

THE MINUTES OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

David Hollenberg, Chairman

Society Hill Synagogue, 418 Spruce Street

26 April 1990

Present: David Hollenberg, Architect, Chairman of the Committee
Penelope H. Batcheler, Historical Architect for
Independence National Historical Park
Herbert W. Levy, American Institute of Architects
Donald Stevenson, Architect

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Patricia A. Siemiontkowski,
Assistant Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

Also: John Mikunas, Philadelphia Electric Company
Russell L. Mullen, Jr., Philadelphia Electric Company
Michael A. Del Casale, Philadelphia Electric Company
Irv Shapiro, Society Hill Synagogue, Board of Directors
Richard Cole, Architect
Alexis Berg Marmor, Synagogue Solicitor
Lorna Katz Lawson, 200 Locust Street,
Society Hill Civic Association, Zoning Chairwoman
Shirley Barol, 416 Spruce Street
Dr. Daniel Barol, 416 Spruce Street
Charles Bangert, 425 Spruce Street
Joseph McKone, Lawrence Court Neighbors
Marian McKone, 417 Pine Street
Mary Watkins, 329 S. Lawrence Court
Sally Springer, 317 S. Lawrence Court
Karen Edelstein, 315 S. Lawrence Court
Michael E. Treat, 326 S. Lawrence Court
Carmen L. Treat, 326 S. Lawrence Court
Sonja R. Vent, 322 S. Lawrence Court
Richard Vent, 322 S. Lawrence Court
Alma D. Bove, 316 S. Lawrence Court
Berthe von Moschzisker, 310 Delancey Street
Harry Goldberg, S. Lawrence Court
Martha Levy, S. Lawrence Court
Richard Dyer, DOMUS
Paul Fuerst, DOMUS

A Summary of Architectural Committee Recommendations: 26 April 1990

Society Hill Synagogue

The Commission staff received calls from the neighbors of Society Hill Synagogue registering their concern about the construction of a concrete pad and wall in preparation for the installation of an electrical transformer. The Synagogue also has cut two holes in the south wall of the building which are visible from Lawrence Walk. They wish to install HVAC units and ductwork along the south wall which would be highly visible from the Walk. Given the nature of this problem, the Committee convened adjacent to the Synagogue on Lawrence Walkway.

After listening to the concerns of the many interested parties attending this meeting, the Committee recommended the following:

- that the present installation of the concrete pad and protective wall was unacceptable,
- that the most desirable placement of the transformer was in the basement of the synagogue, where it would have no visible impact on this historic building or adjacent walkway,
- that the second most desirable location for the transformer was in the rear southeast corner of the property, where its impact on this historic site would be reduced, and
- that the proposed location for the HVAC units and ductwork was unacceptable and that the architects find a less visible placement for these fixtures.

— electrical permit- obtained w/o
referral to PHC.

(no)

- new transformer room
- relocate

<Cole>

defer 5/31
to 2pm
Arch.
Cmtee.

Society Hill Synagogue, 418 Spruce Street.

Mr. Hollenberg explained the role of the Architectural Committee and provided background for the project. The Commission staff received complaints from the neighbors of Society Hill Synagogue regarding the construction of a concrete pad and protective wall along Lawrence Walk in preparation for the installation of an electrical transformer. Although an electrical permit was obtained for this installation, the application was not reviewed by the Historical Commission or its Architectural Committee. Given the nature of this problem, the Committee convened on the grounds of the synagogue.

Mr. Shapiro, of the Synagogue Board, informed the Committee that the Synagogue had not intended to circumvent review by the Historical Commission. Further, the Synagogue Board voted to move the transformer and pay for an alternative installation at a location acceptable to PECO, the Architectural Committee and the Historical Commission.

John Mikunas, high-voltage inspector for the Philadelphia Electric Company, negotiated the present location of the transformer based on existing legal and regulatory restrictions. Given the power increase needed by the Synagogue for air conditioning, PECO offered the option of an outdoor pad-mounted transformer or an indoor installation. Having considered the alternatives, the Synagogue chose an outdoor installation because it was less costly. According to Mr. Mikunas, pad-mount installations require the following standards: vehicular access for a service truck, eight feet clearance from the front of the transformer, three feet clearance from any walls, and twenty feet clearance from any doors or windows; if there is less than twenty feet, a barrier wall must be constructed in front of the openings. Mr. Mikunas concluded that the present site met all safety requirements.

The Committee examined the west side and rear of the property, as possible alternative sites. Mr. Mikunas noted that these areas lacked adequate clearance. The Committee, however, noted that it seemed possible to install the transformer in the southeast corner of the property if a segment of an existing iron fence were removed and a gate installed. One resident noted that this suggestion only transplanted the problem. The Committee indicated that this placement at least would move the transformer away from the historic building and the more visible Spruce Street corner.

The Committee also explored the possibility of a subterranean installation. Mr. Mikunas explained that PECO would not install a pad-mounted transformer in a pit for reasons of emergency egress and water collection problems. Such installations were

possible if placed within a vault that provided an escape at the same grade. Mr. Shapiro indicated that the cost of constructing such a vault, which essentially would be a large extension of the basement, would be prohibitive.

Dr. Barol, owner of 416 Spruce Street which fronts on the Walk, pointed out that the earlier discussion of safety neglected the potential hazard which the transformer posed to the many young children who played along the walkway. He objected that the three-sided barrier wall protected the adjacent building but did not protect the children along South Lawrence Walk, a public space. Several other residents of the neighborhood addressed the Committee with their concerns relating to the impact of the transformer on the aesthetics of Lawrence Walkway.

The Committee, having listened to the concerns of the many interested parties in attendance, recommended the following:

- that the present installation of the concrete pad and protective wall was unacceptable, and
- that the most desirable placement of the transformer was in the basement of the synagogue, where it would have no visible impact on this historic building or adjacent walk. The Committee, however, noted that this option might be prohibitively expensive, and
- that the second most desirable location for the transformer was in the rear southeast corner of the property, where it would have a reduced impact on this historic site.

The Committee also briefly addressed the issue of the proposed HVAC installation and ductwork. Given the high visibility of the proposed location from Lawrence Walkway, the Committee recommended the selection of another location. The Committee noted that holes in the rear, or south, wall were cut without a required building permit.

There being no further comments or business, the Committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary