

**REPORT OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**Arlene Matzkin, Chairperson
Commission Conference Room
Suite 1301, 1401 Arch Street
10 February 1995**

Present

**Arlene Matzkin, Chairperson, Architectural Committee
Penelope Batcheler
J. William Cornell
David Hollenberg
Herbert W. Levy
Suzanne Pentz**

**Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer
Lori Plavin Salganicoff, Historic Preservation Specialist**

Also

**Bernice Hamel, Society Hill Civic Association
Tom Hine, Philadelphia Inquirer
Roger Pritchard, Preservation Coalition
Randy Cotton, Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation
Peter Shaw, P & A Associates
David Ertz, Cope Linder Associates
Gerald Cope, Cope Linder Associates
Sam Fadullon, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Milton Marks, Preservation Coalition
Warren E. Huff, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Bill Dupont, American Institute of Architects Philadelphia Chapter
Richard Snowden, Preservation Coalition**

PSFS AND YORK ROW: 700 AND 712, 714, 716 WALNUT STREETS

Peter Shaw, P & A Associates

Gerald Cope, Cope Linder Architects

PROPOSAL: Partial Demolition and Rehabilitation

The Applicant holds an Agreement of Sale for the parcel bounded by Washington Square (7th Street), Walnut Street, 8th Street, and St. James Street. In order to construct a 30-story luxury condominium building, the Applicant originally sought to demolish the three buildings constituting York Row, c. 1807, and a portion of the Frank Furness addition to the PSFS building. As the result of the 31 January 1995 Architectural Committee meeting, the Committee agreed to reconvene after the Applicant had a chance to discuss this proposal and its possible refinement with interested organizations and persons.

A meeting on 7 February 1995 at 4:30 p.m. in the offices of Cope Linder Associates yielded a compromise design. The Applicant now proposes to retain the facades of the remaining houses on York Row with at least 15 feet of their roof pitch. The facades will serve as the streetface for a parking garage and retail spaces; no garage vents will be placed anywhere on Walnut Street. The windows will be glazed with wood sash. The tower will rise behind the rooflines. The building at the corner of 8th and Walnut Streets will be demolished and replaced with new a structure in the scale of York Row and PSFS.

Subsequent to that meeting, the Applicant met with the Society Hill Civic Association and the Washington Square West Civic Association, where those in attendance voted either "no" or "no opposition." All but one of the many people in attendance voted not to oppose this proposal provided that the York Row facades were preserved and that no demolition should take place on the site, including the banking hall until financing is in place. Mr. Tyler noted that the Commission had imposed a like condition on the razing of Smith Hall at the University of Pennsylvania.

The balance of the original plan has not changed; the remaining "L"-shaped portion of the currently "U"-shaped bank will be rehabilitated for use as a lobby and offices. A 240-car parking garage will be located underground and in a new structure on Walnut Street. St. James Street will remain a through street, slightly widened, and will provide access from 8th Street to the circular entrance courtyard at the south (rear) edge of the complex. The tower will be set back from Washington Square by the width of the PSFS building. The rear of the PSFS building will be restored and the newer in-fill buildings at this location will be removed.

Committee members' concerns about the logistics of demolishing almost all but a facade were answered by Mr. Cope's assurances that they could be braced and would not have to be taken down and rebuilt.

Ms. Batcheler suggested that reorienting the rectangular tower along St. James Street would allow the York Row buildings to be retained in their entirety and would only detract from the proposed design by encroaching somewhat on the circular courtyard. Mr. Shaw argued that this change would also result in a different entrance configuration for the complex, and would place the PSFS lobby far from this automobile court and render it useless. In addition, some light into the PSFS building and the courtyard would be blocked by the tower, and the shadow of the N. W. Ayer building would fall on more of the tower.

Mr. Shaw described several other alternatives that were considered. A few reduced the size of the tower, which, he stated, did not make sense economically. The cost of common area maintenance per unit and the square footage cost of each unit would increase substantially with any significant tower size reduction. Moreover, only one apartment per floor would then face Washington Square.

Ms. Matzkin asked whether the preservation groups concurred with the numbers. Mr. Pritchard responded that the Applicant's economic analysis was accepted as a basis for producing a design compromise. When asked about reducing the required parking square footage, Mr. Shaw defended the need for self parking and the two-car per unit allowance based on the experience of other similar condominium complexes in Philadelphia. Self-park garages necessitate more space than valet garages because building code requires greater width for each parked vehicle as well as more shallowly graded ramps.

Mr. Pritchard, who opposed the earlier proposal, spoke in support of the current design. He characterized the Applicant's meeting with the community and preservation groups as a positive collaborations.

Ms. Pentz asked if the party walls of York Row could be utilized in the redesign. She requested confirmation that it is technically feasible to retain the facades without dismantling them and reapplying them as a skin. Mr. Shaw noted that this had been accomplished on Spruce Street. He indicated that engineers would determine the most appropriate method for this work, which could be steel bracing, retention of some depth of party wall, or some other measure.

A member of the audience expressed concern that the facades might not have enough depth behind them and that they could appear to be "wallpaper" on the tower building. Mr. Shaw stated that, although the 15 foot minimum depth is part of a schematic design, enough depth and visible roof will remain to read the facades as separate from the tower. Ms. Batcheler wondered whether the currently missing dormers could be replicated to give a greater sense of roof. Mr. Shaw stated that replacement of dormers would be considered if found to be affordable, but that this should not be required of him.

Ms. Matzkin noted that keeping the York Row townhouses intact is clearly better than having their facades retained as decoration, but that the preservation organizations seem to have endorsed the latter. Mr. Snowden, a developer and member of the Preservation Coalition, stated that preservationists would obviously prefer to have York Row restored as townhouses. However, if sufficient depth is maintained, the retention of only facades and roof fragments would be a fair compromise to maintain the streetscape, regain the use of the PSFS building, and see successful development of the site. He stressed that this endorsement is contingent upon maintaining the illusion of the townhouses afforded by adequate setback of new construction.

Mr. Hollenberg asked about the use of the townhouses' first floors. While emphasizing that the design is still conceptual, Mr. Shaw stated that the steps would not be used to lead to a proposed small retail space. These spaces, to be used for retail or offices, rather than parking, could be accessed from ground level entrances at 8th Street or St. James Street. Mr. Hollenberg stated that the treatment of these windows would greatly affect the perception of the Row as buildings or as wallpaper. It was not made clear whether the floor levels would be maintained and the windows used.

Mr. Shaw urged that he not be bound to a particular program for the use of this first floor space, stating that many concessions have already been made. He declared that this proposal is not open to much more compromise. Ms. Batcheler reminded him that the Architectural Committee was not privy to the earlier meetings and that this was the first time the Committee had seen this proposal. Mr. Snowden added that the proposal is sufficiently sketchy to warrant collaborative refinements in the design.

Mr. Tyler stated that he does not oppose this proposal. Given the location and its surroundings, he noted the desirability of this site for a luxury condominium complex, and that the restoration of the PSFS building is important for Washington Square. He qualified his remark by adding that this solution could not be called the "historic preservation" of York Row and suggested that any recommendation to the Historical Commission stress that this treatment not be considered a precedent. He said that solutions to such complex issues must be handled case by case.

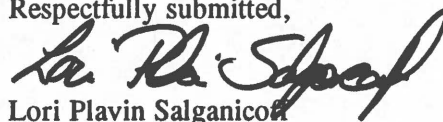
Ms. Batcheler noted her belief that this solution will support the retail activity of the opposite side of the street and encourage preservation and development of those buildings. She asked whether anything remains of the interior and was told that everything historic, with the exception of a few mantels, is now gone. She recommended that whatever is left be salvaged and photographed for reuse elsewhere after Mr. Shaw's development is certain.

Mr. Hollenberg reiterated his concern about the use and articulation of the first floors of the York Row townhouses and restated his question about the 15 foot minimum depth of the setback. He observed that the roofs' ridgelines occur 22 feet from the facade, and noted that his request from the previous meeting for substantiation of the stated requirement for square footage has gone unanswered. The Committee has requested similar verification for other projects. He expressed his support for the project but added that this process should not be considered a precedent.

The Committee voted to recommend approval in concept of the preservation and restoration of the York Row facades and the retention of the roofs to a reasonable depth. The facades shall be restored in situ and shall not be disassembled at any time. In addition, the Committee recommends approving the removal of the western wing of the PSFS building. No demolition shall occur until building permits and financing have been secured. The demolition shall be a part of the construction contract. This decision is particular to this development and sets no precedent for the assessment of future developments. The Applicant shall also be requested to document and salvage historic architectural elements within the buildings or to give permission for others to undertake this.

Mr. Tyler noted that when the design for the complex is at a more advanced stage, it will return to the Committee and the Commission for review. He encouraged that status reports precede a request for final review. Speaking for the preservation groups involved, Mr. Snowden asked that they be included in the deliberations throughout this project.

Respectfully submitted,



Lori Plavin Salganicoff