

**THE MINUTES OF THE 637TH STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**FRIDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2015
ROOM 18-029, 1515 ARCH STREET
SAM SHERMAN, CHAIR**

PRESENT

Sam Sherman, Chair
Richardson Dilworth III
Anuj Gupta, Esq.
John Herzins, Department of Public Property
Rosalie Leonard, Esq., Office of City Council President
John Mattioni, Esq.
R. David Schaaf, RA, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Robert Thomas, AIA
Betty Turner, M.A.

Jonathan E. Farnham, Executive Director
Randal Baron, Historic Preservation Planner III
Kim Broadbent, Historic Preservation Planner I
Laura DiPasquale, Historic Preservation Planner I

ALSO PRESENT

Jason Birl, Ambit
Tomas Hanna
Stephen Varenhorst, Varenhorst
John B. Edwards II, Varenhorst
Hasina Choudhury, Varenhorst
Rob Kettell
Eric Leighton, Cecil Baker Partners
Tim Shaaban, Urban Space Development
David Orphanides, Esq.
Patrick Grossi, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
Ashley May, Chris Hamel
Cecil Baker, Cecil Baker Partners
Michael Fierle, Cecil Baker Partners
Carolina Peña, YCH Architects
William O'Brien, Esq., Manayunk Law Office
Justino Navarro, Spring Garden Civic Association
Grace Melay
Carolyn Zemanian
Joel Naiman
Evan Schweckler
Katlyn Cotton
Starr Herr-Cardillo
Eric Pfeifer
Sonja Lengel
Josh Bevan
Nathaniel Hammitt
Ramune Bartuskaite
Alice Gilmore

David Hollenberg
Diane Truber
Philip Yamposky

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Sherman, the vice chair, called the meeting to order at 9:09 a.m. Commissioners Dilworth, Gupta, Herzins, Leonard, Mattioni, Schaaf, Thomas, and Turner joined him.

MINUTES OF THE 636TH STATED MEETING OF THE PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ACTION: Ms. Turner moved to adopt the minutes of the 636th Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, held 14 August 2015. Mr. Schaaf seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

THE REPORT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE, 25 AUGUST 2015

Dominique Hawkins, Chair

CONSENT AGENDA

Mr. Farnham introduced the consent agenda and explained that it included applications for 4127 Main Street and 526 N. 22nd Street. He explained that the Commission had received a letter from a neighbor opposing the project proposed for 526 N. 22nd Street. He noted that the opposition was unrelated to preservation matters. Mr. Sherman asked if any Commissioners had comments on the Consent Agenda. None were offered. Mr. Sherman asked if anyone in the audience had comments on the Consent Agenda. Attorney William O'Brien, representing the application for 4127 Main Street and designer Ashley May, representing the application for 526 N. 22nd Street, identified themselves, but no one offered comments.

ACTION: Mr. Schaaf moved to adopt the recommendations of the Architectural Committee for the applications for 4127 Main Street and 526 N. 22nd Street. Ms. Turner seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

AGENDA

ADDRESS: 4127 MAIN ST

Project: Demolish part of building; renovate front façade; construct addition

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: Kazimier Sokolowski

Applicant: William J. O'Brien, Manayunk Law Office

History: 1860

Individual Designation: None

District Designation: Manayunk Historic District, Contributing, 12/14/1983

Staff Contact: Laura DiPasquale, laura.dipasquale@phila.gov, 215-686-7660

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The Architectural Committee recommended approval, provided the stucco color of the upper floors match the adjacent properties and differ from the front façade, and the fourth-floor window at the south elevation is corrected as suggested, pursuant to Standard 9.

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to demolish the rear of a small three-story residential property on Main Street in Manayunk, and to construct a four-story addition straight up from the

ridge line of the existing building. The application proposes to retain the front façade and front slope of the gable roof, to install appropriate windows in the upper floors, and to combine and expand the first-floor window openings to create a storefront window matching that of the neighboring building. At the ridge line, the addition would step up an additional two stories. The addition would be clad in stucco and feature plate and casement window openings.

ACTION: See Consent Agenda.

ADDRESS: 2108 AND 2110 WALNUT ST

Project: Construct 5-story addition and 9-story building

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: 2110 Walnut Street Development LLC

Applicant: Eric Leighton, Cecil Baker & Partners

History: 1868; E.B. Warren House; Furness & Hewitt, attributed; 1920

Individual Designation: None

District Designation: Rittenhouse Fidler Residential Historic District, Contributing, 2/8/1995

Staff Contact: Laura DiPasquale, laura.dipasquale@phila.gov, 215-686-7660

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The Committee voted to recommend denial, pursuant Standards 2, 9, and 10.

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to construct a ten-story condominium building on a currently vacant lot, and to substantially alter the adjacent four-story Second Empire brownstone building. The two buildings would be internally connected, and the consolidation of the parcels would provide the Commission full jurisdiction over the entire site. The project was previously reviewed conceptually by the Architectural Committee, which commented that the massing of the previously-proposed seven-story building was too large and that the proposed façade was incompatible with the row of historic buildings. The Committee also noted that the massing overwhelmed the Chancellor Street elevation and recommended additional setbacks. The current application adds an additional three stories and penthouse to the proposal. The application proposes a four-story glass and metal addition on top of the historic building at 2108 Walnut Street, and a ten-story corrugated metal, glass, and stone-veneer building on the vacant lot. The new construction on the vacant lot would occupy the entire lot from Walnut Street through to Chancellor Street, where it would feature a brick façade with ground-floor louvers and Juliette balconies above.

DISCUSSION: Ms. DiPasquale presented the application to the Historical Commission. Attorney David Orphanides, architects Cecil Baker and Eric Leighton, and developer Tim Shaaban represented the application.

Mr. Sherman asked whether the applicant had revised the drawings to incorporate the Committee's comments. Mr. Orphanides responded that they had. Ms. DiPasquale noted that the revised drawings were included in the Commission's packets of meeting materials.

Mr. Orphanides described the conditions of both properties. He noted that 2108 Walnut is an existing four-story building, and the adjacent vacant lot at 2110 Walnut has been a parking lot since 1959, according to the zoning records, with curb cuts along both Walnut and Chancellor Streets. At the rear of 2108, he continued, there is a two-story carriage house, connected to the main building by a low one-story structure.

Mr. Orphanides opined that the project has evolved over time. He noted that, given the continuity of use between the properties, zoning may have allowed his client to use the floor-

area-ratio (FAR) from 2108 to construct a much larger building at 2110, but they rejected that option and prefer combining the parcels as currently proposed. He noted that his client met with the Architectural Committee twice, as well as with the staff, and reported that there was little negative feedback. Mr. Baron responded the staff was and remains staunchly opposed to the project, owing to the proposed massing on the historic building.

Mr. Baker clarified that they are proposing a nine-story building with an enclosed penthouse at the tenth floor. He noted that the gross floor area and FAR have remained unchanged, but that they have pulled the facades in from both streets, thereby increasing the height of the building. He commented that, from a zoning perspective, it is a by-right project. Mr. Leighton presented views that were not included in the Commission's packets of meeting materials. Mr. Baker described the changes since the meeting of the Architectural Committee. He noted that they pushed the massing back away from the street on the historic structure at 2108, but did not change the massing on the new building at 2110.

Mr. Baker praised the developer, Mr. Shaaban. He described his various restaurants throughout the city. He contended that Mr. Shaaban has changed the city for the better. He noted that Mr. Shaaban has a bias towards contemporary architecture. In his new endeavors for residential architecture, Mr. Shaaban has a vision, absolutely contemporary, glass architecture, which he markets to a high-end clientele. Mr. Baker opined that Mr. Shaaban deserves to build the type of building he wants. He explained that their goal is to design a building that responds to the facades to the east and west, but also provides the contemporary design which appeals to Mr. Shaaban's clients.

Mr. Baker described the proposed infill building, with its travertine stone cladding and deeply set windows. He opined that it has a strong base with the glass creeping up behind it. He noted that the portion of the addition on top of the historic building is pulled 27 feet back from Walnut Street. In order to pull back more from both Walnut and Chancellor Street, he noted, they had to add extra floors to maintain the FAR. Mr. Shaaban needs the FAR to make his numbers work, Mr. Baker asserted. If the Commission robs him of the FAR, he will not pursue the project.

Mr. Leighton presented composite renderings and photographs of the street. Mr. Baker opined that this block that does not have a strong identity. He noted that Mr. Shaaban wants a glass box.

Mr. Orphanides asked the architects to describe how the design honors the neighboring Second Empire buildings. Mr. Leighton responded that the façade of the proposed building at 2110 Walnut will sit in the same plane as the neighbors to either side, and will end at the cornice line of the adjacent properties. A glass section will be set back to the innermost point of the mansard roofs, in front of which will sit two contemporary frames acting as "dormers."

Mr. Schaaf congratulated the architectural team on an excellent job. He noted that it is an extremely handsome block, and opined that filling the vacant lot will be a significant improvement. Mr. Schaaf asked if the proposed stone of the façade would be compatible with the neighboring properties. Mr. Leighton responded that they are currently proposing travertine stone, but would be willing to work with the staff to identify an appropriate material.

Mr. Schaaf questioned the scale of the doors on the first floor of the infill building, which he noted would be enormous. Mr. Leighton responded that they may add transom above the doors, to reduce their height. The doors provide the entrance to the elevator lobby of the residential building. He noted that the commercial use at 2108 Walnut would be retained and would be extended over into the 2110 building.

Mr. Schaaf read Ms. Hawkins' comments from the Architectural Committee minutes, and opined that the applicant had responded to her suggestions including moving the addition on the historic building back from Walnut Street. He noted that Mr. McCoubrey had asked for the addition to appear as though it is another building, and opined that that had been achieved. Mr. Sherman concurred.

Mr. Thomas commented that, because this site is in a historic district, the developer should consider the space between the building and the curb. He noted that Walnut Street and its sidewalk are wider than typical on this block. If one looks at old photographs, he continued, one would notice that the space adjacent to the buildings, out as far as the stoops, was occupied by garden areas, which provided a real sense of pause and separation. He suggested that the developer not only install street trees, but also some of the pavement with greenery. He noted that, owing to the projecting stoops, the sidewalks adjacent to the buildings are not used by pedestrians. Despite the fact that it is in the public right-of-way, he noted, the developer or owner is responsible for the sidewalk. He suggested that establishing green space between the residential and commercial entrances and the building and street would enhance the building and the historic district. Mr. Baker concurred and agreed to look into it. Mr. Shaaban responded that he would discuss it with the Streets Department.

Mr. Schaaf commented that removing the curb cut on Walnut Street is an improvement.

Mr. Farnham expressed the staff's concern that the project includes a four-story rooftop addition on a four-story historic building. He observed that, if this project is approved, it will be difficult for the Commission to justify disapproving applications for small rooftop additions and decks because they are not invisible from the public right-of-way. He observed that an approval in this case could have unanticipated consequences. Mr. Schaaf responded that roof decks and their visibility from the street is one of the prickliest issues the Commission confronts. He remarked that, in this case, when looking at the rendering, he thinks of the "wonderful magic" that the Venturi firm achieved at the Curtis Institute building on the 1600 block of Locust Street. He suggested that this project will be like that project; it will not be very visible from the street. Mr. Gupta expressed skepticism about Mr. Schaaf's claim that the addition would not be visible. He asked Mr. Schaaf if he really thought it would not be visible from the opposite side of the street. Mr. Schaaf responded that he would be surprised if much of the building was visible from the opposite side of the street.

Mr. Thomas commented that the distinction between this project and a one-story addition to a two-story carriage house is that, in this case, it will not read as the same building. Mr. Thomas opined that, when something is set back 27 to 30 feet, it may not be recognized as part of the same building, which is not possible with a small building. Mr. Schaaf agreed, noting the addition simply becomes part of the cityscape around you. Mr. Baron responded that, while there are some tall buildings on this street, they are located at the ends of the row, which is traditional, but the center of the block is a perfectly continuous row at four stories. He claimed that it is possible to view the row from such a distance that the proposed building will be read as being part of, or on top of, the historic buildings.

Mr. Baron commented that the staff has been concerned with the size and massing of the proposed development from the beginning, and that the tenor of the Committee meeting, aside from Mr. McCoubrey's comment, was also that the massing was too large. He contended that this huge addition will appear huge on the historic building. Mr. Dilworth asked if Mr. Baron thought the revised plans ameliorated the massing concern at all. Mr. Baron responded that they did not. Mr. Baron suggested that an approval of this application will damage the

Commission's process and standards. Mr. Schaaf opined that the rendering of the building from 22nd Street shows the glassy building folding into the tall building at the corner, and that the continuity of the mansard will be the element that is perceived first. Mr. Gupta responded that that may be the case from that angle, but questioned whether the same could be said looking head-on at the building. Mr. Schaaf responded that he thinks only a small section of the addition will be visible from in front of the building. Mr. Dilworth commented that the Commission approved a tall building on top of a portion of the Lit Brothers building last year because it appeared like a separate building. Mr. Thomas noted that a line-of-sight drawing was included in their packets. Mr. Thomas noted that the subjective question is whether the Commission is looking at invisibility or inconspicuousness. Is the addition set back far enough? What is the treatment of the building? Mr. Thomas likened the situation to the Cira Center near historic 30th Street Station. He noted that, because the Cira Center is constructed of glass, it does not overshadow the other buildings near it. He opined that, in this situation, the setback and the materials give it sufficient inconspicuousness.

Mr. Shaaban commented that they chose to combine lots. If they left them separate, they could have built a very tall building on 2110, over which the Commission would have Review-and-Comment jurisdiction only. He noted that they tried to combine the properties and make the view from Walnut Street consistent at a four-story height and allow the addition to be set back from the street and clad in glass. He noted that they chose glass because, when they looked at it in metal and other materials, it appeared much heavier. He reiterated the need for sufficient FAR based on the acquisition cost of the site.

Mr. Sherman opened the floor to public comment, of which there was none.

ACTION: Mr. Schaaf moved to approve the revised application as presented to the Historical Commission on 11 September 2015, with the staff to review details. Mr. Mattioni seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADDRESS: 1733 SPRING GARDEN ST

Project: Add exterior stairs and doors, ADA ramp, and elevator

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: 1733 Spring Garden St LLC

Applicant: Dale You, 1733 Spring Garden St LLC

History: 1875

Individual Designation: None

District Designation: Spring Garden Historic District, Contributing, 10/11/2000

Staff Contact: Laura DiPasquale, laura.dipasquale@phila.gov, 215-686-7660

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The Architectural Committee voted to recommend approval of basement stairway, provided the front 6'-6" between the fence and stair are developed into a garden; denial of the ramp as well as the side stair, with the recommendation that the applicant consider an entry at grade; approval of doors into the carriage house, but with a revised design more in keeping with the style of the building; and approval of the elevator shaft, provided the shaft is clad in stucco or matte metal, with the staff to review details, pursuant to Standard 9.

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to make several alterations to an existing four-story building at the corner of 18th and Spring Garden Streets. On the Spring Garden Street elevation, the application proposes to create a new basement access through a new exterior stairway cut from an existing concrete pad. The application proposes to restore one currently infilled basement window on the Spring Garden Street side and to cut a door straight down from the

other basement window and create an arched transom to fill the top of the historic window opening. The stairway would be surrounded by a new retaining wall with a black metal handrail, and would be additionally concealed by a metal picket fence installed along the front of the existing elevated concrete pad. The fence would be designed to resemble that shown in a historic photograph of the property.

Following the Architectural Committee review, the applicant revised the proposal to eliminate the ramp and side entrance stairway. The revised application proposes to cut an ADA entrance at-grade in the 18th Street façade of the small non-historic addition.

The application also proposes to install an elevator shaft, which would penetrate the flat roof portion of the rear ell 3'6" above the roof surface and would not disrupt the mansard roof. Following the Architectural Committee review, the application was revised to include stucco cladding of the shaft instead of brick.

The application further proposes to replace a door on the carriage house, which faces into a courtyard between the house and the carriage house, with a barn-style door.

DISCUSSION: Ms. DiPasquale presented the application to the Historical Commission. Architect Carolina Pena represented the application.

Mr. Thomas addressed the "concrete pad," noting that it was historically the location of a garden, thus the name Spring Garden Street. He opined that installing the stair and recreating the historic garden are appropriate. He noted that the staff should review the landscaping plan.

ACTION: Mr. Thomas moved to approve the revised application as presented to the Historical Commission on 11 September 2015, with the staff to review details. Ms. Turner seconded the motion, which passed unanimously

ADDRESS: 218-26 ARCH ST

Project: Construct 10-story mixed-use building with parking

Review Requested: Review and Comment for site; Final Approval for Little Boy's Court

Owner: 218 Arch Street Associates, LP

Applicant: John B. Edwards, Varenhorst, PC

History: vacant lot and Little Boy's Court

Individual Designation: None

District Designation: Old City Historic District, Non-contributing, 12/12/2003

Little Boy's Court, Historic Street Paving Thematic District, Significant, 12/9/1998

Staff Contact: Randal Baron, randal.baron@phila.gov, 215-686-7660

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: Approval, pursuant to Standard 9, with the staff to review details including the parking gate on Arch Street and the need for archeology, provided the following revisions are made:

1. a cornice or other articulation is added at the cornice line of the Arch Street façade,
2. muntins are installed on the outside of the glass of all the windows, and
3. all terraces, privacy fences, and railings are setback and no higher than the parapets.

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to construct a large mixed-use building on a parking lot on the south side of the 200-block of Arch Street. The property is classified as non-contributing in the Old City Historic District. The properties at 218 and 220 Arch Street were individually designated as historic, but those designations were rescinded in 2006. The property includes a section of Littleboy's Court, a small, private street that runs between Arch and Cuthbert Streets.

Littleboy's Court may be the only original, surviving cobblestone street in the city and is listed as significant in the Historic Street Paving Thematic District.

The Architectural Committee reviewed a similar application in June 2015, but that application was withdrawn prior to the July Historical Commission meeting to allow the applicant to confer with the neighbors. The current application has been modified from that reviewed in June 2015.

The current application proposes a ten-story structure with a five-story red brick color façade on Arch Street. The building steps up from five to ten stories as it steps back from Arch Street. The building would include ground floor retail and a large entryway on Arch Street to interior parking. The building has industrial-style punched windows throughout the upper floors. Materials have not been noted on the drawings, but appear to be brick of various colors with limestone trim, as is suggested in the cover letter. A detailed plan has been provided regarding work to Littleboy's Court.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Baron presented the application to the Historical Commission. Attorney Anthony Forte and architect Stephen Varenhorst represented the application.

Mr. Forte stated that the threshold issue that should first be determined is the level of jurisdiction that the Commission will use to review this application. He asked Mr. Farnham to explain the issue. Mr. Farnham stated that the ordinance limits the Commission's jurisdiction to review-and-comment on new construction on undeveloped lots in historic districts. He reported that a section of the designated historic street known as Littleboy's Court runs through a portion of this development site. The Commission must decide whether the section of the street constitutes or does not constitute a "development" in the eyes of the ordinance. Mr. Farnham stated that he would advise that the Commission's jurisdiction should be limited to review-and-comment based on two factors. First, when the Commission rescinded the individual designations of the two parcels at 218 and 220 Arch Street, it did not indicate that it would continue to review applications for those lots with full jurisdiction. Second, when the Historic Street Paving District was created, the Commission did not notify the owner of this parcel that the street was being considered for designation. Mr. Forte added that, when the Historic Street Paving District was created, the Commission stated that the review would only cover the cartway, not any adjacent portions of the site. Also, the Old City inventory listings for 218 and 220 Arch state classify them as non-contributing. Mr. Farnham concluded that, in his opinion, the level of review should be review-and-comment. He noted that the applicants concede to the Commission's plenary jurisdiction over the cartway of Littleboy's Court.

ACTION: Mr. Mattioni moved to find that the site at 218-26 Arch Street is undeveloped and the Historical Commission's jurisdiction is limited to review-and-comment jurisdiction. Ms. Leonard seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Forte explained that the property was the subject of zoning litigation, which resulted in the definition of zoning parameters for the development of the site. Mr. Varenhorst displayed a diagram showing how the present proposal fits within that zoning envelope, with slight modifications that benefit the neighbors. He explained that they had met with neighbors and developed a model to demonstrate that the proposed building would not interfere with views of the Christ Church steeple. He said that they have developed an inner courtyard for loading and trash removal. Mr. Schaaf commented that the Arch Street façade should be further developed to highlight the central bay with materials, different fenestration, or an architectural feature like a cartouche. Mr. Varenhorst said he would consider that suggestion. He explained how the Arch Street façade has been better articulated with four-inch-deep registers and recessed spandrel

panels with herringbone brickwork. He explained that the proposed windows would have depth with external simulated muntins.

Mr. Sherman opened the floor for public comment. Neighbor Rob Kettell commented that the building should not be constructed with three colors of brick; the variety is not common to the neighborhood.

Mr. Baron asked the Commission to consider the Committee's other comments including adding a cornice and keeping rooftop partitions lower than the front parapet. Mr. Varenhorst replied that they had decided not to add a cornice, but rather addressed a concern about the depth of the façade with a change to the spandrels. On the height of partitions, they agreed that the deck partitions would remain below the level of the parapet.

Mr. Farnham noted that the staff had conducted extensive research on Littleboy's Court, which was also known as Mickle's Court. Sam Mickle purchased a property on N. 2nd Street that included a portion of the court in 1745. Maulby Littleboy purchased the property from Mickle's heirs in 1811. Mr. Farnham stated that there is a common misconception that the cobblestone at the south end of Littleboy's Court is colonial. He stated that Ben Franklin never walked on those cobblestones because the southern section of the street did not exist about the time of the Civil War. The First Baptist Church of Philadelphia stood on what is now Cuthbert Street and the church's burial ground extended west from the church across the land on which Littleboy's Court now runs. The congregation moved about 1860; the church was demolished and the bodies exhumed and reinterred at Mt. Moriah. Factory buildings were constructed on both sides of the southern end of the court. In 1876, the City paved the court as a "tramway" with stone slab edges for the wheels of carts and cobblestones in the middle to provide traction for horse's hooves.

ACTION: Mr. Thomas moved to approve the application as it relates to Littleboy's Court, over which the Commission exercised plenary jurisdiction, with the staff to review details, and to request that the applicant consider the comments offered on the proposed building, over which the Commission exercised comment jurisdiction as stipulated in Section 14-1005(4) of the Philadelphia Code. Ms. Turner seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Gupta excused himself from the meeting.

ADDRESS: 526 N 22ND ST

Project: Construct addition

Review Requested: Final Approval

Owner: 526 N 22nd Street LLC

Applicant: Chris Hammel, Deborah Anderson

History: 1859; new front façade, 1986

Individual Designation: None

District Designation: Spring Garden Historic District, Contributing, 10/11/2000

Staff Contact: Kim Broadbent, kim.broadbent@phila.gov, 215-686-7660

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The Architectural Committee voted to recommend approval, with the staff to review window, door, metal railing and stucco details, pursuant to Standards 9 and 10.

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to construct a one-story addition on top of an existing two-story rear ell. The additional story will be minimally visible from Spring Garden Street, when looking across the gas station and parking lot located at the corner of North 22nd and Spring Garden Streets. Visibility of the proposed addition will be partially or mostly obstructed by the existing three-story rear ell of the adjacent property to the south. The proposed addition will be clad in stucco and feature a sliding door opening onto a small deck at the rear.

ACTION: See Consent Agenda.

ADDRESS: 1627 MOUNT VERNON ST

Project: Construct residential building

Review Requested: Review and Comment

Owner: Tomas Hanna

Applicant: Kristin Pool, Ambit Architecture

History: vacant lot

Individual Designation: None

District Designation: Spring Garden Historic District, Non-contributing, 10/11/2000

Staff Contact: Kim Broadbent, kim.broadbent@phila.gov, 215-686-7660

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE COMMENT: The Architectural Committee commented that the applicant should consider the suggestions offered during the review of this project.

OVERVIEW: This application proposes to construct a duplex on a vacant lot in the Spring Garden Historic District. The Commission's jurisdiction is likely Review-and-Comment because the site appears to be undeveloped; however, a remnant of the former building related to a shared alleyway entrance stands at the edge of the lot and may be sufficient to consider the site developed. Before considering the merits of the design, the Historical Commission will need to determine whether it considers this site developed or undeveloped and therefore whether its jurisdiction is Full or Review-and-Comment.

A limestone base and brick veneer, the color of which is not specified, are proposed as front façade materials. The building is comparable to the other rowhouses on the block in terms of its height. The staff considers the design of the front façade to be incompatible with the historic district in terms of rhythm, scale of openings, and proportions, and there is a lack of information about the entryway and cornice.

DISCUSSION: Ms. Broadbent presented the application to the Historical Commission. Architect Jason Birl and property owner Tomas Hanna represented the application.

Mr. Sherman stated that the Commission must first decide if it has plenary jurisdiction or review-and-comment jurisdiction over the site. Mr. Dilworth asked if the historic value of the site is based on the shared alleyway, and if so, he reminded the Commission that the alleyway, including lintel and bricks, is being maintained as part of the proposal. Mr. Baron responded that, if the Commission were to deny the project, the denial would be based on Standard 9, which provides guidance regarding the compatibility of rhythm and scale for new construction. Mr. Thomas asked how much of a building needs to remain standing for the Commission to have plenary jurisdiction. Mr. Birl responded that the shared alleyway will be less than five percent of the overall façade, and less than two-and-a-half percent of the overall lot. Mr. Schaaf responded that there is a substantial amount of structure remaining on this lot, and opined that the Commission should assert plenary jurisdiction. Mr. Dilworth opined that the Commission should have plenary jurisdiction, but only if it were to approve the application as presented. He questioned whether the Commission could argue that there may be archaeological potential at this site and other undeveloped sites, which he considered to be unfair. Mr. Birl commented that the Hannas have owned the lot since 1980, and it was a vacant lot for quite some time before that. He also noted that the block is not as cohesive as one may think, and there are several properties on the block that are not part of the historic development. Mr. Baron commented that the Commission has, in years past, not considered a site undeveloped when it was a missing tooth out of a row, because the whole row was the development, and a piece of that development is missing. Mr. Farnham disagreed with Mr. Baron's interpretation, which is not supported by the ordinance.

Mr. Farnham offered the current definition of an undeveloped site from the Commission's Rules & Regulations as a property within a historic district which is not individually designated, which the subject property is not; to which the inventory for the historic district attributes no historical, cultural, or archaeological value, which the inventory does not; and upon which no building or structure stood at the time of designation of the historic district. He explained that the question to be answered by the Commission is whether the shared passageway constitutes a structure.

Justino Navarro of the Spring Garden Civic Association stated that the Civic Association's position is that the Commission should exercise plenary jurisdiction over this site because of the existing structure upon the site. He explained that the Civic Association was involved in restoration work to multiple buildings in the neighborhood years ago, one of those being 1629 Mount Vernon Street, where it was determined that the shared alleyway was a historic feature. He stated that the Civic Association has no opposition to the owner's intent to develop a ground-level entrance to provide access for his parents, but he believes the design is incompatible with the historic district. He encouraged the owner to work with the Civic Association to develop a more compatible design.

Mr. Thomas opined that the alleyway is "occupiable" space that constitutes a structure.

ACTION: Mr. Thomas moved to find that the site at 1627 Mount Vernon Street is developed, owing to the alleyway entrance, and the Historical Commission's jurisdiction is full or plenary jurisdiction. Mr. Dilworth seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Schaaf commented that, in the Society Hill neighborhood, there are many examples of mid-century modern architecture that offer commentary on earlier architecture, but with its own architectural expression. He opined that it would be easy to just infill this lot with a building to match the row, but this building can instead be the exception to the rule that makes the block exciting.

FAILED MOTION: Mr. Dilworth moved to approve the application. Ms. Turner seconded the motion, which failed by a vote of 5 to 3. Ms. Leonard and Messrs. Herzins, Schaaf, Sherman, and Thomas dissented.

Mr. Thomas asked about accessibility. Mr. Birl responded that the accessibility details are being worked on. He reported that they were initially considering a ramp, but are now considering a series of shallow steps. Mr. Thomas responded that he has seen examples where a ramp is located inside the shared alleyway. Mr. Birl responded that the alleyway is too narrow, and it is also a shared space with the neighboring property. Mr. Navarro commented that the Commission approved an accessible building in the neighborhood years ago at 1619-21 Wallace Street. He explained that he recently took Mr. Hanna's mother to the building, and showed her how it is possible to achieve a ground-floor entrance that is accessible without a ramp. Mr. Hanna asked Mr. Navarro to explain the doorways of the Wallace Street property, which had been discussed during a conversation between Mr. Hanna and Mr. Navarro two days prior. Mr. Navarro responded that the Commission had plenary jurisdiction over the Wallace Street site; it includes a ground-floor entrance that accommodates wheelchairs, and, because the Commission required they recreate the historic appearance, there are also marble steps with a false door.

Mr. Thomas opined that the large blank brick wall features too much unbroken area. Mr. Sherman and Mr. Schaaf agreed. Mr. Schaaf suggested the addition of a window or windows to break up the wall. Mr. Birl stated that he is not opposed to the addition of window openings.

Ms. Leonard asked if the cornice could be modified to be more compatible with the block. Mr. Birl responded that a cornice could be added. Mr. Schaaf commented that a cornice may compromise the design, and noted that this building is not a nineteenth-century Italianate building.

Mr. Sherman suggested that the applicant meet again with the Civic Association. Mr. Birl responded that they are not required to meet with the Civic Association because it is a by-right project. Mr. Schaaf suggested that the applicant meet instead with the Commission's staff.

The Commission reviewed the comments from the Architectural Committee.

Mr. Herzins stated that he would like to see additional window openings. Mr. Mattioni moved to approve the application, subject to the addition of some form of openings in the large brick wall, with the staff to review details. Mr. Schaaf seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ACTION: Mr. Mattioni moved to approve the application, provided windows are inserted in the large brick areas at the second and third floors of the front façade, with the staff to review details. Mr. Schaaf seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

ACTION: At 11:05 a.m., Mr. Mattioni moved to adjourn. Mr. Schaaf seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES CITED IN THE MINUTES

Standard 2: The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinct materials or alterations of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

Standard 9: New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new works shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

Standard 10: New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.