

REPORT ON THE ORIENTATION MEETING OF THE PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

26 March 1985

F. Otto Haas, Chairman

Present: Joan Ferreira
Grace Gary
Caroline Golab
David Hollenberg
Jason Nathan
William Thompson
Christine Washington
John F. Street, Esq., Councilman, Fifth District
Charles Pizzi, First Deputy Director of Commerce
James S. White, Commissioner of Licenses & Inspections
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director, City Planning Commission
Eileen Weinstein, Director of Policy and Planning, Office of Housing

Richard Tyler, Historian
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Architectural Historian
Randal Baron, Executive Secretary
Terry Koob, Clerk Steno II
Kenneth Cooper, Esq.

The Historian introduced the Commission members to each other and to the staff.

Mr. Tyler described briefly the role of the Commission under the old ordinance, the changes in historic preservation since the creation of the Commission in 1955, and the inadequacy of the former legislation to address these changes. The Historian then presented an outline of the new ordinance with particular emphasis on the authority to create districts and the permit review process.

Mr. Street explained to the Commission that if a need should arise in the future to amend the ordinance, he would introduce any necessary amendments.

In discussing design review under the new ordinance, Mr. Tyler made it clear that the Commission will only have the power to comment on a new construction. Mr. Street expressed his view that it is important to control new construction to prevent totally incongruous new designs within historic rows. Ms. Kaplan supported this position and explained that the good modern infill buildings in Society Hill resulted from the architectural guidelines of the Redevelopment Authority that regulated material, scale and rhythm. Mr. Tyler replied that design guidelines could too easily inhibit good modern design which should provide us with tomorrow's landmarks.

Mr. Tyler stated that the Department of Licenses and Inspections provides the mechanism of enforcement for the Historical Commission. Commissioner White took the opportunity to show the Commission the poster already prepared by his Department to give public notice of proposed demolitions of historic properties as stipulated in Section (7)(b). He told the Commission that he would assign his best building inspector to work with the Commission in the implementation of the provisions of the new ordinance.

Mr. Tyler observed that under the new ordinance, the Commission could delay a demolition indefinitely subject to an applicant's demonstration that a building could not yield a reasonable return on investment, a position upheld by the U. S. Supreme Court in the Grand Central case. The old ordinance provided only for a six-month moratorium on demolition. Mr. Nathan expressed concern that the Commission recognize the realities of the marketplace in invoking this section. Mr. Tyler responded that the particular professional composition of the Commission had been established, in part, with this question in mind.

Mr. Tyler recommended to the Commission that it continue the practice of having advisory committees for certification and architectural review. He further recommended that the Architectural Committee be composed mainly of architects who do not sit on the Commission to provide broader participation and a greater variety of perspectives. He suggested the following architects for membership on the Architectural Committee: David Hollenberg as Chairman, John Dickey, Herbert Levy, Penelope Batcheler and David DeLong.

Mr. Tyler suggested the following names for appointment to the Committee on Certification: Caroline Golab, Grace Gary, David Baldinger, Hyman Myers, Janet Klein and Sandra Tatman.

By consensus the Commission members accepted these several committee recommendations for formal action at its first regular meeting.

It was proposed that the regular meetings of the Commission should occur on the second Tuesday of each month at 3:00 P.M., with the first meeting scheduled for 9 April 1985.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Randal Baron
Executive Secretary