

THE MINUTES OF THE 322nd STATED MEETING
OF THE

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

8 June 1988

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman

Present: Jason Nathan
David Brownlee
Caroline Golab
David Hollenberg
William D. Thompson
Christopher Cashman, First Deputy Director, Department of
Commerce
Benjamin F. Ellis, Commissioner, Department of Public Property
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director, City Planning Commission
John Street, Esq., Councilman, Fifth District
David Wisner, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Licenses and
Inspections
Scott Wilds, Office of Housing and Community Development

Susan Shinkman, Esq., Law Department
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer
Sally Elk, Historical Research Technician
Carmen Weber, Archeologist
Maureen Heaney, Clerk Steno I

Also: David Baldinger, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
MaryLou McFarland, Executive Director, Preservation Coalition
Residents of the proposed Rittenhouse/Fitler Historic District
And others.

THE MINUTES of the Meeting of the 321st Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, held on 11 May 1988, Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman, were reviewed. Mr. Hollenberg noted that a correction should be made to the minutes in regard to the Architectural Committee Report. The statement in the 11 May 1988 minutes which notes that the windows of the John Wanamaker Department Store are being replaced on floors three through twelve should be corrected to read that "window sash" will be replaced on floors three through twelve.

The Commission unanimously voted to recommend an approval of the Minutes of the 321st Stated Meeting, as corrected, for filing.

THE REPORT of the Architectural Committee Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, held on 26 May 1988, David Hollenberg, Chairman. Mr. Hollenberg divided the report into three parts. The first section includes those projects for which the Committee recommends an approval as submitted: 1703 Walnut Street, 3432-36 Sansom Street, 3424 Sansom Street, 123 Queen Street and The Warwick Hotel. Mr. Hollenberg asked that the last sentence of the minute regarding the Warwick Hotel be stricken from the report.

The Commission unanimously voted to accept the recommendation of the Architectural Committee for the approval of these applications.

The second section covers projects that require additional information. These include the Bourse Building and 413 S. 3rd Street. Mr. Hollenberg reported that the additional information has been received and that an approval of each is now recommended.

The Commission unanimously voted to approve these two projects.

The final section includes two submissions: the Forrest Theater and 3428-3430 Sansom Street. The Committee recommended the rejection of the proposal to alter the doors of the Forrest Theater and approved in concept the alteration of the eastern most bay of the front elevation to accept a money access machine and a display case for playbills.

The Committee also recommended a partial approval of the submission for 3428-3430 Sansom Street with a denial of the intrusion of an areaway in front of the property.

The Committee stressed the special significance of this row of intact Second Empire rowhouses built c. 1870. Several of the houses retain their original front yards while others have been paved with either brick or concrete. No areaways currently exist on the street. The Committee found the proposed excavation and basement window alteration to be in conflict with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines and recommended a rejection of this portion of the proposed rehabilitation.

Mr. Schlosser appeared before the Commission and presented photographs, drawings and other illustrations of the proposed alterations to 3428-30 Sansom Street.

Mr. Schlosser stated his belief that the Historical Commission previously had reviewed and approved Design Criteria for the entire Sansom Street Row and that these criteria included sample basement areaway treatments similar to that proposed for 3428-3430 Sansom Street. Mr. Schlosser read a letter dated 6 April 1978, which approved general specifications for Sansom Row. It was Mr. Schlosser's contention that this letter approves, in concept, the Design Criteria booklet adopted by the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority for Sansom Row. A copy of this letter is attached to the official copy of these minutes.

Mr. Tyler pointed out that the letter of 6 April 1978, submitted by Mr. Schlosser, refers to rehabilitation specifications dated 15 February 1978 and not to the Design Criteria booklet, dated 22 May 1981 and 1 April 1982, as suggested by Mr. Schlosser. The 15 February 1978 specifications do not specify or suggest the introduction of areaways on the Sansom Street fronts.

In 1984, under the former preservation ordinance, the Historical Commission did review and approve the introduction of a basement areaway at 3420-3422 Sansom Street. This areaway, however, was never executed. Moreover, the Historical Commission standards and guidelines for review of applications under the new ordinance are, unlike review under the former ordinance, governed by specific preservation/rehabilitation criteria, i.e., the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.

Carl Roberts, attorney representing the Sansom Street Committee, offered to obtain and to submit to the Commission record evidence to show that the Historical Commission reviewed and approved the 1981-1982 design criteria for the introduction of areaways on Sansom Row.

After much discussion, the Commission voted to table this issue. The Commission staff will review its files and exchange information with Mr. Schlosser in order to establish a full and accurate record for consideration by the Commission.

The Commission voted to accept the recommendation of the Architectural Committee with regard to the Forrest Theater as previously described.

Mr. Tyler stated that several months ago an application for demolition of 243 Market Street was submitted to the Architectural Committee at which time it was suggested that a structural engineer be retained to undertake an evaluation of the building. Nicholas Gianopulous from Keast and Hood undertook this survey and reported to the Commission staff that the stabilization of this building would cost \$120,000. Mr. Gianopulous concluded that, "In view of the initial low quality of the building as built and as it exists, we do not encourage the retention and repair of this building."

Mr. Tyler recommended that the demolition of 243 Market Street be permitted with the requirement that the developer submit plans and specifications for the proposed new construction on the entire site covering 241-245 Market Street to the Commission for a final review and approval.

The Commission unanimously voted to allow the demolition of 243 Market Street as conditioned.

THE REPORT of the Philadelphia Historical Commission Staff Activities for May 1988, Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer.

The Commission voted to accept this report and directed that it be filed with the minutes of this meeting.

At this time, Christopher Cashman reported to the Commission that the Commerce Department has received a number of questions and concerns relating to the treatment of non-contributing buildings in an historic district. Mr. Cashman suggested the appropriateness of applying the standard for the review of new construction to proposals for alterations to non-contributing buildings, i.e., a forty-five day period of review and comment.

Councilman Street explained to Mr. Cashman that the ordinance sets forth the Commission's powers and that the Commission cannot change its authority under the ordinance but only establish regulations to guide its members in the application of those powers.

Mr. Tyler stated that, in his opinion, the Commission has no jurisdiction over demolition of non-contributing buildings. Mr. Tyler stressed the Commission's need to find a solution to the proposed treatment of applications for alterations to non-contributing buildings to avoid inconsistencies in standards and the encouragement of demolition of non-contributing buildings. Mr. Tyler suggested that the Commission consider adopting a 45-day period of review and comment for the review of any proposed alteration to a non-contributing building in an historic district as a solution to this dilemma. Such treatment would parallel the Commission's power over new construction on undeveloped land in an historic district and would allow the continuity of the historic process of design evolution.

After much discussion, the Commission unanimously voted to table the discussion on the treatment of non-contributing buildings in historic districts.

THE REPORT of the Committee on Historic Designation

The Rittenhouse/Fitler Residential Historic District, David Brownlee.

Richard Tyler reviewed the lengthy nomination process which the Commission staff, the Designation Committee and various neighborhood organizations have followed over the last two years. Mr. Tyler also read aloud the letter dated 6 May 1988 from Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director of the Planning Commission supporting the designation of the Rittenhouse/Fitler district with minor boundary modifications. A copy of this letter is attached to the official copy of the minutes.

Mr. Tyler stated that this proposed district contains 2,359 properties with 217 or 9.2% listed as significant; 1977 or 83.8% listed as contributing; and 165 or 7% listed as non-contributing. Mr. Tyler pointed out that for an urban setting these percentages reflect a very high degree of integrity of the resource.

David Brownlee illustrated with slides the architectural significance of this proposed district. Mr. Brownlee also stated that the historical significance of the properties in this proposed district fully matches the architectural significance. Mr. Brownlee also remarked on the number of buildings in this area that are not now in use as residences but which contribute to the overall historical and architectural character of the area.

Following the presentation by Dr. Brownlee, many residents of the Rittenhouse/Fitler area addressed the Commission and voiced their concern, objection or support. The following issues were among those most frequently raised:

1. Buildings currently with commercial uses do not reflect the character of the district;
2. Restrictions on property owners with regard to alterations of their buildings;
3. Treatment of non-contributing buildings.

Richard Tyler explained the procedures of the Historical Commission addressed the concerns expressed. After much discussion between the audience and the members of the Commission, Richard Tyler suggested that a meeting be scheduled within the next few weeks to continue the hearings on the proposed designation of the Rittenhouse/Fitler Residential Historic District. Councilman Street recommended that the meeting be held in the evening.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maureen Heaney
Clerk Stenographer I

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