

THE MINUTES OF THE 332ND STATED MEETING
OF THE

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

12 July 1989

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman

Present: Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman
David Brownlee
David Hollenberg
William Thompson
Commissioner Benjamin Ellis, Department of Public Property
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director, Philadelphia City
Planning Commission
John Street, Esq., Philadelphia City Council
Scott Wilds, Office of Housing and Community Development
David Wisner, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Licenses
and Inspections

Maria Petrillo, Esq., Chief Assistant City Solicitor
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Assistant Historic Preservation
Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner

Also: Gerald Spoolstra, A.W. Lookup Corporation
Michael Chicalo, A.W. Lookup Corporation
Hans Stein, Hans P. Stein Architects
Curt Biehn, Hans P. Stein Architects
Neil Stein, Lesser & Kaplin, P.C.
Mel Gershon, Gershon/Leeds
Peter Rothberg, Gershon/Leeds
Thomas J. Leidigh, Keast & Hood Company
Roger Prichard, Old City Civic Association
William Blades, Philadelphia Historic Preservation
Corporation
R. Wayne Tomlinson, Department of Public Property
Paul Vaivoda, Curtis Cox Kennerly Architects
Charles B. Landreth, Owner of 723 Rodman Street
Lucinda S. Mezey, Owner of 723 Rodman Street
Gary Sachau, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Jeff Glass, Boyd's Men's Store
Herbert Bass, Fox Rothschild O'Brien & Frankel

Robin Rosenberg, Fox Rothschild O'Brien & Frankel
Donna Bergonzi, Old City Civic Association
Astrid Caruso, Old City Civic Association
Theodore T. Newbold, Old City Civic Association
Tupper Barrett, Old City Civic Association
William Kingsley, Old City Civic Association
David Villela, Department of Public Property
Leonore Millhullen, Preservation Coalition
Penny Hunt, Preservation Coalition
Ursula Reed, Old City Civic Association
Douglas Frankel and others.

THE MINUTES of the 331st Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 19 June 1989, Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman, were reviewed and approved.

OLD BUSINESS

Boyd's Men's Store, 1818-1820 Chestnut Street. At the request of the applicant, the Chairman changed the order of the agenda and moved to Old Business. Mr. Hollenberg reviewed for the Commission members, the recent history regarding Boyd's application for a substantial rehabilitation of the former Oliver Bair Funeral Home at 1818-1820 Chestnut Street. This application included the introduction of banners, window awnings and an entrance canopy on the Chestnut Street elevation. At its meeting of 10 May 1989, the Historical Commission voted to approve, in concept, the placement of windows awnings, an entrance canopy and banners on the front facade of Boyd's new store. The Commission further directed the applicant to work with the Architectural Committee to resolve all architectural and aesthetic differences. In particular, the Commission and Committee expressed concern that the installation of the awnings, banners and canopy not destroy any original building fabric on this finely detailed facade.

Subsequent to the 10 May meeting, the applicant met with the Architectural Committee to review the design and construction details for the proposed canvas awnings and entrance canopy. The applicant informed the Committee that the proposed hanging of banners on the facade has been abandoned. Mr. Hollenberg advised the Commission that the Committee and the applicant continue to disagree on the aesthetics of this proposal. However, in the spirit of cooperation with which the Commission asked the Committee to act, Mr. Hollenberg recommended to the Commission a reluctant approval of the entrance canopy and window awnings. Mr. Hollenberg pointed out to the Commission members that the architect designed the entrance canopy as a free-standing feature which will not touch the facade and, therefore, will not damage any original building fabric.

The Committee members continue to believe, however, that a square-headed canopy would be more appropriate than an arched one but agreed to recommend an approval since the canopy is not a permanent feature and is not attached to the building facade.

Mr. Hollenberg's motion for an approval of the proposed entrance canopy and awnings for the Boyd's Men's Store was seconded and carried.

THE REPORT of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission for 29 June 1989, David Hollenberg, Chairman.

A final approval was recommended by the Committee for four projects. These included the rehabilitation of 104 Market Street, alterations to 712 N. Franklin Street, and window replacement at Kearsley Hospital, 49th and Monument Avenue. Mr. Hollenberg reported that subsequent to the Committee meeting, the staff received revised drawings for the proposed rehabilitation of 14 North Front Street and that a final approval, rather than an approval in concept, was now being recommended for this project. The Commission voted to accept the recommendation of its Architectural Committee and grant a final approval on these four applications.

Mr. Hollenberg next reported to the Commission on his Committee's review of a preliminary design for the proposed construction of an observation deck atop City Hall Tower. The Committee members found the proposed design of the new deck to address the concerns raised at an earlier meeting and voted to recommend its approval in concept. Owing to the importance of this project and its high visibility, Mr. Hollenberg asked that representatives of the Department of Public Property and the architectural firm of Curtis Cox Kennerly attend the Commission meeting to make a brief presentation to the Commission and to answer any questions that might arise.

David Villela of the City's Department of Public Property, Division of Architecture and Engineering, introduced his staff and members of the design team to the Commission.

Paul Vaivoda of the firm of Curtis Cox Kennerly described in detail the design of the proposed observation deck. The deck will be constructed of glass, steel and a perforated metal screening. The design of the structure focuses upon the eight points corresponding to the major axes of Broad and Market Streets and the real or implied axes of the four major squares of the city. Oculus windows emphasize these eight points and correspond to the existing oculi windows which occur on the tower below the proposed deck.

Mr. Hollenberg reviewed with the Commission the specific concerns raised by the Architectural Committee at its earlier meeting and how the present design meets those concerns. The first concern involved the manner in which the roof of the enclosure touched the tower. The

present proposal uses a reverse curve which returns back into the building and has less of an impact upon the silhouette of the structure than did previous designs. The second concern involved the problem of reflectivity. This issue was addressed through the use of extensive faceting of the ring shape. This approach limits the amount of horizontal glazing from which light can reflect thereby reducing the structure's visual impact upon the tower. Reflectivity in this design is limited to one vertical bay. The final concern of the Committee involved the question of reflectivity as it relates to the nature of the material that will form the screening below the railing and within alternating portions of the roof. As proposed, a simple steel mesh will be used and coated in a matt finish color.

Mr. Hollenberg congratulated the architects and client on the development of a successful solution to a difficult design problem. A motion to approve, in concept, the design of the proposed observation deck for City Hall tower was made, seconded and carried.

Mr. Hollenberg next presented to the Commission his Committee's recommendation for denial of an application for the proposed construction of a roof deck atop the building at 723 Rodman Street. The Committee found this particular roof deck proposal objectionable because of its proposed location atop a Mansard roof, the building's corner location, its being part of an ensemble of similar buildings and its high degree of visibility from 8th Street. The Committee recognized the applicant's limited access to outdoor space and discussed with the applicant possible alternative roof deck treatments.

The applicants, Charles Landreth and Lucinda Mezey, appeared before the Commission to appeal the Committee's recommendation that their application for a roof deck be denied.

The Commission members discussed with Mr. Landreth the possibility of sinking the proposed roof deck into the Mansard. Mr. Landreth explained that the deck could be sunk approximately two feet but that an additional four feet of railing would still rise above the present roofline. In addition, the sinking of the deck would cost substantially more than the proposed treatment. Mr. Landreth expressed his willingness to consider the use of plexiglass or glass walls around the deck to reduce the structure's visibility from the street.

Mr. Hollenberg further noted that access to the roof deck would occur on the rear facade (north side) of the building. This method of access would require the enlargement of an existing window opening and the hanging of a stairway from that opening to the roof.

Mr. Hollenberg recommended that the applicant engage an architect to study the design problem, develop solutions to it and to resubmit to

the Architectural Committee. Mr. Hollenberg further suggested that an economically feasible and architecturally compatible design solution may not exist in this particular case given the corner location of this building and its high level of visibility.

The applicants expressed serious concern regarding the risk involved in hiring an architect to develop various roof deck designs none of which may prove acceptable.

Following considerable discussion, the Chairman called for a vote on the motion to deny the application currently before the Commission. This motion was carried by a vote of seven to one. Councilman Street cast the one dissenting vote.

The Commission next addressed the issue of whether or not a design solution to this problem existed. Councilman Street noted that interference with the silhouette of the building constituted a basis for denial of the present application. He further pointed out that any roof deck structure will interfere with the silhouette of the building and that the Commission should not give the applicant false hope for an approval if, indeed, a change in the silhouette of the building will be grounds for denial of any application.

The Commission members discussed at length the issue of whether to permit the addition of any type of deck atop a Mansard roof. It was agreed that the Commission should reach a decision on whether or not to allow a deck in this instance. Following some further discussion, a motion to approve, in concept, the construction of a roof deck atop 723 Addison Street was made, seconded and carried. The applicant was advised to engage the services of an architect to develop a deck design which does not adversely impact to any great degree the historical and architectural nature of the building.

The final application reviewed by the Architectural Committee involved the proposed demolition of the buildings located at 24, 26 and 28 South Front Street. Mr. Hollenberg reviewed with the Commission the Committee's consideration of this application. He noted that the Architectural Committee took into consideration the owners' record of attempts to develop and rehabilitate the existing buildings, the deteriorated structural condition of the buildings and their threat to public safety, and the owners' willingness to preserve and/or reconstruct the facades.

After a full consideration of these issues and others, the Committee voted to recommend to the Commission the preservation of as much building fabric as possible to include the Letitia Street facades and a substantial portion of the Front Street facades as well as the reconstruction of original streetscape design. The extent of preservation, according to Mr. Hollenberg, would be determined

following further study of the condition of the three structures. This motion, offered by Mr. Hollenberg, was seconded and the floor opened for discussion.

The Commission members discussed the structural condition of the buildings and considered whether this matter might be viewed as a case of demolition by neglect. Mr. Wismer reported on his department's recent evaluation of the buildings from the exterior. He noted that although the buildings might be categorized as dangerous, they appeared not to be in imminent danger of collapse at this time.

Neil Stein, attorney for the applicant, reiterated his client's attempt to preserve and rehabilitate the existing buildings as evidenced by the substantial development of three proposals over the past several years. These projects failed to materialize for various reasons including changes in market conditions, inability to obtain sufficient financing, community opposition, etc. During this planning process and in response to the receipt of a violation from the Department of Licenses and Inspections, Mr. Stein's client engaged a structural engineer to examine the buildings and provide advice regarding their structural integrity. Based on the engineer's report and recommendation, a demolition permit application was submitted for the Historical Commission's consideration.

Thomas Leidigh of the firm of Keast and Hood testified to the structurally deteriorated condition of the three buildings. Mr. Leidigh described in detail the various problems associated with each of the buildings including numerous unbraced walls, joists out of their pockets, masonry cracks, etc.

In response to Councilman Street's question regarding future plans for the site, Hans P. Stein, architect for this project, explained his clients' intention to develop a hotel and to reconstruct the facades of the historic buildings to their original appearance. Councilman Street suggested that since the applicant and the Commission appeared to want substantially the same result, the Chairman should establish a committee to work out the details of an agreement which would be binding on the present owners and on future purchasers of the property. Barbara Kaplan agreed with the Councilman's suggestion and recommended that the committee consist of members of the Architectural Committee, a Commission member and a member of the Old City community.

Roger Prichard, representing the Old City Civic Association, supported the Councilman's idea and pledged his group's full cooperation. He further agreed with Mr. Stein's suggestion that perhaps a facade easement could be donated to the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation in an effort to assure all future owners' compliance with the agreement. William Blades, Executive Director of the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation, expressed his opinion that PHPC could develop some type of easement arrangement for these reconstructed buildings.

The applicant agreed to work with the Commission in reaching an agreement provided demolition work could begin immediately on those portions of the buildings, especially 28 South Front Street, where the danger to public safety appears imminent.

The Commission agreed to delegate to its ad hoc committee the power to determine what portion or portions of the buildings could be demolished immediately. The Commission advised the applicant to contact the Department of Streets immediately for permission to barricade the sidewalks to protect the public from any dangerous condition that currently exists.

Following some additional discussion, the Chairman asked David Brownlee, Bill Blades and Roger Prichard to sit on the committee to work out the details of an agreement regarding the properties at 24, 26 and 28 S. Front Street.

The original motion presented by Mr. Hollenberg was tabled and a new motion for the Commission to enter into an agreement with the applicant regarding the preservation and/or reconstruction of these buildings was made. This motion was seconded and carried.

THE REPORT of the Philadelphia Historical Commission's Committee on Historic Designation, 17 April 1989, David Brownlee, Chairman. Dr. Brownlee presented to the Commission his Committee's recommendation for the designation of Engine House # 29 as an historic building. Engine House #29, built in 1894 probably from the designs of John Windrim, stands at 1221-1225 North Fourth Street. Architecturally, the building is a very unusual example of the Richardsonian Romanesque Revival in Philadelphia. Historically, this building, constructed in the 1890's, represented the City of Philadelphia's first great capital commitment to the fire department system established in the 1870's.

A motion to designate Engine # 29 as an historic building was made, seconded and carried.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Siemiontkowski
Assistant Historic Preservation Officer