

REPORT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Robert Thomas, Chair
Commission Conference Room, One Parkway, 13th Fl., 1515 Arch St.
26 January 1999

Present

Robert Thomas, Chair
Tony Atkin
J. William Cornell
Herbert Levy
Daniel McCoubrey

Randal Baron, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer
R. Scott Jacob, Executive Secretary
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also

Claire Donato, Mark B. Thompson Associates, Fairmount Water Works
Edward Grusheski, Philadelphia Water Department, Fairmount Water Works
Amy Freitag, Fairmount Park Commission
Theresa Stuhlman, Fairmount Park Commission
Stephanie Craighead, Fairmount Park Commission
Mark Thompson
Patricia Aden, Preservation Alliance
Michael Nairn, South Street Development Corporation
Alik Strakes, Preservation Alliance
Beatrice Smith
Bruce Benedon
Robert Levy, Edifice Reconstruction
Robert Levy, V61
Patricia Wellenbach
James Ruckman
Wendy Kern
Elizabeth Armour, Society Hill Civic Association
Bruce Robinson
Marie Cerone
Anthony Cerone
Carter Van Dyke
Timothy Arnold
C. L. Compton, Society Hill Civic Association
Martin J. Rosenblum, Martin Jay Rosenblum, RA & Assoc.
William Leatherbee, William Leatherbee & Assoc.
Stephen Stein
Judith Robinson, Partridge Tackett Architects
Joseph Gembala

Joel Spivak
Nicole Wughran
Yaniv Radmi
Gregory Aschendorf
Yaron Aroshas

Mr. Thomas recognized a quorum and called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

Fairmount Water Works

City of Philadelphia, Owner

Claire Donato, Architect/Applicant

DATE: c. 1812-1872

PROPOSAL: Rehabilitation of the New Mill House; landscaping; balustrade; parking; bridge

This application includes:

1. Renovation and restoration of the balustrade.
2. Pole-mounted lights along the deck and up-lighting the buildings.
3. Paving material for the deck.
4. Renovations to the New Mill House, including restoration of the historic fenestration pattern to the river side facade.
5. Landscaping and exposing long buried portions of the walls of the forebay and bridge.
6. Creating parking.

Mr. Baron suggested the Committee review each element of the proposal separately.

Claire Donato, architect for the proposal, explained that the balustrade not only needs rehabilitation and restoration, it must be brought to code. The balustrade does not reach the height requirement, and the space between the balusters is too wide. Ms. Donato stated that it requires the addition of a safety railing to the top of the balustrade to meet code. She explained that one section of the balustrade dates from a prior rehabilitation, while other highly deteriorated or missing sections require complete restoration or reconstruction. The portion along the museum side of the deck needs rebuilding, but does not require the additional safety railing owing to the minimal drop down to the former forebay. Ms. Donato noted the likelihood of receiving a variance to accommodate the space between the balusters, but not for the height. Committee members asked the applicant to use a thinner pipe rail for the safety handrail, painted a muted color or to match the balustrade.

Ms. Donato showed the Committee photographs of the historic pole-mounted lanterns along with drawings for the proposed new lights. The new lights do not replicate the historic ones exactly, but resemble them very closely. She described the historic locations of the lanterns and additional locations as required by the new use. The Committee did not object to the new lanterns or locations.

Ms. Donato also explained the new lighting scheme for the buildings and riverside wall. She noted that the new lighting scheme will complement the one for the Philadelphia Museum of Art just behind the Water Works. Small inset fixtures will cast light from behind the columns of the pavilion and the porticos, while other concealed light fixtures will illuminate the exteriors of the buildings and the river side wall. Mr. Atkin asked her to downplay the lighting scheme on the river side wall to highlight the buildings above. Ms. Donato stated that the illustrations for this presentations do not accurately portray the intensity of the lights, and agreed to meet with Committee members for a demonstration to fine tune the lighting scheme.

The proposal includes re-paving the deck. Ms. Donato explained that problems with water seepage necessitate the replacement. The paving material near the Old Mill House will be brick, laid in a herringbone pattern, and faux bluestone over the New Mill House.

Ms. Donato described the proposal to reopen the windows on the river side walls of the New Mill House, and to reinstall fiberglass or aluminum-clad wood windows to replicate the historic windows. Committee members did not object to this aspect of the proposal, but did suggest using the fiberglass windows for easier maintenance.

Other aspects of the proposal involve site developments including a bike path, landscaping and several parking lots. Ms. Donato described the proposed placement for the parking lots, which includes established as well as new locations. The lots, most of which will lie away from the Water Works complex, will accommodate about three hundred and thirty cars. Committee members did not think the submitted drawings for the parking lots sufficiently described the proposal.

Patricia Aden of the Preservation Alliance objected to the proposed parking lots and other landscape features. She described the Water Works grounds as a cultural landscape that warrants greater attention and respect than this proposal offers. Ms. Aden stated that the proposal should respond to the character-defining features such as the gardens, fountains, walkways and natural features. She expressed concern over the impact of the paving and the cars on the landscape, and asked the applicant to conduct a Cultural Landscape Report. Amy Freitag of the Fairmount Park Commission stated that such a study had been done. Michael Nairn shared Ms. Aden's concerns over how the proposal would change the character of the landscape, and asked the Committee to review the landscape and parking aspects of the proposal at a later date after additional study.

The Committee voted unanimously recommend:

Approval of:

- 1. Renovation and restoration of the balustrade, with a thinner pipe rail for the safety handrail, painted a muted color or to match the balustrade.*
- 2. Pole-mounted lights along the deck and up-lighting the buildings.*
- 3. Paving material for the deck.*
- 4. Renovations to the New Mill House, including restoration of the historic fenestration pattern to the river side facade.*

Tabling of:

- 1. Landscaping and parking until a later meeting.*

Fairmount Water Works, Esplanade

City of Philadelphia, Owner

Edward Grusheski, Applicant

DATE: c. 1812-1822

PROPOSAL: Lighting for esplanade

This application involves lighting for the Esplanade walkway and exhibits south of the Water Works. The applicant explained that the proposal includes two lighting schemes: eleven down lights that will attach to the wall with brackets, and two waterproof up lights near the spiral stairs that will remain hidden under a stone lip.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of the proposal.

Valley Green Inn, Fairmount Park

City of Philadelphia, Owner

Irving Shapiro and Robert Levy, Architects/Applicants

DATE: c. 1805

PROPOSAL: Addition and rehabilitation

Mr. Levy recused himself from the discussion and the vote because of his son's association with the proposal.

This proposal involves restoring the porch of the inn and adding a kitchen wing to the back of the building. The proposal shows a much reduced addition from what the Commission previously approved. The proposal necessitates the demolition of non-original rear sheds.

Committee members did not object to the size and location of the addition, but asked the applicant to darken the color of the roofing material and lower the higher portion of the addition's roof to create one flat surface. The architect stated that revised plans already call for lowering that portion of the roof. Committee members also asked the applicant to change the wood siding sections of the addition's facade to stone in the interest of uniformity. The architects agreed to revise the proposal.

The four remaining Committee members voted to recommend approval, changing the wood siding sections of the addition's facade to stone to match the stone of the rest of the addition, and with staff to review and approve details. Mr. Levy recused himself.

Ridgeland Mansion Barn, Fairmount Park

City of Philadelphia, Owner

James Ruckman, Architect/Applicant

DATE: c. 1840

PROPOSAL: Rehabilitation; new terrace; awning; garage door

This proposal involves:

1. Restoring the barn of the Ridgeland Mansion for the use of the Wellness Center.
2. New glass doors will replace a garage door.
3. A new terrace will occupy a site surrounded by an existing wall, and poles and a metal channel will attach to the building to support a seasonal tent canopy.
4. Soil stack vents through the roof and four air conditioning condensers near the chimney.

Committee members noted that the spaces between the bars of the proposed terrace railing do not conform with safety regulations. The applicant explained that he will raise the grade level to line up with the terrace. Committee members also asked the applicant to choose a color for the canopy that complements the barn.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval, with staff to review and approve details.

8501 Germantown Avenue, at Highland Avenue

Bruce Robinson, Owner

Wendy Kern, Architect/Applicant

DATE: c. 1760

PROPOSAL: New roof in faux slate

Mr. Thomas recused himself from the discussion and the vote.

This proposal involves removing a diamond pattern asbestos shingle roof and replacing it with a faux slate. An historic photograph shows the building covered with wood shakes. The architect plans to cover the dormer cheeks with clapboard. Mr. Baron asked the applicant to consider a faux wood shake by the same company instead. Wendy Kern, architect for the proposal, questioned whether the faux wood shingles will hold up as long as the faux slate, and had concerns with the color. Committee members did not object to the faux slate.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval.

2351 St. Albans Place, ne corner of 24th Street

Beatrice Smith, Owner/Applicant

DATE: 1868

PROPOSAL: Legalize windows, door and glass block; fence

Ms. Smith recently bought this property in a deteriorated state, much altered since designation and declared Imminently Dangerous by the Department of Licenses & Inspections. Since that time Ms. Smith has had work done to the property without a permit and on a very limited budget. She now seeks to legalize some of the work as well as apply for additional work. She wishes to legalize the repair of brickwork under a side window that utilized old but mismatched bricks. The previous owner had also installed glass block in the side basement windows and Ms. Smith wishes to continue this treatment on the two front windows. In addition, she has applied to increase the height of the rear masonry fence for security.

She wishes to legalize a door she installed without a permit. She also wants to install a new aluminum-clad bay window in the location of a former storefront window that a former owner illegally removed and reduced in size. Several other items, not on her application but in violation, include vinyl replacement windows installed by Ms. Smith as well as aluminum on the cornice and mansard installed by a previous owner.

Mr. Baron suggested the Committee recommend denial of the glass block in the basement windows, approval of raising the rear fence and the brickwork repair, subject to masonry cleaning to even out the color of the patch. He thought Ms. Smith should work out a schedule to correct the building's other violations over time to submit to the Commission. The Committee recommended that review by the Hardship Committee may be the appropriate forum for this.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend:

Approval of:

- 1. The brick replacement at the north end of the building, subject to masonry cleaning.*
- 2. The stuccoed fence at the rear of the property.*
- 3. The existing glass block.*

Denial of:

- 1. The glass block not yet installed.*
- 2. The bay window*

By a vote of three to two, the Committee voted to recommend approval of the new door, with staff to review and approve the details of paint color. Mr. Thomas and Mr. McCoubrey dissented, preferring the option of sending the issue to the Financial Hardship Committee.

3400-3450 Chestnut Street, University of Pennsylvania Law School, sw corner of 34th Street

University of Pennsylvania, Owner

Timothy Arnold, Architect/Applicant

DATE: 1897

PROPOSAL: Rehabilitation; lighting; plaques; transom

The University of Pennsylvania proposes to renovate the Law School. Much of the work can receive staff approval from the Historical Commission. Several small items including new lights, and several bronze plaques come before the Committee for review. One plaque will sit in the transom above a door, while several will attach to brick piers of the perimeter fence.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of the proposal.

228-232 Walnut Street

Marie Cerone, Owner

Martin Rosenblum, Architect/Applicant

DATE: 1999

PROPOSAL: New house, garage and wall on former parking lot

Mr. Levy and Mr. Thomas abstained.

This proposal involves the construction of a new single family house on a vacant piece of property in the proposed Society Hill Historic District. The project comes before the Commission because the ordinance calls for the review of work on property pending historic designation; however, new construction on a vacant lot receives a maximum forty-five-day review and comment. The new house will sit on a lot surrounded by a perimeter fence with a garden both front and rear and a garage at the south end of the lot.

Martin Rosenblum, architect for the proposal, stated that he designed the house and grounds to complement the Merchants' Exchange building across the street. He explained that the house sits back on the lot to allow for an expanded view corridor of the Exchange, and that the building materials correspond with those of the neighboring buildings. Mr. Rosenblum added that the openness of the property acknowledges the nearby park space and abutting churchyard.

Mr. Tyler explained that the National Park Service has a right to review and comment on the proposed structure because this location borders Independence National Historic Park and because §14-2005 of the City's Zoning Code is intended to preserve the historical character of the park. He stated that the Commission has received a letter from the National Park Service confirming their support for the proposal.

Committee members objected to the recessed location of the house on the property, and asked the applicant to move it closer to Walnut Street. Mr. Atkin noted that private houses in "Penn's" Philadelphia, i.e. Center City, traditionally sit close to the street, while institutional buildings stand recessed on the property. He and other Committee members expressed concern that this building reads as institutional rather than domestic. Mr. Cornell also observed that the recessed siting of the house leaves a large section of the former party wall exposed. Mr. Rosenblum described possible ways of camouflaging the wall, such as a landscape screen or ivy. The Committee recommended bringing the house closer to Walnut Street.

Elizabeth Armour of the Society Hill Civic Association stated that the association supports the proposal, and would prefer to leave the house recessed to maintain the view of the Exchange.

The remaining Committee voted to recommend approval, with the house moved closer to Walnut Street.

312 South American Street

Michelle Plachter, Owner/Applicant

DATE: c. 1840

PROPOSAL: Flower boxes

The applicant seeks to install basket type flower boxes attached to her wood windowsills. Elizabeth Armour of the Society Hill Civic Association asked the Committee to stipulate that this and future applicants not install window boxes into the brick. She expressed concern that the box would pose a danger to pedestrians because it hangs at head level on this very narrow street.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval of a flower box or basket that attaches to the wood sills, with staff to review and approve details.

925 Chestnut Street

Jefferson Medical Associates, Owner
Christian Busch, Architect/Applicant

DATE: 1925

PROPOSAL: New signage and awning in ramp court

The proposal calls for the installation of a metal and glass canopy above the already approved driveway entrance in the ramp court. The architect seeks to keep drivers from proceeding down the ramp into the garage with this awning identification. Mr. Levy noted that the design of ramp court could create some directional difficulties for drivers, and that the proposed signage would add to the confusion. The other Committee members did not object to the proposal.

Four of the five Committee members voted to recommend approval of the proposal. Mr. Levy dissented.

1210 Spruce Street

William Leatherbee, Owner/Architect/Applicant

DATE: 1822

PROPOSAL: Facade restoration; raise rear roof

Mr. Thomas recused himself from the discussion and the vote owing to his association with the architect.

This proposal involves:

1. Restoration of the front façade.
2. Two skylights to the front roof and removal of the chimney.
3. Alterations to the rear of the house including a first floor greenhouse and raised roof to create a more usable fourth floor and new window cuts.

William Leatherbee, architect for the proposal and part owner of the building, explained that the removal of the fireplaces and interior chimney to increase living space necessitates the dismantling of the exterior portion of the chimney. Committee members discussed the possibility of saving the top portion of the chimney while permitting the removal of the lower portion. Mr. Leatherbee stated that these options would decrease the amount of usable space on the already limited fourth floor. The Committee agreed to allow the removal of the remaining fragments of the chimney.

Mr. Baron noted that pedestrians on Cypress and Fawn Street view the rear façade; however, the context of the rear includes many modern alterations. The architect stated that a carriage house he intends to build will obscure many of the new rear features.

Four of the five Committee members voted to recommend approval of the proposal, with staff to review and approve details. Mr. Thomas recused himself.

1701 Locust Street, Warwick Hotel, nw corner of 17th Street

Apollo Real Estate and Hospitality, Inc., Owner

Judith Robinson, Architect/Applicant

DATE: 1923

PROPOSAL: Handicap ramp

This proposal involves the installation of a handicap accessible ramp behind an existing low brick retaining wall. The Committee did not object to the proposal.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval.

1732 Spruce Street

William Most, Trustee for Owner

Gregory Aschendorf, Contractor/Applicant

DATE: c. 1855

PROPOSAL: Legalize door replacement

This proposal involves legalization of a pair of doors installed without a permit. The panel pattern of the doors the contractor removed match the jamb of the doorway. The applicant explained that the owner hastily had the doors installed after the tenants of the building filed suit against her over a recent break-in. He also noted that the elderly owner of the building may have trouble affording another door replacement. Mr. Thomas explained the process of the Financial Hardship Committee.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend denial of the proposal.

2101-2117 Chestnut Street, nw corner of South 21st Street

All Rite Parking, Inc., Owner

Stephen Stein, Contractor/Applicant

DATE: 1957

PROPOSAL: Legalize installation of glass block

This proposal involves the removal of transom windows and installation of glass block in the garage portion of this non-contributing apartment structure. The applicant explained that the building has had plywood and two-by-fours in these openings for a more than a decade.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval.

309-311 South Street

Michael Axelrod, Owner

Joel Spivak, Contractor/Applicant

DATE:

PROPOSAL: Demolish storefront; build new storefront

This proposal calls for removing the historic glass and marble storefront and replacing it with a modern anodized aluminum and glass storefront system. The proposal reduces the current storefront recess to three feet. Joel Spivak, the applicant, explained that the tenants of the store want to move the door and rear of the display windows forward to increase the shop space within. This will entail removing some of the marble and tiles from the entrance. Mr. Spivak stated that the proposed alteration will retain the front half of the coved foyer ceiling.

Mr. Baron spoke of the rarity and quality of the recessed storefronts on South Street which the City loses with increasing regularity. Mr. Tyler noted that the existing storefront has two bevel breaks, and suggested pulling the door up to the rear bevel line. Committee members discussed possible ways of moving the storefront forward without losing all the historic fabric. Mr. Atkin asked for a stipulation that the applicant must restore the remaining historic fabric if allowed to pull the door forward, including the repair and restoration of the marble and tiles. Mr. Thomas reminded Mr. Spivak that the entrance must meet ADA requirements. Mr. Spivak explained that he will raise the grade of the entrance corridor to a ramp prior to restoring the marble and tiles. Commission staff expressed concern over the treatment of the transom, which Mr. Spivak said he would retain. The Committee recommended having staff review and approve the reinstallation.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend denial of the proposal as submitted, and to approve a revised proposal to pull the door up to the rear bevel line, subject to the restoration of the remaining historic fabric including the repair and restoration of the marble, tiles and brass window muntins. The Committee told the applicant to submit new detailed drawings for review at the Commission meeting.

710 South Front Street

Maria and Melvin Ngayan, Owners/Applicants

DATE: c. 1750; refaced c. 1850

PROPOSAL: Legalize removal of chimney

A former owner of this house removed the chimney without a permit. The present owners, currently in the process of restoring the house, do not want to rebuild the chimney, and seek legalization for its removal. Committee members noted that the abutting house acquired a glass rooftop addition after removal of the historic chimney that a rebuilt chimney would interfere with.

The Committee voted unanimously to recommend approval.

Respectfully submitted,


R. Scott Jacob

Executive Secretary