

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION
OF THE PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**WEDNESDAY, 26 JUNE 2024
REMOTE MEETING ON ZOOM
EMILY COOPERMAN, CHAIR**

CALL TO ORDER

START TIME IN AUDIO RECORDING: 00:00:00

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. The following Committee members joined her:

Committee Member	Present	Absent	Comment
Emily Cooperman, Ph.D., Chair	X		
Suzanna Barucco	X		
Jeff Cohen, Ph.D.	X		
Bruce Lavery	X		
Debbie Miller	X		
Elizabeth Milroy, Ph.D.	X		

The meeting was held remotely via Zoom video and audio-conferencing software.

The following staff members were present:

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director
Kim Chantry, Historic Preservation Planner III
Heather Hendrickson, Historic Preservation Planner II
Izzy Korostoff, Community Initiative Specialist
Ted Maust, Historic Preservation Planner II
Allyson Mehley, Historic Preservation Planner III
Leonard Reuter, Esq., Law Department
Alex Till, Historic Preservation Planner II

The following persons attended the online meeting:

Allison Weiss, SoLo Germantown
Abbey Lewis
Amy Lambert, University City Historical Society
Andrew Goodman, City Councilmember Gauthier's Office
Christopher Mejia-Smith
David G. Orphanides, Esq., Orphanides & Toner LLP
David Traub, Save Our Sites
Eric Santoro
Frank Chance
George Poulin
Gregory Fisher
Hal Schirmer, Esq.
Hanna Stark, Preservation Alliance
Jamie Vann
Janine Sanzari, Spruce Hill Community Association

Jason Diamond
Job Itzkowitz
Julia Hayman
Julie Bush
Kathy Dowdell
Kevin Block
Lauren Leatherbarrow
Marta Bartholomew
Mary Goldman
Mary McGettigan
Michael Mattioni, Esq., Mattioni Ltd.
Michael Phillips, Esq., Klehr Harrison
Michael Ramos
Patrick Bayer
Paul Steinke, Preservation Alliance
Sharon Fleming
Stanley Uhr
Taylor Kessinger
Tony West
Trevian Ambrose
Will Cameron
Will Tung

AGENDA

SPRUCE HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT, SOUTHEAST QUADRANT

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Multiple

Nominator: Spruce Hill Community Association

Staff Contact: Kim Chantry, kim.chantry@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes designating the Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The proposed district includes 572 properties in West Philadelphia that are primarily residential and commercial buildings. This district is the first of four anticipated in Spruce Hill, encompassing an area that will eventually include approximately 2,000 properties. For administrative purposes, the area was divided east to west at 43rd Street, and north to south at Spruce Street, into four quadrants and each of the four quadrants is being nominated separately and sequentially, owing to the complexities of nominating large numbers of properties simultaneously. It is anticipated that nominations for the other three quadrants will follow as the inventories are completed. The boundaries of the district currently proposed are generally 43rd Street to the west; Spruce Street to the north; 39th Street to the east; and Baltimore and Woodland Avenues to the south.

The nomination states that the proposed district satisfies Criteria for Designation A, C, D, E, and J. Under Criterion A, the nomination argues that Spruce Hill has significant character, interest, and value as part of the development of West Philadelphia where public transportation drove speculative development of a high caliber that still retains its architectural integrity. Under Criteria C and D, the nomination states that Spruce Hill reflects the environment in an era characterized by distinctive architectural styles and that the buildings embody distinguishing characteristics of mid to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architectural styles,

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION, 26 JUNE 2024

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION, PRESERVATION@PHILA.GOV

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including Italianate, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Neo-Grec, Second Empire, and Georgian Revival. Under Criterion E, the nomination outlines the significant architects commissioned to design buildings in Spruce Hill, including Samuel Sloan, Theophilus P. Chandler, G.W. and W.D. Hewitt, and Willis G. Hale. Lastly, under Criterion J, the nomination argues that Spruce Hill exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community, as an exemplary representation of West Philadelphia's development as a streetcar suburb.

At its 17 April 2024 meeting, the Committee on Historic Designation began its review of the proposed Spruce Hill historic district, southeast quadrant. It heard comments from property owners for approximately 40 minutes, but then concluded the meeting after losing quorum at that time. The Historical Commission directed the matter back to the Committee on Historic Designation at this newly added meeting on 26 June 2024. Everyone, including property owners not yet heard from and the public will have an opportunity to participate in today's review.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates the proposed Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant satisfies Criteria for Designation A, C, D, E, and J.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 00:08:15

RECUSAL:

- Ms. Barucco recused from the review of the nomination, owing to her involvement in preparing the nomination.

PRESENTERS:

- Ms. Chantry presented the nomination to the Committee on Historic Designation.
- Attorney David Orphanides, preservation consultant Sharon Fleming, and Janine Sanzari of the Spruce Hill Community Association represented the nomination.
- Numerous property owners participated in the discussion.

DISCUSSION:

- Mr. Orphanides introduced the nomination. He stated that the nomination is for a very specific and limited district, and is not a nomination for a part of a district. He stated that it is a district in and of itself that is complete and for which Commission staff properly notified property owners.
- Ms. Fleming stated that this particular part of Spruce Hill contains some of the earliest historic resources. She noted that only six percent of the properties are classified as non-contributing, making for a very high integrity district. She commented that the area is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places. She noted that there are several smaller districts within this proposed district which are already listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.
- Ms. Sanzari spoke in support of the efforts of the Spruce Hill Community Association as the nominator of the district.
- Numerous property owners participated in the discussion.
 - o Jamie Vann, owner of 4222 Osage Avenue, spoke in support of the designation.
 - o Mary Goldman, owner of 4107 Pine Street, spoke in support of the designation. She stated that four generations of her family have lived at this property.
 - o Eric Santoro, owner of 4535 Pine Street and former president of Spruce Hill Community Association, spoke in support of the designation. He stated that

Philadelphia is a World Heritage City and that Spruce Hill has a remarkable collection of intact Victorian houses that should be preserved.

- o Christopher Mejia-Smith, an owner on the 4900 block of Pine Street, spoke in opposition to the designation. He stated that he purchased his property nine years ago and is concerned about restrictive zoning and preventing new residents from becoming neighbors in Spruce Hill.
- o Attorney Michael Phillips, representing Campus Apartments, University City Housing, and other undisclosed property owners, commented in opposition to the nomination based on procedural grounds. He stated that the nomination as submitted is not complete. It does not include a complete inventory for all four quadrants of the historic district. The partial nomination for a single quadrant of a historic district cannot stand on its own merits as a distinct historic district. He stated that there is no precedent or authority for the Historical Commission to consider or designate a partial historic district. He stated that the nomination should be returned to the Historical Commission's staff because it is incomplete. He stated that he could not opine on the merits of the nomination because it is a partial inventory of what is intended to be a Spruce Hill Historic District with 2,000 properties in Spruce Hill. The district is being approached in a piecemeal fashion. He referred to pages in the nomination which reference other areas of Spruce Hill, not just the Southeast Quadrant. He stated that this is dooming the effort, based on a rush. He stated that the nomination needs to be returned to the Historical Commission's staff to await a complete inventory which will cover all of Spruce Hill.
 - Mr. Farnham countered this argument. He stated that every district nomination speaks to the history that extends beyond the boundaries of the district. He used the Ridge Avenue Roxborough Thematic Historic District as an example, which speaks about the history of Manayunk as part of the statement of significance. He assured everyone that all property owners will have an opportunity to participate in the process. Mr. Farnham clarified that this is a complete standalone historic district. He acknowledged that it is anticipated that there will be three additional historic districts considered at later dates, and each will be its own historic district in and of itself. He stated that these districts have a shared history, but are standalone districts, not pieces of one larger historic district.
- o Marta Bartholomew, an owner in the proposed district, spoke in support of the designation.
- Mr. Orphanides responded to arguments about incompleteness. He clarified that earlier comments about this area being on the National Register were not meant to imply that this district must be listed on the Philadelphia Register. He stated that the submission is proper and constitutes a complete historic district.
- Mr. Phillips stated that language and words matter, and there is no focus on the Southeast Quadrant in the explanation of what constitutes the district.
 - o Mr. Farnham reminded everyone that the nomination is a proposal submitted by a community organization. He agreed that words do matter, and that the Historical Commission can assess the words proposed in the nomination and potentially revise them. He stated that the nomination document is not cast in stone at this point in the process. He stated that the Historical Commission can accept or reject the nomination; or it can revise it. He commented that it might be prudent for the Historical Commission to consider the words that Mr. Phillips has noted and perhaps revise them so there is no ambiguity.

- Ms. Cooperman asked about the process and procedure for returning a nomination to a nominator.
 - o Mr. Farnham explained that, if the nomination is returned to the nominator, the Historical Commission would give up its jurisdiction to review all building permit applications for the implicated properties that it currently enjoys. He stated that the jurisdiction would lapse until such time that a new nomination is submitted, and new notice is provided to property owners impacted by the new nomination.
- Ms. Cooperman noted that a nomination does not necessarily bind the Historical Commission in terms of designation, and that the Commission can make its own assessment. She asked about the potential for the Historical Commission to continue the matter until such time as an inventory for all of the Spruce Hill neighborhood is prepared by the nominator.
 - o Mr. Farnham responded that the Historical Commission could continue the review, but it then runs the risk of building permit applications being deemed approved because it has not completed its review of the nomination within the 90 days allocated for permit review for properties with pending designations.
- Mr. Phillips questioned how one determines the appropriateness of the boundaries of the proposed Southeast Quadrant versus the entirety of the Spruce Hill neighborhood.
 - o Ms. Cooperman noted that there are no hard and fast legal boundaries to any neighborhood, and that Spruce Hill is a neighborhood name.
 - o Mr. Lavery observed that the boundary provided is what is being considered at this time. He acknowledged that it can be part of a larger neighborhood, but the boundary as outlined in the nomination is what is before the Committee to consider, and to determine if the nomination successfully argues for significance based on Criteria for Designation for this specific area.
 - o Mr. Cohen agreed.
- Mr. Cohen asked that nominators clearly note when they are attributing buildings to architects in the future, observing that sources were not provided in every case in the current nomination. He recommended that the nominator review Joseph Minardi's book *Historic Architecture in West Philadelphia, 1789-1930s* and fire insurance surveys. He stated that the nomination still makes a compelling argument for satisfaction of Criteria for Designation.
- Ms. Milroy commented that nominations are not the final word on something, but rather are a collection of information at a point in time. She stated that the quadrant approach makes sense. She stated that a designation in this area is long overdue.
- Ms. Cooperman stated that this is the Spruce Hill neighborhood, and this nomination proposes a historic district within that neighborhood. The buildings in this proposed district satisfy the Criteria for Designation called out in the nomination.
- Ms. Miller stated that the nomination as presented is clear and makes a case for significance. She stated her support for the designation.
- Mr. Lavery opined that it takes a long time in Philadelphia for good things to happen, and the designation of a historic district in Spruce Hill is an example of this phenomenon. He questioned delaying this process any longer. He stated that there is a nomination in front of the Committee now on which it can make a recommendation.
- Mr. Cohen suggested that, if there are any places in the nomination that are unclear about the terminology of district versus quadrant, those can be revised. He stated that this is a solid nomination with a lot of work behind it.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- Amy Lambert, representing the University City Historical Society, commented in support of the designation.
- David Traub, representing Save Our Sites, commented in support of the designation.
- Hanna Stark, representing the Preservation Alliance, commented in support of the designation.
- Taylor Kessinger, a renter in the adjacent Squirrel Hill neighborhood, commented in opposition to the designation. He commented that historic designation will limit the number of people who can live in Spruce Hill.
- Frank Chance, a nearby resident, commented in support of the designation.
- Julia Hayman, a renter in Powelton Village, commented in support of the designation. She challenged earlier claims that designation leads to gentrification, and she recommended the work of preservation economist Donovan Rypkema.
- Julie Bush, a nearby resident, commented in support of the designation. She commented that this has been a community-led process which has been transparent about future district boundaries.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS:

The Committee on Historic Designation found that:

- At its 17 April 2024 meeting, it began the review of the proposed Spruce Hill historic district, southeast quadrant, but ended the meeting after losing quorum. At its 10 May 2024 meeting, the Historical Commission directed the matter back to the Committee on Historic Designation for review on 26 June 2024.
- A nomination is a draft until such time as it is adopted by the Historical Commission. The Historical Commission can revise the written document.
- The Historical Commission is scheduled to review the nomination at its 12 July 2024 meeting.

The Committee on Historic Designation concluded that:

- The proposed district has significant character, interest, and value as part of the development of West Philadelphia where public transportation drove speculative development of a high caliber that still retains its architectural integrity, satisfying Criterion A.
- Spruce Hill reflects the environment in an era characterized by distinctive architectural styles and that the buildings embody distinguishing characteristics of mid to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architectural styles, including Italianate, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Neo-Grec, Second Empire, and Georgian Revival, satisfying Criteria C and D.
- The nomination outlines the significant architects commissioned to design buildings in Spruce Hill, including Samuel Sloan, Theophilus P. Chandler, G.W. and W.D. Hewitt, and Willis G. Hale, satisfying Criterion E.
- Spruce Hill exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community, as an exemplary representation of West Philadelphia's development as a streetcar suburb, satisfying Criterion J.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: The Committee on Historic Designation voted to recommend that the nomination demonstrates the proposed Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant satisfies Criteria for Designation A, C, D, E, and J.

ITEM: Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant MOTION: Designate; Criteria A, C, D, E, and J MOVED BY: Cohen SECONDED BY: Milroy					
VOTE					
Committee Member	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Emily Cooperman, Chair	X				
Suzanna Barucco				X	
Jeff Cohen	X				
Bruce Laverty	X				
Debbie Miller					X
Elizabeth Milroy	X				
Total	4			1	1

ADJOURNMENT

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 01:32:40

ACTION: The Committee on Historic Designation adjourned at 11:04 a.m.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Minutes of the Philadelphia Historical Commission and its advisory Committees are presented in action format. Additional information is available in the video recording for this meeting. The start time for each agenda item in the recording is noted.
- Application materials and staff overviews are available on the Historical Commission's website, www.phila.gov/historical.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

§14-1004. Designation.

(1) Criteria for Designation.

A building, complex of buildings, structure, site, object, or district may be designated for preservation if it:

- (a) Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth, or nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past;
- (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation;
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or professional engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth, or nation;
- (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship that represent a significant innovation;
- (g) Is part of or related to a square, park, or other distinctive area that should be preserved according to a historic, cultural, or architectural motif;

- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or City;
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.