

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
OF THE PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

20 March 1985

Herbert W. Levy, A.I.A., Chairman

- Present: Herbert W. Levy, A.I.A., Chairman
Theodore T. Bartley, Jr., F.A.I.A., Preservation Committee, American Institute
of Architects, Philadelphia Chapter
John Dickey, F.A.I.A.
David Hollenberg, Philadelphia Historical Commission Member/Architect
Ken Cooper, Esq., Deputy City Solicitor, Law Department
Richard Tyler, Historian
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Architectural Historian
Randal Baron, Executive Secretary
Terry Koob, Clerk-Steno II
- Also: Raymond Rola, Architect, to present revised drawings for the rehabilitation
of 51 North 2nd Street and 125 Cuthbert Street
Angelo Koutsoubs, to request an approval of illegal alterations to the facade
of 121 North 21st Street
Robert Thomas & Louri Feinberg of Campbell Thomas, Architects, to present plans
for the rehabilitation of the Wissahickon Apartments at 5211-5231 Schuyler
Street
Robert DeSilets, Architect, to present his proposal for the reconstruction of
a structurally deficient wall of a wing at the rear of Mother Bethel A.M.E.
Church, 419 South 6th Street
Jeff Gibbons and Michael O'Connor of Bohlin Powell Larkin Cywinski, Architects,
to present plans for renovations to Belfield located at 5500 North 20th Street
Earle Ball and Grace Wheeler of William Penn Charter School and Architect Charles
Hough to request permission to demolish the Steel House and its accessory buildings
Verna Shmavonian, City Council staff person
Lenore Millhollen, Preservation Coalition
Mary Beth Lonergan, Gray Smith's Office
Anita M. Mastroieni, Germantown Courier
Phil Furnas

During the Committee's executive session, Mr. Levy raised the issue of compensation for members of the Architectural Committee. Since new committees will be appointed by the reconstituted Philadelphia Historical Commission, Mr. Levy recommended that the Commission offer some compensation to Committee members in recognition of the time and energy expended by them in the performance of their duties. Mr. Levy pointed out that this is common practice among other design review boards. The other Committee members present expressed their concurrence and agreed to ask the Historical Commission to consider this recommendation.

SUBMISSIONS FOR ALTERATIONS

Fort Mifflin, East Sallyport Bridge over Moat, John Dickey, Architect.

Mr. Dickey presented plans to the Architectural Committee calling for the construction of a bridge over the moat to Fort Mifflin. The proposed bridge, to be supported on wood pilings, is based upon a 1921 photograph of a previous bridge sited in the proposed location.

Following some discussion of the construction technique to be used, the Committee voted to recommend that the bridge design be approved subject to the installation of a safety rail along the sides.

51 North 2nd Street and 125 Cuthbert Street, Raymond Rola, Architect. At its November 1984 Stated Meeting, the Philadelphia Historical Commission voted to accept the recommendation of its Architectural Committee to require the resubmission of plans for renovations to 51 North 2nd Street, a three-and-a-half story 1820's house with a twentieth century commercial ground floor and a 1920's addition on the rear.

Mr. Rola presented to the Committee his revised plans which addressed the concerns raised by the Committee members at a prior meeting. These revised plans corrected the windows on the gable wall to be consistent with the size of the windows on the front facade. The new design, however, showed the window sash as nine-over-nine lights instead of six-over-six. When questioned about this discrepancy, Mr. Rola stated that these were stock windows with snap-in muntins. Mr. Rola was informed that snap-in muntin windows were unacceptable. He was advised to install six-over-six, double hung wood windows. Mr. Levy examined the shutter detail and recommended that the shutter rail be increased to 3" in order to accomodate hardware.

The Committee voted to recommend an approval of the revised plans for 51 North 2nd Street subject to the following changes:

1. widening of the shutter rail to 3", and
2. installation of wood window frames and sash with six-over-six lights on the front facade and gable wall of the original house.

Mr. Rola also submitted plans for an addition atop the roof of 125 Cuthbert Street. Since this addition will be set back from the cornice line and will not be visible from the street level, the Committee voted to recommend its approval.

If any changes to the exterior of either building is required in order to obtain Part II Certification by the state and federal preservation offices, revised plans must be presented for another review.

Fairmount Waterworks, David Hollenberg of John Milner Associates, Architects.

Mr. Hollenberg presented plans for the rehabilitation and reuse of the Fairmount Waterworks. This project is being undertaken by the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation in cooperation with the Junior League of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Water Department. This phase of the project involves the rebuilding of the Waterworks' deck and the area below the deck which at one time housed an aquarium. Several of the buildings presently sitting on the deck will be temporarily removed while the old deck and its supporting structure undergo repair and restoration.

The Committee unanimously recommended the approval of the plans by the Commission. Mr. Hollenberg abstained from voting on this project.

121 North 21st Street, Angelo Koutsoubs, Owner. Ms. Siemiontkowski explained to the Committee that Mr. Koutsoubs received a Violation Notice from the Department of Licenses & Inspections in February 1982 for work done on 121 North 21st Street, an historically certified building, for which approval was not received from the Philadelphia Historical Commission. The Commission previously reviewed these illegal changes to the front facade and found them to be inappropriate to the Victorian character of the house and unacceptable. The shortening of the buildings tall window openings, in particular, detracted considerably from the integrity of the original design of the building and the streetscape. It was the opinion of the Historical Commission at that time that approval for the illegal work not be given.

Mr. Koutsoubs was seeking once again an approval for this same work. Since corrections required by the Historical Commission in 1982 were not made, it was recommended by the Committee that approval not be given to Mr. Koutsoubs. Drawings must be submitted for the restoration of the building facade to its original condition. It was stressed that window and door openings must be reopened to their original size and that the frame moldings be restored.

Wissahickon Apartments, 5211-5231 Schuyler Street, Robert Thomas and Lauri Feinberg, Architects, Campbell Thomas & Co. Mr. Thomas and Ms. Feinberg presented plans for the rehabilitation of The Wissahickon, a large-scale apartment building built in 1911 from the designs of W. Frisbey Smith, Architect.

Ms. Feinberg explained that the exterior front facade would remain virtually unchanged except for repainting and minor repairs. Requirements for the handicapped mandate that one of the front doorways be enlarged several inches to accomodate a wheelchair. This will be achieved by removing the existing door frame and installing a new, more narrow frame which will allow the retention of the original masonry opening. On the rear elevation, it was suggested that existing steel fire doors be retained and replaced where missing.

The Architectural Committee unanimously recommended an approval of this submission.

131 North Mole Street, George Pappas, Architect. The Committee reviewed a proposal to lower the existing entrance door opening to meet the floor level on the interior of this building, a three-story, early nineteenth century rowhouse. Ms. Siemiontkowski noted that the window sash on the drawing were incorrectly shown as eight-over-eight lights.

Following some discussion, the Committee voted to recommend an approval of the proposed change to the height of the door opening. They asked, however, that the architect use a taller door, approximately 7'4" in height, and that he keep the head of the door opening at least two courses above the head of the window opening.

A final approval of this submission is recommended subject to the following changes:

1. the installation of six-over-six light window sash rather than eight-over eight sash, and
2. the reduction of the door opening to a height two courses above the ground floor window opening.

Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, 419 South 6th Street, Robert DeSilets, Architect.

Mr. DeSilets presented to the Committee plans for the demolition of a portion of the rear wing on Mother Bethel Church and its reconstruction using salvaged original brick and new matching brick. The architect explained that demolition was necessary owing to the imminently dangerous condition of the wall which posed a threat to public safety. Contributing factors in the deterioration were described by Mr. DeSilets as initially poor construction, water problems and settlement.

The Committee unanimously recommended a final approval of Mr. DeSilets plans.

Belfield, 5500 North 20th Street, LaSalle College, Owners. Jeff Gibbons and Mike O'Connor, Architects, presented plans for alterations to the Belfield Mansion, the home of Charles Wilson Peal between 1810 and 1825. It was explained that LaSalle College wants to use this house as the President's office utilizing the rear terrace as an outside reception area. Proposed changes to the front of the building include the removal of window frames enclosing the porch and, if financially feasible, reconstruction of the original columns. Major changes would occur in the rear of the house where the architects propose making two new doorways by enlarging existing window openings. The terrace will be resurfaced with cast stone to achieve a more level surface. They additionally proposed removing existing shingles on a small rear addition and applying a uniform coat of stucco and paint to match the rest of the building.

Following an examination of the plans, the Committee voted to recommend their approval, in concept, to the Commission. The architects agreed to submit a complete set of final working drawings for final review.

783 South 2nd Street, Edwyn Shoemaker, Engineer. Mr. Shoemaker submitted to the Commission staff a report on the structural integrity of the front masonry wall at 783 South 2nd Street. Mr. Levy reviewed the report and recommended that the Commission allow the facade to be dismantled and reconstructed. Mr. Levy and Mr. Hollenberg examined the elevation drawing submitted by the applicant, Lou Orkofsky, and agreed to recommend its approval. The facade will be rebuilt to match the existing front. A sample strap of brick will be prepared for inspection by the Commission staff prior to construction.

DISCUSSION

333 South Street. Mr. Tyler reported to the Committee on recent developments concerning the proposed rehabilitation of 333 South Street. At the Historical Commission's March Stated Meeting, it was unanimously decided that the second floor masonry fabric of the building should remain intact and that the storefront recess should be preserved to a depth of at least six feet. Subsequent to the meeting of the Commission, Mr. Shusterman, attorney for the owner, informed Mr. Tyler that Mr. Lavin is willing to compromise and to retain the shopfront with a four foot recess.

Mr. Levy stated that he would be willing to consider the approval of a four foot recess as a compromise. The Committee agreed to request the submission of a drawing showing the proposed shopfront alteration. As soon as an amended drawing is received, it will be circulated among the Committee members for review. If the revised drawing showing the proposed shopfront treatment is found to be acceptable, the Committee will recommend a final approval of this project.

DEMOLITIONS

Steel House, 3001 Schoolhouse Lane, William Penn Charter School, Owners. Representatives of the school, Earle Ball, Grace Wheeler and Charles Hough, appeared before the Architectural Committee to request permission to demolish the Steel House and its accessory buildings. Mr. Ball explained that this particular tract of land was of prime importance to the expanded development of the school. Mr. Ball cited two main reasons necessitating demolition. First, the school's need for additional full size playing fields. The second reason focused on the economics of preserving and restoring the buildings. Mr. Ball pointed out that the school had no use for the buildings and that if it did, funds for the restoration and continued maintenance of the building were not available.

Grace Wheeler, at the request of Mr. Ball, provided information on the history and significance of the house. In her opinion, the house possessed little significance. She noted that it did not appear in the A.I.A.'s Guidebook to Philadelphia Architecture and that it was listed only in the appendix in Elizabeth Yarnall's book on Addison Hutton. She pointed out that several Hutton houses still stand in the Philadelphia area and that Steel was not a particularly important person. She suggested that recording the buildings with photographs should be sufficient mitigation to demolition. Of course, in the opinion of the Historical Commission staff, the house possesses major significance as an important

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work of Addison Hutton and as one of the last remaining elegant mansions which once abounded in this area. In an historic sites survey conducted for the State Office for Historic Preservation, the house was judged to be eligible for entry on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Committee members reviewed, at length, with the school representatives, possible alternatives to demolition. These included buying alternative tracts of land, leasing open space from Alden Park, or demolishing only some of the back buildings on the property. Mr. Ball explained that other options had been explored by the school but that none seemed to be viable.

Following considerable discussion, the Committee members agreed to recommend that the Historical Commission impose its six-month statutory delay of demolition and that, during this period, the Commission, its Committees and its staff search for a solution which will ensure the preservation of the Steel House and its accessory buildings. Messrs. Ball and Hough and Ms. Wheeler were advised of their right to appear before the Philadelphia Historical Commission at its next Stated Meeting to appeal the Architectural Committee's recommendation and request that the Commission allow demolition to proceed.

PLAQUES

268 South 3rd Street, Joseph Poniatowski, Owner. The Committee reviewed the owner's request for a plaque for 268 South 3rd Street. Following some discussion regarding the shutters, it was decided that Mr. Bartley would make an on-site inspection of this building to determine its integrity.

Subsequent to the meeting, Mr. Bartley visited the building and reported to the staff his recommendation that the Commission award a Certified Restored plaque to the house at 268 South 3rd Street.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Koob