

THE REPORT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

David Hollenberg, Chairman

28 February 1991

Present

David Hollenberg, Architect, Chairman
William Cornell, J.S. Cornell & Sons, Inc.
David DeLong, Historic Preservation Program,
University of Pennsylvania
Donald Stevenson, Architect

Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

Also

Howard Kittell, Executive Director, Preservation Coalition
Joseph Syrnick, Streets Department
Lorenzo Cruger, Streets Department
John F. Lutz, Lane Fike and Ernie Catilus, Streets Department
Richard Slattery, H.G. Lichtenstein and Associates
Missy Maxwell, Susan Maxman Architects
Dennis Montagna, National Park Service
Robert McCauley, architect, Rittenhouse Savoy
Dr. Max Mintz, Rittenhouse Savoy Condominium Association
Tony Crane, architect for 1930 Panama Street
Jill Bonovitz, owner, 1930 Panama Street
Sal Spano, representative, Hartmarx Specialty Stores, Inc.
John Capri, contractor, Wallach's Clothing Store

APPROVAL IN CONCEPT

Strawberry Mansion Bridge: Joseph Syrnick, Chief Engineer and Surveyor for the Philadelphia Streets Department, introduced a presentation for conceptual plans to alter the Strawberry Mansion Bridge. Built in 1897 by the Fairmount Park Transit Company to carry its trolley over the Schuylkill River, the Bridge remains a landmark in the Park even though the trolley ceased operations in 1946. The Department appreciates the historic significance of this bridge and has retained consultants in the fields of bridge construction and historic preservation to assist in this endeavor.

Lorenzo Cruger, Chief Bridge Engineer for the Department, described both the existing conditions and the proposal in more detail. The unique lattice-girder construction and decorative railings have fallen into disrepair; so have the flat steel bottom of the bridge and its asphalt cartway. Deteriorated floor beams and stringers will be replaced in kind and the asphalt will be resurfaced. South of the roadbed and separated from it by a decorative rail, the vacated trolley right-of-way remains open. The Department would like to remove the interior rail and use its

panels as replacements for those deteriorated in the two exterior rails, which will be preserved. In place of the vacated trolley tracks, the Department wants to introduce a promenade to allow pedestrians to view the Park and observe the scullers rowing on the Schuylkill. While an exciting prospect, it presents significant problems. The Schuylkill Navy, a coalition of the rowing associations, stressed the potential hazard of persons dropping heavy objects off the bridge onto rowers and expensive sculls. On the north side, where pedestrians presently can approach the edge, protection is provided by a chain-link fence. To diminish the potential danger from the promenade, the Department proposes to install a safety fence. Though some people want to install pedestrian cages, the Department is aware that those fixtures would detract too much from the aesthetics of this bridge. The Department hopes to achieve a design which is sympathetic to both these legitimate safety concerns and the interests of historic preservation. Mr. Cruger also noted that the old catenary poles and lamps for the trolley were removed; the bridge is now illuminated by standard street lights. He also indicated that Federal regulations may require other barriers between the cartway and walkway.

Mr. Levy, who forwarded written comments before the meeting, suggested moving the safety fence three feet away from the decorative railings of the bridge. This modification would leave twelve feet for a promenade, reduce the visibility of the fence and preserve the historic appearance of the bridge. The safety fence would meet the decorative railing at the end posts, closing off the three foot space from pedestrians. Mr. Syrnick acknowledged the benefits of this suggestion, but pointed out that it would prevent people from looking over the railing. He added that it may even create a pocket where trash would collect. The Committee noted, however, that it would preserve the spectacular vista of the Park and may facilitate bridge maintenance. Mr. Stevenson asked if the alterations would preclude any possible return of a park trolley. Mr. Cruger indicated that the bridge may not be able to support the weight of a trolley anymore.

Mr. Stevenson then suggested perhaps joining the elements added to the bridge, including the lighting and safety fence. He encouraged the architects and engineers to view these fixtures as integral elements of the aesthetics of the bridge. Mr. Hollenberg offered several suggestions toward this end. First, the use of a horizontal safety mesh across the former trolley track area would remove two of the vertical safety fences. This change would provide the required protection while retaining a view of the bridge structure. Second, he suggested merging the two different lights shown for the promenade and the track area into one fixture. This alteration also would prevent the appearance of a clutter of new fixtures. The Committee recommended a conceptual approval of the proposal,

including the reduction of the number of decorative rails from three to two. Final review will focus on the design of the safety fence and light fixtures. Mr. Hollenberg expressed appreciation to the Department for presenting its plans at an early stage. He noted that this project requires approval by the Art Commission and the Fairmount Park Commission. If funded by either Federal or state funds, it also will require review by the respective historic preservation agency.

Rittenhouse Savoy, 1810 South Rittenhouse Square: Robert McCauley of Ueland Junker and McCauley presented plans to replace the existing windows, frames and sash of this apartment building. Constructed in 1955, the Savoy is a contributing building in the proposed Rittenhouse Fittler Historic District. During a study of the windows, the architects found numerous problems, including some which are structural. The thin, hard-caulked windows possess a fixed upper sash and an upward-lifting lower sash. This lower hopper presents problems for some elderly owners and also allows significant water penetration and heat loss. For these reasons, the architects recommended replacement, rather than repair.

The proposed windows would operate more efficiently with less effort and would conserve energy more effectively. A majority of the members of the condominium association agreed with the recommendation to replace the windows. Following a considerable search for a window manufacturer, the association negotiated with Traco Window Company for a double-hung window. The association wishes to order the windows in an antique bronze-colored aluminum. The milled aluminum finish of the existing windows has become dirty and discolored. The owners chose brown, perceiving that it is consistent with the window frames of other buildings surrounding the Square. He concluded by noting that the proposal followed patterns existing in the original window scheme.

Mr. Stevenson stated that the proposal removes the subtleties of the windows and imposes a uniform appearance. Mr. Hollenberg, who concurred, explained that the Committee previously had approved window replacements so long as the profiles were close to those of the original windows. This proposal, however, would significantly change certain window dimensions. Now, there is 6" of metal including the sill and meeting rail; the proposal would increase this dimension to 11" -- a much heavier appearance. A general width of 3 3/8" solid material would increase to 5 1/4". Dr. DeLong asked if the architects considered an alternative window with a fixed upper sash, which would reduce the need for thick mullions. Mr. McCauley noted that the owners' primary interest was for an operative lower sash. Mr. Levy, whose comments were read by the chairman, also noted that the proposal would change the general appearance of the walls. By introducing

exterior screens the present glazed finish would appear as a duller, matte finish. As an alternative, he suggested internal screens. Regarding the proposed color, Dr. DeLong stressed that brown was inappropriate for the building. Mr. Cornell suggested retaining the original color with an anodized finish to prevent oxidation. The project architect advised that the condominium association prefers the brown color. The Committee then recommended that the window manufacturer explore alternatives without operable upper sash. To further study this proposal, the members agreed to meet on site with the architects and window manufacturers.

Dr. Max Mintz appeared and stressed the good faith efforts of the Savoy Condominium Association to address their window problem. The association spent three and a half years examining this problem and they believe that they paid considerable attention to the relevant historic issues. Dr. Mintz noted that they discussed this proposal with William Bolger of the National Park Service. The owners want double-hung windows for reasons of function and maintenance, and they looked for a close match which would meet this functional requirement at an affordable price. Having met with many window companies, they felt that they found a reasonable replacement. After explaining that the original milled aluminum finish collects considerable dirt and grime, Dr. Mintz presented a sample recently gathered to reinforce his point. Combined with the air pollutants that it collects, the finish is unattractive. The owners want a more attractive color which is harmonious with surrounding buildings. Mr. Hollenberg stated that the proposed brown color would be unattractive immediately because it was inappropriate for the building. Mr. Stevenson and Dr. DeLong reinforced this point, adding that it was contrary to the design of the windows and the building. Dr. Mintz restated his position that the association proceeded in good faith and had reached a reasonable example; he also indicated that some of the owners argued vociferously for picture windows and more dramatic changes. Responding to another point, Dr. Mintz clarified that the operable upper sash would not have a screen.

Mr. Hollenberg restated the Committee's fundamental concerns that the proposed dimensions were too thick and the proposed color was inappropriate. He indicated that the Committee would recommend an approval in concept for the replacement of the windows of the Rittenhouse Savoy. However, significant revisions to the proposed replacements were necessary prior to final approval. Once more, the Committee suggested convening an on-site meeting with the architects and window manufacturers. Before that meeting, which will be scheduled by the staff, the Committee recommended that the architects inform the manufacturers of the previously stated concerns. Mr. McCauley concluded that the association could not install an individually built window system; a shop-manufactured replacement was the only reasonable

alternative.

APPROVAL

Wallach's Clothing Store, 1610 Chestnut Street: The Committee first reviewed a proposal to install security grates on this 1927 Commercial Style building in February 1990. In October of that year, the Commission approved a design for grates and three separate awnings. The present drawing resulted from a decision by the Art Commission, which pressed for a reduction in the projection of the grate housing and awning. The applicants accomplished that objective by rotating the motor. An assessment by an engineer determined that the grate tracks must be affixed a minimum of six inches into the middle of the piers. In order to cover the tracks, the awnings must be extended; this change reduced the distance between them to three inches. Because this seemed a perceptual unification and appeared to pose maintenance problems, the Art Commission approved the installation of a single awning spanning the entire facade.

Sal Spano appeared, representing Hartmarx Specialty Stores, Inc., along with John Capri, a contractor. The two men explained the numerous design restrictions imposed by the security grates and housing. The Committee discussed this proposal at length. It noted that the installation required punching several holes into the stone and that the housing would rest in front of the glass. Although several members suggested that the appearance of the awning was inappropriate for this facade, they agreed that it was not as disturbing as the security grate itself.

Mr. Baron advocated a design with three awnings, even if they were separated by only three inches. Although that small separation would not provide a strong division, it related more harmoniously to the three-part vertical division of the facade, which would be obscured by a single awning. Though Mr. Spano himself preferred the three-awning design, he expressed concern that the Art Commission would not approve it. Mr. Baron indicated that the Art Commission was now amenable to either alternative. The Committee then recommended an approval of the three-awning design.

DISAPPROVAL

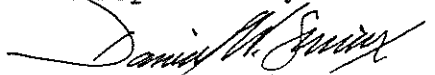
Residence, 1930 Panama Street: Jill Bonowitz, owner, proposed numerous alterations to this c. 1963 brick residence in the proposed Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District. In addition to contributing to the district in its scale and size, the building stands a fine example of modern infill in an historic, residential environment. The staff, in consultation with several members of the Committee and Commission, discussed this proposal at length with the architect and owners. After much negotiation and compromise, a modified plan emerged and a building permit was

approved for a majority of the work. Now, the applicants were appealing one element of this proposal and sought to widen a kitchen window on the front facade instead of lengthening it as approved. The owners requested this change to increase the amount of light in a small, dark, dining area. Their architect, Tony Crane, architect, also presented a new plan to both widen and lengthen the window. Although the proposed opening may appear as an aberration on the facade, he noted that it will have been created for a legitimate need.

Dr. DeLong indicated that lowering the sill alone would increase the amount of light significantly. After further discussion, the Committee maintained that the proposal to widen the window would detract from the aesthetic of this building and would appear as an aberration on the street. Presently, the window fits into a narrow reveal in the building and the ground floor windows match the width of those on the second floor. By a vote of 3-1, with Mr. Cornell opposed, the Committee recommended disapproval of the new plan to widen and lengthen the window. By the same vote, the Committee reaffirmed the staff denial of the proposal to widen the window and its approval of the proposal lengthen it.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Daniel W. Simcox
Executive Secretary