

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL HARDSHIP PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

**Scott Wilds, Acting Chair
Commission Offices, Room 578, City Hall**

22 March 2005

Present

Scott Wilds, Office of Housing and Community Development, Acting Chair
Kafi Lindsey, City Planning Commission
Vincent Rivera, AIA

Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also

Peggy Conver, Chestnut Hill Academy
Tim Calligan, Chestnut Hill Academy
Frank Steel, Chestnut Hill Academy
Eric Rahe, Bower Lewis Thrower Architects
Jason Sieminski, Esq., Drinker Biddle Reath
Paul Deegan, Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation
John Gallery, Preservation Alliance

Mr. Wilds recognized the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

500 West Willow Grove Avenue, Chestnut Hill Academy

Owner: Chestnut Hill Academy

Applicant: Eric Rahe, architect

History: Wissahickon Inn: 1882-84, Hewitt Brothers, architects and William Mackie, builder; Commons Building: 1905, Frank Miles Day, architect; Woodward Gymnasium, c. 1907, Frank Miles Day, architect; Kingsley Gymnasium: addition to Woodward 1956 and 1959, Martin & White, architects; Kline Science Building: c. 1950, Martin & White, architects

Project: In concept – Demolish commons, both gymnasiums and science building, construct two buildings and parking lot

Frank Steel, Headmaster for the Academy, opened the meeting by announcing to the Committee that the Academy, with its architect, had adopted a new approach. They also met with Mayor Street to discuss the school's goals. The Academy wishes to balance their programmatic needs, the desires of the neighbors and the preservation of the historic buildings on the campus. As a result, the architect has produced a new design, called Option 6. The school would like the Historical Commission to be able to vote on the plan at its April meeting. The school has met with the neighbors and the City Planning Commission with this new plan.

The architect for the project, Eric Rahe, then explained Option 6. In creating this option, he made several assumptions:

- 1) The present campus of the Academy poses a programmatic hardship.
- 2) The Kline and Kingsley buildings may be demolished.
- 3) The Woodward and Commons buildings should be preserved, if possible.
- 4) More encroachment into the steep slope could be considered.

In Option 6, the Commons building along Willow Grove Avenue would be preserved. Several additions would be necessary for it to be feasible, but they will be pulled away from the original building to preserve end elements. Mr. Rahe referred to a historic photograph of the building which showed former outbuildings for the Commons; these will serve as models for the proposed additions. The design for the additions will be similar in style to the contemporary Arts Building on the campus.

The Woodward Gymnasium will be demolished and a new gymnasium will be built in the same place. The new building will have contemporary design elements that blend with the historic Commons building, but will not replicate the historic building. Mr. Rahe noted that the footprint of the new gymnasium will allow the Kingsley gym to remain in case the school does not raise the necessary funds for the construction of the other courts.

The demolition of the Kingsley gymnasium and Kline Science building and the construction of their replacements are similar to what the school first proposed. The new gymnasium building will encroach into the steep slope slightly more than previously proposed.

The Committee reiterated that this proposal was for approval in concept, and the Academy would have to apply to the Commission for final approval for the design of each building before receiving building permits.

Mr. Rivera said that he had toured the campus over the weekend and saw Option 6 as a viable alternative. He characterized the Commons building as the Headhouse of the campus, but noted that it is undersized for the Academy's use. He praised the design for maintaining the centrality of the Commons. Mr. Rahe noted that it was advantageous that the Commons stood along Willow Grove Avenue and that it was the more adaptable of the two buildings.

John Gallery of the Preservation Alliance asked the Academy if it had further investigated Option 5 as the Committee requested. Mr. Steel responded that it had not because they do not now propose total demolition of both buildings. They concentrated their time and efforts in the creation of the compromise Option 6. Mr. Wilds agreed with Mr. Gallery's question, but acknowledged that the school has been responsive to the Committee's concerns.

Mr. Rivera noted that after his visit to the campus, he had concerns with Option 5, particularly the size of the new gymnasium building on Willow Grove Avenue. Mr. Rahe said that when they returned to the neighbors and discussed Option 5; many were concerned about the impact of this scheme as well.

When Mr. Wilds asked about the school's response to the donation of an open space easement, Mr. Steel acknowledged that the Academy's board has not met to discuss its

response and will not meet until May. Mr. Wilds encouraged the Board to meet to discuss the issue.

Upon a review of the several schemes the Committee found that the Academy has shown a financial hardship that warrants demolition of the Kline, Kingsley and Woodward buildings, and the preservation of the Commons Building, with additions, as seen in Option 6. Mr. Rivera made a motion to recommend to the Historical Commission approval in concept of Option 6. Ms. Lindsay seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

The Committee adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura M. Spina
Historic Preservation Planner