

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**THOMAS SUGRUE, PH.D., CHAIR
TUESDAY, 10 SEPTEMBER 2007, 9:00 A.M.
ROOM 578, CITY HALL**

PRESENT

Thomas Sugrue, Ph.D.
Janet Klein
Bruce Lavery
David Schaaf, RA

Jonathan Farnham, Acting Historic Preservation Director
Erin Coté, Historic Preservation Planner

ALSO PRESENT

John Gallery, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
Elizabeth Blazeovich, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
Howard B. Haas
Liz Lankenai, Kise, Straw, & Kolodner
Richard Thom, Richard W. Thom, AIA
John Ryan, Obermayer, Rebmann, Maxwell & Hippel, LLP
Sherman Smith, 17th Street Development Company, LP

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Sugrue, the chair, called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. Ms. Klein and Messrs. Lavery and Schaaf joined him on the Committee.

228-38 N. 13TH STREET

Owner: Foundation of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
Nominator: Richard Thom
History: 1946, William Harold Lee, architect
Proposal: Designate as historic and list on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

OVERVIEW: The Warner Bros. Distributing Corp. building, designed by William Harold Lee in 1945, has significant character, interest, and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of Philadelphia and embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Art Moderne style (Philadelphia Register Criteria a, d, and j). Lee's work significantly influenced theater architecture in the city of Philadelphia, particularly between 1920 and (Philadelphia Register Criterion e). The subject of this nomination represents a departure from Lee's more common use of the Art Deco style for movie house designs of the 1920s and 1930s. While likely a stylistic choice of its era, the streamlined industrial features that define the Art Moderne style may also represent the functional, business-end of the movie industry as opposed to the fanciful, eclectic, and escapist qualities exhibited on earlier Art Deco movie houses.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The property at 228-38 N. 13th Street satisfies Designation Criteria a, d, e, and j and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

DISCUSSION: Ms. Coté presented the nomination to the Committee. Richard Thom represented the nomination.

Mr. Thom stated that the Warner Bros. Distributing Corp. building is a remarkable building that could be designated individually or as part of a thematic district. Mr. Sugrue noted that there were few Art Moderne properties listed on the Register and he suggested that the nominator mention this fact when the Commission reviews the nomination.

Howard B. Haas submitted a letter of support for the nomination and read the letter to the Committee. He noted that the building is significant because of its Art Moderne style and its architect, William H. Lee. Lee was an important movie house designer. He stressed that most of the film exchange buildings that once stood around 12th, 13th, and Vine Streets have been demolished.

Mr. Schaaf observed that it is fitting that this building stands near the Avenue of the Arts. Mr. Thom expressed his hope that this building could serve as an anchor for the neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION: Mr. Schaaf moved to recommend that the property at 228-38 13th Street satisfies Designation Criteria d, e, and j and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. Lavery seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

1524 N. 17TH STREET

Owner: 17th Street Development Company, L.P.

Sherman W. Smith, III and Thomas Stafford, Principals

Applicant: Sherman W. Smith, III

History: 1886, Willis Hale, architect, demolished March 2007

Proposal: Rescind designation of 1524 N. 17th Street

OVERVIEW: This application proposes the rescission of the designation of the property at 1524 N. 17th Street, which is now a vacant lot. It proposes the rescission pursuant to §5.5.c.1.1 of the Rules & Regulations, which states:

The bases for the rescinding of an entry on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places are 1) the resource has ceased to meet the criteria for listing on the Register because the qualities that caused its original entry have been lost or destroyed...

The “qualities that caused its original entry” were “destroyed” when the building was demolished with a valid demolition permit. The Department of Licenses & Inspections issued the permit on 19 March 2007 without referral to the Commission. The Department was unaware that it was designated as historic because it was not flagged as historic in the Department’s computer. The building was demolished on or before 28 March 2007, when the staff visited the site after receiving a complaint call. The property had been vacant and in such poor condition that the Department considered it Imminently Dangerous. The current owners, who demolished the building, purchased this and several other properties from the Redevelopment Authority on 17 July 2006. They plan to develop a three-story, three-family residential building on the lot. The demolished building was part of an architecturally distinguished row of Queen Anne twins that lines the west side of the 1500-block of N. 17th Street. Noted architect Willis Hale designed the twins in 1886 for Peter A.B. Widener and William Elkins, streetcar magnates, real estate

developers, and Philadelphia's wealthiest men. The Commission designated the group of houses as historic on 3 March 1983.

The unique row of buildings includes bridges that connect adjacent twins across narrow pedestrian walkways. When the building at 1524 N. 17th Street was demolished, the bridge connecting it to its neighbor to the south at 1522 was completely demolished on both sides of the property line, leaving a gaping hole at the second story of 1522. The work to 1522, which is also designated as historic, was executed without a building permit or Commission approval.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends the rescission of the designation of 1524 N. 17th Street, pursuant to §5.5.c.1.1 of the Rules & Regulations, provided the opening in the wall of 1522 N. 17th Street resulting from the illegal demolition of the southern half of the bridge is appropriately infilled under the review of the Commission.

DISCUSSION: Ms. Coté presented the proposal to the Committee. Sherman W. Smith of the 17th Street Development Company represented the proposal.

Mr. Lavery inquired about the identity of the owner of 1522 N. 17th Street. Mr. Farnham stated that the property is currently vacant and is owned by an elderly woman. Mr. Sugrue questioned who should be responsible for the repairs that need to be made to 1522 N. 17th Street. He opined that the building would quickly deteriorate if left open. Mr. Farnham informed the Committee that the staff was drawing up the paper work to request that the Department of Licenses & Inspections issue of a demolition by neglect violation for 1522. Mr. Smith reported that they attempted to shore up the 1522 section of the bridge when they demolished the building at 1524 N. 17th Street. However, once the building at 1524 was demolished, the bridge would not hold and was removed. They stabilized the opening at 1522 to prevent further loss.

Mr. Sugrue regretted the loss of the building at 1524. Mr. Farnham stated that this instance is representative of larger maintenance problems with the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. He stated that the fault lies with the Commission and not the Department of Licenses & Inspections. He explained that the staff has been working to correct the problems with the Register and to guarantee that the appropriate flags are set in the Hansen computer system at the Department of Licenses & Inspections, but it is a very time consuming process that has been deferred for many years. He stated that the Commission does not have the staff to correct it immediately, but is working to correct it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Lavery asked about the new construction planned for the lot. Mr. Smith stated that he intended to build a three-story building, but had not determined all of the details.

John Gallery of the Preservation Alliance opined that the owner, knowing the other buildings owned by his development company in the same row were designated, should have double-checked with the Commission about the designation status of this building. He stated that the Commission should retain its jurisdiction. He stated that inappropriate new construction in this magnificent row would be an atrocity. The designation should not be rescinded and the new construction should be subject to the Commission's full review process.

Mr. Sugrue offered that Mr. Gallery sees this row or block of twins as a mini district and that the relationship between the individually designated buildings is important. Mr. Gallery concurred and cited two examples where the Commission has retained its jurisdiction: 10th and Spruce and the National Products building.

Mr. Smith stated that he was informed that only two of the buildings in that row owned by his company were designated. He claimed that no one has stepped forward to develop these properties, which are in very poor condition. His company is bringing life to the buildings and neighborhood. He added that the Commission does not have jurisdiction over the properties to the north of 1524; he noted that 1526 is a vacant lot. Mr. Schaaf asked about 1526 and Mr. Farnham replied that that property was never designated.

Ms. Klein voiced her concerns about demolition by neglect in this historic row and stated that she did not want this incident to trigger the losses of the other buildings in the row. Mr. Lavery observed that 1524 had already lost its twin; it was only half a building at the time of demolition. He stated that by rescinding the designation, a sharp boundary would be created for the remaining row.

RECOMMENDATION: Mr. Lavery moved to recommend that the Philadelphia Historical Commission rescind the designation of 1524 N. 17th Street, pursuant to Section 5.5.c.1 of the Commission's Rules & Regulation. Ms. Klein seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

300-18 N. 63RD STREET

Owner: North 63rd Realty Associates

Applicant: Hercules W. Grigos, Obermayer, Rebmann, Maxwell & Hippel, LLP

Proposal: Rescission of 300-18 N. 63rd Street from the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

OVERVIEW: Noted Philadelphia architect T. P. Chandler designed the Patterson Memorial Presbyterian Church, at 300-18 N. 63rd Street. Built in two phases, the bell tower and parish house in 1884 and the main sanctuary in 1897, the building was designated to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places on 7 March 1974.

On 15 May 2001, the church filed a demolition permit application for the building. On 29 May 2001 the Department of Licenses issued a violation notice deeming the building unsafe. The Historical Commission referred the demolition permit application to the Hardship Committee on 13 June 2001. After a series of meetings, continuances, appeals and hearings, the Committee on Financial Hardship, at a meeting on 4 November 2002, voted to deny the Church's demolition permit application based on financial hardship on grounds that the Church failed to demonstrate that it explored viable reuses for the property. On 8 November 2002, the Historical Commission voted to deny the issuance of a demolition permit to the Church and, following a rehearing on 12 November 2002, the Board of License & Inspection Review affirmed the denial of a demolition permit in a decision dated 27 November 2002. The Church appealed the Board's decision. The appeal was heard in the Court of Common Pleas on 19 March 2003. On 1 August 2003, the Court issued an Order sustaining the Church's appeal and ordering the City of Philadelphia to issue a demolition permit to the Church for demolition of the entire building. The City filed a Notice of Appeal to Commonwealth Court. On 2 March 2004, the Court affirmed the Order, reversing the decision of the Board of License & Inspection Review and ordering the City of Philadelphia to issue a demolition permit to the Church for demolition of the entire building. The building was later demolished to clear the site for a pharmacy.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the designation of 300-18 N. 63rd Street be rescinded, pursuant to Section 5.5.c of the Philadelphia Historical Commission's Rules & Regulations, as "the resource has ceased to meet the criteria for listing on the Register because the qualities that caused it original entry have been lost or destroyed."

DISCUSSION: Ms. Coté presented the proposal to the Committee. Mr. John Ryan of Obermayer, Rebmann, Maxwell & Hippel, LLP represented the proposal.

Mr. Sugrue opined that the loss of this church with such eccentric architecture is a tragedy that cannot be undone. Mr. Ryan stated that a Walgreen's Pharmacy was built on the site.

RECOMMENDATION: Mr. Lavery moved to recommend that the Philadelphia Historical Commission rescind the designation of 300-18 N. 63rd Street, pursuant to Section 5.5.c.1 of the Commission's Rules & Regulation. Ms. Klein seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

1001-25 FILBERT STREET

Owner: 1001-1025 Filbert Street, c/o Criterion Group LLC

Proposal: Rescission of 1001-25 Filbert from the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

OVERVIEW: The Harrison Building at 1001-25 Filbert Street, designed by Cope and Stewardson and built in 1893, was designated to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places on 2 February 1984. The building was destroyed by fire on 3 May 1984. A bus terminal has since been erected on the site.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the designation of 1001-25 Filbert Street, be rescinded, at 1001-25 Filbert Street pursuant to Section 5.5.c of the Philadelphia Historical Commission's Rules & Regulations, as "the resource has ceased to meet the criteria for listing on the Register because the qualities that caused it original entry have been lost or destroyed."

DISCUSSION: Ms. Coté presented the proposal to the Committee.

RECOMMENDATION: Ms. Klein moved to recommend that the Philadelphia Historical Commission rescind the designation of 1001-25 Filbert Street, pursuant to Section 5.5.c.1 of the Commission's Rules & Regulation. Mr. Lavery seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

401 W. JOHNSON STREET

Owner: City of Philadelphia

Proposal: Rescission of 401 W. Johnson Street from the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

OVERVIEW: The Mayfair at 401 W. Johnson Street, designed by Sugarman and Berger and built in 1925-1926, was designated to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 4 February 1982. On 14 April 1999, the Commission approved the demolition of the building owing to financial hardship. The Commissions decision states: "approval of the proposal to demolish the Mayfair House on the grounds of financial hardship."

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the designation of 401 W. Johnson Street, be rescinded, pursuant to Section 5.5.c of the Philadelphia Historical Commission's Rules & Regulations, as "the resource has ceased to meet the criteria for listing on the Register because the qualities that caused it original entry have been lost or destroyed."

DISCUSSION: Ms. Coté presented the proposal to the Committee.

RECOMMENDATION: Ms. Klein moved to recommend that the Philadelphia Historical Commission rescind the designation of 401 W. Johnson Street, pursuant to Section 5.5.c.1 of the Commission's Rules & Regulation. Mr. Lavery seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Klein moved to adjourn. Mr. Schaaf seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 10:20 a.m.