

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

David Brownlee, Chair
Commission Conference Room, One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor
9 April 1999

Present

David Brownlee, Ph.D., Chair
Hyman Myers
Janet Klein, Chair, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
David Baldinger, Deputy Planning Director, City Planning Commission
Sandra Tatman, Ph.D.
Stephanie G. Wolf, Ph.D.

Kristin Cardi, Historic Preservation Planner
Elizabeth Harvey, Historic Preservation Planner
R. Scott Jacob, Executive Secretary
Laura Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also

Catherine Franklin, Penn-Knox Neighborhood Association
Tim Wood, President, University City Historical Society
David Bower, Fairmount Park Commission
Joseph Syrnick, Chief Engineer and Surveyor, Streets Department
Madeleine Antinucci, Streets Department
Richard Redding, City Planning Commission
Theresa Stuhlman, Fairmount Park Commission
Amy Freitag, Fairmount Park Commission
James Igess, Wister Neighborhood Council
Tina LeCoff, Penn Knox Neighborhood Association

Mr. Brownlee, Chair, recognized the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

The Committee on Historic Designation met to discuss the addition of portions of three streets to the Historic Street Paving Thematic District and to discuss the possible sequence for the designation of the new historic districts.

Additions to the Historic Street Paving Thematic District

Mr. Brownlee introduced the three additions proposed by the staff for designation to the Historic Street Paving Thematic District including Forbidden Drive, Port Royal Avenue (200 Block) and Skidoo Street.

Forbidden Drive (a.k.a. Wissahickon Drive), Fairmount Park

The first street discussed, Forbidden Drive, extends through Fairmount Park and is perhaps one of the oldest roadways in Philadelphia. Mr. Myers questioned the assessment of the integrity of the roadway as moderate, and Ms. Spina explained that the paving material does vary with the majority of the roadways being covered by gravel but that some areas of compacted dirt and asphalt are visible. Mr. Myers suggested changing the integrity of the inventory to read "varies from moderate to high." Theresa Stuhlman and Amy Freitag of the Fairmount Park Commission questioned the addition of Forbidden Drive to the district based on the fact that the history of this roadway's paving material has not been researched. Joseph Syrnick, Chief Engineer and Surveyor of the Streets Department added that the correct name of a roadway is Wissahickon Drive. The Committee agreed to table the addition of Forbidden Drive until further research can be completed and recommended that the following three items be addressed prior to designation.

Mr. Myers made a motion to table the issue pending:

- 1. Survey of the roadway to establish the current condition. This includes documenting the paving either through photographs or by using a site plan to denote the paving materials, their condition and location along the twelve mile stretch of Forbidden Drive.*
- 2. Testing to aid in the determination of earlier paving materials.*
- 3. Investigation of the structure of the roadway including culverts and gutters.*

Ms. Klein seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Port Royal Avenue, 200 Block

The second proposed addition, Port Royal Avenue (200 block), extends through a rural section of the Shawmont area of Upper Roxborough and consists of a granite block cartway of moderate integrity. Two representatives from the Streets Department, Mr. Syrnick and Madeleine Antinucci, District Engineer of the Fourth Highway District, spoke regarding the current condition of this cartway. Ms. Antinucci stated that the Streets Department has concerns regarding the steep grade of the street and the lack of drainage provisions. She also noted that the surface of the street becomes slick in wet weather. Mr. Brownlee observed that the function of this Committee is to determine whether a nominated resource meets one or more of the criteria for designation provided in the historic preservation ordinance. He added that although safety may be a concern of the Commission and that in the future the Commission could permit the street to be paved in a bituminous material, the current granite block paving does meet the standards that would allow its inclusion in the Historic Street Paving Thematic District. Ms. Wolf added that despite the safety concerns, a petition submitted by the residents of Port Royal Avenue indicates that they support the designation of this cartway.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to recommend designation of the 200 Block of Port Royal Avenue. Ms. Klein seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Skidoo Street

The final street addressed at this meeting, Skidoo Street located in East Falls, is a granite block street of moderate integrity. A brief discussion arose regarding the name of this street with Mr. Syrnick's adding that the name was changed to Skidoo Street within the last five years. Mr. Myers requested that the staff verify the historic name and add it to the inventory. The Streets Department, represented by Mr. Syrnick and Ms. Antinucci, stated that they oppose the addition of this street to the Historic Street Paving Thematic District citing the grade of the roadway, slick conditions in wet weather and recent water main breaks as reasons to not designate this street. In addition, Skidoo Street has been slated for repaving in asphalt later this year. Mr. Tyler added that he had approved the repaving of this street approximately two years ago as he thought it did not meet the standards for listing on the National Register. Ms. Wolf pointed out that this street appears to be more heavily used than Port Royal Avenue, which may in the future validate the repaving of this street in a bituminous material. Mr. Myers stated that the street should be designated but that the Streets Department's concerns should be noted.

Ms. Klein made a motion to recommend designation, but with special consideration of the street's function as an access to the neighboring school. Ms. Tatman seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Future Historic Districts

The Committee discussed the possible sequence for the designation of the new historic districts. The Committee reviewed the following district candidates:

- * Spruce Hill in West Philadelphia.
- * Streetcar Suburb in West Philadelphia.
- * Penn Knox / Wister in Germantown
- * Spring Garden in North Philadelphia
- * Strawberry Mansion in North Philadelphia

Mr. Brownlee asked the Committee to consider the following criteria in choosing the next districts:

1. What the Committee has said in the past about the sequence of designation (i.e. 1. Spruce Hill, 2. Penn Knox, 3. Strawberry Mansion)
2. The amount of further work on the nomination required for each district.

Mr. Brownlee noted that the old sequence has been abandoned because of the passage of time and changes in circumstance.

Mr. Tyler also asked the Committee to consider the size of the proposed districts and the impact on the amount of permit activity. He explained that the proposed Streetcar Suburb Historic District would add 3,500 new addresses to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, necessitating an increase in the size of the Commission staff. He noted that the other proposed districts are of a more manageable size.

Ms. Spina spoke regarding the amount of work involved in preparing and submitting a district nomination. Although other agencies or individuals usually prepare the nominations, the Commission staff must review them for accuracy and completeness. The lengthy district designation process also involves creating a complete photographic record of the district. Mr. Tyler also noted that the existing National Register nominations and inventories for proposed local districts do not meet the requirements for local nominations.

Committee members discussed the need to work with outside agencies and community groups in preparing reliable and complete historic district nominations and inventories. Ms. Harvey said that she and Ms. Spina already work with many volunteers from the various proposed districts who assist with the researching and writing of nominations. She also mentioned that the Preservation Alliance can assist individuals and organizations with the raising of funds to complete the nomination. Mr. Brownlee noted that the nominations for the Rittenhouse Fidler Historic District and the Society Hill (and Pennsylvania Hospital of Washington Square West) Historic District can serve as models for future district nominations and designation proceedings.

Tim Wood, President of the University City Historical Society, stated that the Spruce Hill nomination was submitted thirteen years ago. He explained that members of the community have recently wanted to incorporate the proposed Spruce Hill district into the larger proposed Streetcar Suburb district because of a broader interest in historic designation and the changing climate of the neighborhoods. Committee members did not want to undertake the Streetcar Suburb district, and favored going back to the original Spruce Hill nomination. Mr. Brownlee qualified this decision by noting the greater integrity of the Spruce Hill neighborhood as an historic district.

Tina LeCoff, representing the Penn Knox Neighborhood Association, spoke regarding the Penn Knox and Wister sections of Germantown, and asked the Committee to consider both neighborhoods in a joint district. The Committee did not oppose the joint district proposal.

After discussing the size and details of the several possible new historic districts, the Committee decided to recommend considering both Spruce Hill and Penn Knox / Wister for the next historic districts. Historical Commission staff will work on both of the districts simultaneously, and the Committee will review the first completed nomination.

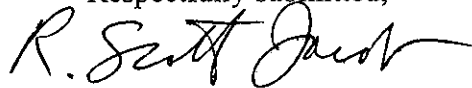
Mr. Tyler asked the Committee members to review the nominations for both of these proposed districts and to provide comments in brief reports to the Commission staff within one month of this meeting. Mr. Tyler will also submit his comments.

Ms. Klein made a motion to consider Spruce Hill only, not the Streetcar Suburb. Ms. Wolf seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to recommend considering both Spruce Hill and Penn Knox / Wister for the next historic districts, with staff to work on the districts simultaneously, and the Committee will review the first completed nomination.

Richard Thom of the Old City Civic Association stated an intention to submit a nomination for Old City as an historic district and that the neighborhood has received a grant to prepare a nomination. He inquired about the possibility of adding Old City to the list of proposed new historic districts. Mr. Thom raised his concern about preparing a nomination only to have it sit while other districts move forward. The Committee members and Mr. Tyler agreed that upon the submission of a complete and accurate nomination for Old City, it would be considered as soon as possible. Committee members described the process and a possible time frame for getting to new submissions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "R. Scott Jacob".

R. Scott Jacob

Executive Secretary