed trolleys of the Fairmount Park Transportation Company over the Schuylkill. Since then, the trolley right-of-way on the south side of the structure has remained vacant, though the rest of the bridge has remained in use for automobiles. Because of significant deterioration to the Bridge, the Department proposes to replace, in kind, the deteriorated floor beams and stringers and to resurface the asphalt cartway. They also propose to establish a public promenade in the vacated trolley right-of-way. Here, pedestrians may look out over the Schuylkill and across the Park. While an exciting prospect, there is significant concern for the potential hazard of persons dropping objects off the bridge onto rowers and expensive sculls.

In general, the Committee encouraged designing the new elements in a manner consistent with the aesthetics of the bridge. The Commission adopted the recommendation of its Committee and voted an approval in concept at that time. This project requires approval by the Art Commission, the Fairmount Park Commission and -- if funded by Federal or state monies -- the respective historic preservation agency.

Significant changes to the proposal include:

- reconstruction of short segments of the trolley line at both ends of the promenade, which will narrow toward its end; enhanced by descriptive graphics, these tracks will facilitate an understanding of the history of the bridge;
- establishment of several viewing wells on the north side of the promenade to show the structure of the bridge;
- installation of benches for pedestrian convenience;
- reconstruction of several decorative catenary poles, to recall the historic trolley line and provide a sense of enclosure;
- modified lighting similar to the historic fixtures;
- deletion of the proposed safety fence; instead, a new two foot extension on top of the historic railing will offer some protection for scullers from objects dropped from above.

The Committee commended the applicants for their work and voted to forward an enthusiastic recommendation to approve these plans.

Arch Street Presbyterian Church, 1726-1732 Arch Street:

Architect Hy Myers of the Vitetta Group presented two different proposals for installation of a fence and gates around this church, built 1853-55 in the Italianate style. Given problems with vagrants, the congregation wants to establish a barrier to diminish this nuisance and to protect the building. The proposed gate would match an early twentieth century fence, part of which remains on the east side of the building.

The Committee preferred the design which placed the gates flush with the fence at the bottom of the stairs. This alternative provided a better barrier than that which placed the gate amid the columns. Mrs. Batcheler discouraged the proposed "squiggle top" detail of the fence even though it matches the existing fence segment; she suggested a simpler treatment. The Committee recommended approval of the fence, with a simplified profile, and gate at the base of the stairs.

Reading Railroad Terminal, 1115-1141 Market Street: The Vitetta Group submitted seven volumes of 320 sheets of completed drawings for the adaptive reuse of this National Historic Landmark, built 1891-93, for the Pennsylvania Convention Center. The Commission previously reviewed proposals to alter the trainshed and market in December 1988, November 1989 and May 1991. None of these submissions included the Headhouse, which is still owned by the Reading Company; the Convention Center Authority only has an easement through that building. Through this design review process, the Historical Commission and its Architectural Committee have made specific design recommendations while allowing the project to proceed through general approvals in concept. A summary of the specific meetings follows:

In December 1988, the Commission voted an approval in concept for this proposal, including:

- rehabilitation of the trainshed exterior and structural stabilization of deteriorated building fabric.
- introduction of a ballroom and meeting rooms within the north end of the trainshed;
- provision of access to the exhibition hall;
- creation of a visual link between headhouse and trainshed;
- reconstruction of a central skylight and clerestories to obtain maximum natural lighting; and
- the introduction of four fire stairs and service area within the market area north of Filbert Street.

In November 1989, the Commission approved in concept plans by Kelly/Maiello Architects for proposed alterations to the Reading Terminal Market.

In April 1991, the Architectural Committee reviewed plans for the trainshed submitted by the Vitetta Group and Thompson Ventulett Stainback. After review of numerous historic photographs and a model of the Convention Center, the Committee commended the architects for integrating the trainshed more fully into the Center design; more specifically:

- The Committee commended the architects for simplifying and reducing the ballroom facade, making it appear less like a building itself and more like an element within a larger space.
- The Committee encouraged the architects to design the pylons at the fore of this structure to reflect their function as elevators. Further development of these features may add more to the space than the proposed sculpture. The Committee also suggested deleting fountains shown in the renderings.
- The Committee conveyed its general satisfaction with the reduced profile of the "false ceiling" which will provide tracks for sound and lighting equipment for the ballroom. Diminishing its size and number of elements affords a better view of the span of the shed.
- The Committee recommended retention of the existing openings within the link building and discouraged the creation of any new openings.
- On the north elevation, where the trains once entered the shed, the architects proposed to copy the historic southern wall. The Committee recommended approval of the historic glass wall treatment but asked for a treatment of the former track level historic train level with black panels to create the sense of a void.
- The Committee recommended approval in concept to alter the skylight to make it a uniform width.
- The Committee strongly recommended disapproval of the proposal to remove the upper light monitor. The applicants maintain that preserving this structure will increase construction and maintenance costs with little gain. The monitor will not ventilate the space, as air will be stratified at the ballroom level. The Committee strongly recommended disapproval of this element because of the impact it would have on the profile of the shed.
- The Committee recommended opening the clerestories to provide some natural light at that level.
- The Committee recommended approval of the goose-neck ducts and smaller air handling units for the market to be hidden behind a small parapet.
- The Committee left most color selection to the discretion of the architects. The interior roof trusses need not replicate the original black. The Committee discouraged a proposal for interpretive striping on the rubber surface of the roof.
- The Committee also acknowledged the value of recording the

building in photographs and drawings prior to construction.

The Commission adopted the report of its Committee and voted for an approval in concept, incorporating the preceding design recommendations.

In August 1991, the Committee reviewed a proposal by the Vitetta Group to restore the exterior of the shed and its base, to include:

- restoration of the yellow brick and cast-iron components, as well as the coping and existing ornament;
- repair or replacement in kind of the wooden sash and frames which will be painted dark and light brown respectively.
- replacement of missing finials in fiberglass with a faux copper finish, if money is available in the budget.
- construction of a north wall for the shed. This wall will appear similar to the south wall, though will use dark panels to create a sense of opening where the trains once entered. Though proposing copper, the alternate is aluminum with a "weathered-copper" finish.

The Committee recommended approval of these proposals for the exterior colors and treatments.

On the interior of the shed, the Authority proposed:

- replacement of nearly one-third of the wood planking which has rotted with new, stained pine planks.
- painting the truss a lighter color than the wood planking. Through most of its history, the interior appeared primarily black, from soot. However, the architects presented a photograph which showed the truss possessing a lighter value than the planking. Mr. Ventulett prefers this value differentiation. It would not show dirt because it is beyond the mainstream of the hall's activity; further, the semi-gloss paint would clean easily.

Following considerable discussion, the Committee agreed that it preferred a dark color for the truss. Members stressed the value of using black on these vast structural spans. The Committee deferred a recommendation on this treatment and suggested the preparation of samples of the two alternatives, using black or a dark color on one truss and the proposed lighter color on another.

At its meeting of 31 October 1991, the Committee reviewed completed drawings for the Convention Center.

At the outset of this presentation, Hy Myers of the Vitetta Group broached a perceived misunderstanding between the applicants and

the Committee. Specifically, he understood the design recommendations accompanying the previous approvals more as suggestions than as requirements. For this reason, the Convention Center Authority listed restoration of the upper light monitor as one of twelve alternates to the base bid package. To allow this significant project to proceed, Mr. Myers requested approval of the current submission with the condition that a committee of the Art and Historical Commissions review the entire package of alternates after bids are received.

Mr. Hollenberg objected to this suggestion, stressing that the Committee and Commission both had been clear in their position regarding the retention of the upper light monitor. He reinforced this point by reading a section of the minutes of the 351st Stated Meeting of the Commission:

[The Committee's] primary reservation regarded the proposed removal of the top, gabled light monitor, sometimes called the "doghouse."....[It] is a signature element of the trainshed's profile. The Committee strongly recommended its disapproval....

At the meeting of the Historical Commission...[project architect Thomas] Ventulett indicated his concurrence with the Committee regarding the top light monitor. However, he noted that preserving this structure...will increase construction costs an estimated \$230,000. It will also add to long-term maintenance costs....[The Commission] noted that [it] had been flexible in its review and that this feature was highly visible and worth preserving. [It also] stressed the value of this...monitor to the "fifth facade," the roof, especially for those people who most often view the Terminal from offices in taller buildings. The Commission agreed with its Architectural Committee and strongly urged the retention of this structure.

Mr. Hollenberg reiterated that the Committee did not use harsh words of disapproval regarding the proposed removal of this monitor because of the project architect's acknowledgement of the importance of this feature and the general tone of conceptual review. Even so, the preceding language is clear.

Mr. Myers suggested an approval with the condition that the restoration of the monitor become the first alternate selected. He expressed concern that disapproval of this one point could impair the project.

Mr. Cornell suggested that discussion had ventured away from the role of the Architectural Committee, which should advise the Commission on matters of architecture and preservation, not budgetary issues. The message of previous meetings had been clear and he could not understand why the monitor was not

included in the base bid package. Mr. Cornell made a motion to recommend retention of the upper monitor.

Charles Boshen, Cost Control Manager of the Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority, underscored that this entire project was on a tight budget and that even the ballroom was sent out for bids as an alternate.

Mr. Levy responded that most government projects are on fixed budgets and that he was astounded that the ballroom was an alternate. He also noted that if the monitor were not preserved now, it was unlikely that it would be added later. The ballroom stands a better chance of being completed in the future.

Mr. Baron pointed out that the Committee had been extremely flexible by previously allowing partial removal of the monitor at the northern end of the train shed as a compromise. Mr. Hollenberg stressed that the Committee had been very flexible and that this issue may have been the only one where it has stood firm. He then made a motion to recommend disapproval of the request to remove the upper light monitor, unless its removal is part of a project to restore it. Mr. Cornell seconded this recommendation, which received unanimous approval of the Committee.

Mr. Baron then led a discussion and review of specific elements of the 100% completed, final plans. The Committee recommended approval of the rest of this proposal.

Nan Gutterman of the Vitetta Group requested one additional change to previously reviewed drawings. Specifically, she asked for approval for the temporary installation of a vent in the existing restored storefront on the Market Street facade. This vent is necessary for air conditioning the hallway through the easement in the Headhouse. Mr. Hollenberg, whose firm designed the existing entrance several years ago, abstained from this part of the discussion and vote. The Committee voted unanimously, with Mr. Hollenberg abstaining, to recommend approval of this vent.

Disapproval

758 South Front Street: The staff examined the condition of this building. The applicant proposes to reconstruct, in kind, a wall which is nine inches out of plumb. Mr. Baron produced an engineering report which states that the wall is dangerous and in need of reconstruction.

The Committee expressed concern that the openings shown on the drawing differed from those evident in photographs. It recommended approval of the proposed demolition of the apparently unstable wall. However, it recommended disapproval of the

proposed reconstruction until submittal of photographs and drawings which document the wall and demonstrate that an accurate reproduction of the existing wall will be built.

Having completed its agenda, the Committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary