

THE MINUTES OF THE 362ND STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

13 May 1992

Conference Room of the
Philadelphia Historical Commission
Suite 1301, 1401 Arch Street

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman

Present

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman
David Brownlee
David Hollenberg
Jason Nathan
Stephanie G. Wolf
Louis Einhorn, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Public Property
Scott Wilds, Executive Assistant, Office of Housing & Community Development

E. Jane Hix, Assistant City Solicitor, Law Department
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Sara Jane Elk, Historical Research Technician
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

The Chairman noted that there was not a quorum. There being no objection, the Commission proceeded with the agenda.

The Minutes of the 361st Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, held 8 April 1992, Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman. Mr. Simcox pointed out an error regarding discussion of the Victory Building. The appeal of the Commission's denial of a demolition permit will be heard by Common Pleas Court Judge Bradley, not "Judge Broderick" as indicated in the minutes. A motion to approve the minutes, as corrected, was made by Mr. Wilds, seconded by Dr. Brownlee and approved by unanimous vote.

The Report of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held 29 April 1992, David Hollenberg, Chairman. Mr. Hollenberg summarized three applications:

Approval in Concept

Bonwit Teller Building, 1700 Chestnut Street: The Committee recommended approval in concept for plans by Jacobs/Wyper Architects to alter this 1927 art deco department store for Daffy's Inc., a retail clothing corporation. The scope of work includes window replacement on the upper floors, installation of interior security grilles, as well as two new decorative exterior gates at the recessed entrances. *The Committee encouraged a closer match of the subtle shape of the original window frames. It also requested detailed drawings of the final design of the gate as well as its means of attachment to the building. The Committee recommended conceptual approval of this proposal, with the preceding remarks.*

Mr. Nathan seconded this recommendation, which was adopted unanimously.

Approval

The Bellevue Stratford Hotel, 200 S. Broad Street: The Committee recommended approval of plans to alter the Walnut Street entrance to improve visibility of and accessibility to the Shops inside. The scope of work includes removal of steps, rebuilt in the 1950s, to make the entrance flush with grade. Doors, of sufficient width to accommodate a wheelchair, and flanking vitrines of glass and bronze will be installed. *The Committee recommended approval of this proposal.*

Mr. Nathan seconded this recommendation, which was adopted unanimously.

Philadelphia City Hall, Broad and Market Streets

The Committee recommended approval of plans by the Vitetta Group for three proposed demonstration projects for City Hall. Last month, the Commission voted an approval in concept for two of these three projects, including plans to rehabilitate the east portal and the northeast stair tower. Plans to improve a row of offices were tabled last month. However, the Committee had reviewed them and recommends approval of this project as well. A more specific description of the scope of work is provided in the Report; following are summaries of significant changes from plans presented last month:

East Portal

The architects propose to clean, patch, paint and re-lamp this portal. Intrusive structures, including the vending booths, will be removed independently.

- **Encaustic tile:** A proposal to replace missing decorative tile with segments of colored concrete has been deleted.
- **Stair:** Seeking to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the architects proposed to install a railing on the stairs that rise from the portal to the second floor. The architects discussed their proposal to install a center railing with Bennett Levin, Commissioner of Licenses & Inspections. The architects indicated that Commissioner Levin deemed the existing condition satisfactory given the architectural value of this feature.
- **Ceiling lighting:** The architects now propose to retain a Sputnik fixture, a multi-lamp globe, while raising it several feet to allow an unobstructed view down Market Street from the mezzanine. They still want to cut six holes in the coffered ceiling for downlighting, a number significantly reduced from the original thirty proposed.

The Committee commended the new proposal, which entails fewer penetrations of historic material. However, the Committee discouraged a final decision on retaining the Sputnik at this location until a later time. Some members suggested that alternative hanging fixtures, serving the same function as the Sputnik, may better fit the architectural character of the space.

- **Bird netting:** The architects will prepare a small test area in the north portal, which has substantial downlighting, to provide a test area of the proposed netting scheme.
- **Cleaning, painting, polishing:** The architects will secure staff approval of samples for all cleaning treatments and color schemes before proceeding with treatments of large surfaces.

General Remarks: The Committee encouraged the City to allow vending in this area, though not within the existing intrusive structures. Members suggested exploring designs for decorative wrought iron carts or kiosks with light fixtures incorporated into their tops.

The architects drawings depict the installation of decorative iron gates at the portals, features which were present in architect John McArthur's early plans for City Hall. Members of the Architectural Committee recommended approval, contingent upon details for plans of the means of attachment to the building.

Northeast Stair Tower

- **Stairs:** In March, the architects proposed to install a railing down the center of these stairs to comply with legal requirements. The architects discussed this proposal to install a center railing with Licenses & Inspections Commissioner Bennett Levin. The architects indicated that Commissioner Levin deemed the existing railing sufficient given the architectural value of this historic resource.
- **Cleaning, painting, polishing:** The architects will secure staff approval of samples for all cleaning treatments and color schemes before proceeding with treatment of the surfaces.

Offices: Third floor

A third demonstration project entails improving a row of offices on the third floor. The architects want to upgrade these rooms, while providing a genuine feeling of their location in an historic building. This aesthetic will be conveyed by exposing the vaulted ceilings, restoring the iron door frames and windows and by restoring historic light fixtures or installing reproductions. The architects propose somewhat different treatments for each room.

- **Doors:** Fire safety provisions in the Philadelphia Code require one-hour fire-rated doors along corridors. None of the office doors in City Hall comply with these requirements. However, based on the assumption that the City will install a sprinkler system in the future, the architects intend to seek a variance from these provisions.

Further, none of the office doors meet the requirements of the ADA. All doors must have handles, instead of knobs, or eighteen inches clear space between the hardware and door jamb. *The Architectural Committee urged the architects to seek a variance on this matter. The Committee also requested that the architects ensure that the door hinges, which are impressed with the Seal of the City of Philadelphia, are secured with tamper-proof screws.*

- **Ceilings:** The architects will examine several treatments, including removal of the existing suspended ceiling and restoration of the original vaulted ceiling. A new suspended ceiling will be hung in a conference room, to provide greater acoustical control.
- **Lighting:** A variety of configurations will be examined, including restoration and simulation of historic fixtures and downlighting from new fixtures installed between the vaults.
- **Walls:** Near the door and window of each room, the architects propose to install two drop ceiling compartments for ductwork, pipes and other mechanical systems. They also propose to install a cabinet along the wall by the door for vertical wiring and utilities. Tiles along these walls will be "mined", only to the degree necessary and from a few designated areas, to repair wainscoting at other locations. Generally, the tile wainscoting will be restored where unaffected by utility cabinets. An acoustical wall treatment will be installed above the wainscot in each room.

- **Air Conditioning:** The scope of work also includes air conditioning these rooms. The eventual installation of central air-conditioning systems will remove the need for the many existing window units. The chilling units for the demonstration rooms will be installed in the lavatory and will not harm any historic fabric.

The Committee recommended approval of this project, incorporating all of the preceding comments and specific recommendations.

Mr. Nathan seconded this recommendation, which was approved unanimously.

COMMENDATION OF DAVID HOLLENBERG, Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer.

Richard Tyler expressed his profound gratitude and respect for David Hollenberg, who has served on the Commission and as Chairman of its Architectural Committee since April 1985. In his role as Chairman, Mr. Hollenberg has been an exemplar of public service. He has committed innumerable hours to review proposals for alterations to historic buildings. In this role, Mr. Hollenberg has demonstrated creativity in facing vexing design problems while conveying an understanding of applicants' needs. Throughout, he has treated the public with great respect and has maintained a sense of humor. Mr. Tyler expressed his profound regret that Mr. Hollenberg is resigning in order to join the National Park Service. As a token of his esteem, Mr. Tyler presented David Hollenberg with the George Howe Award for Outstanding Public Service in the Review of Design Alterations of Historic Landmarks. This unique honor bestowed upon Mr. Hollenberg is signified by a glass block, part of renovations designed by Mr. Howe, that was salvaged from the Bulletin Building.

The Commission heartily endorsed Mr. Tyler's comments.

The Report on Staff Activities, April 1992, Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer.

A motion to adopt this report, made by Mr. Nathan and seconded by Mr. Brownlee, was approved.

Reading Terminal Market: Mr. Wilds expressed concern regarding mention that proposed alterations to the Market did not conform with plans previously approved by the Commission. Mr. Tyler indicated that the Authority and Commerce Department have been most cooperative in addressing this problem. The plans will be reviewed by staff and then presented to the Architectural Committee.

Victory Building: On 6 February 1992, the Board of Licenses and Inspections Review reversed the Historical Commission's denial of a demolition permit for the Victory Building. The City filed a notice of appeal with the Court of Common Pleas to preserve its right of appeal. Without a relatively concrete demonstration of the practicality of sale or the reasonableness of reuse, however, this appeal may be difficult to maintain before a court. The prospect that Thomas Jefferson University Hospital might occupy the building, which influenced the Commission's denial of the permit, has dissipated. However, discussion has ensued with the federal General Services Administration regarding the prospects of occupancy by the National Park Service or another federal agency. Through this dialogue, it has become clear that federal acquisition holds the best hope for the rehabilitation of the Victory Building. Rental of its space by a federal agency, following private development, seems less viable because several other nearby historic buildings can offer lower rental rates.

With funding from preservation organizations, the first two floors have been sealed with plywood, wire lath and stucco. Since then, the Fire Department has reported no fires.

On the legal front, argument for the Commission's appeal has been scheduled for October 2, 1992. Judge Bradley ostensibly wants to know the ruling of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in the matter of United Artists' before hearing argument.

Certified Local Government Comment on Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places.

Germantown Junction: Built three phases between 1896 and 1915, this station for the Pennsylvania Railroad was designed by Theophilus P. Chandler. Dr. Brownlee noted that the station is a major building by a major architect and symbolic of the Pennsylvania Railroad's reach to Manhattan. It appears to meet the criteria for entry on the National Register.

German Society: Built in 1888 by plans of William Gette, the headquarters of the German Society of Pennsylvania has been a center of German culture in this region. This building is already on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Dr. Brownlee recommended forwarding a favorable recommendation of both buildings for entry upon the National Register of Historic Places.

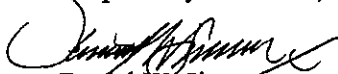
Mr. Nathan seconded this recommendation, which was approved unanimously.

At this time, Mr. Tyler announced that this meeting was probably the last of the Commission as presently constituted. A number of the members have served on the Commission since its reorganization in 1985. Mr. Tyler conveyed his profound gratitude to the Commission members for their years of service and support of the staff, particularly in the implementation of the new ordinance and in addressing a number of difficult issues, especially United Artists'.

Jay Nathan commended the leadership and direction provided by the staff and by Mr. Montgomery as chairman.

There being no further business, the Commission adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,


Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary