

THE MINUTES OF THE 351ST STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

8 May 1991

City Council Caucus Room

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman

Present

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman
David Brownlee
David Hollenberg
Jason Nathan
Reverend William D. Thompson
Joseph Certaine, Deputy Commissioner, Public Property
James Cuorato, Commerce Department
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director, City Planning Commission
Donald Kligerman, Commissioner, Licenses and Inspections
Scott Wilds, Office of Housing and Community Development

Maria Petrillo, Esquire, Deputy City Solicitor
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Sara Jane Elk, Historical Research Technician
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

Also

Harold H. Hairston, Deputy Commissioner, Fire Department
Nathaniel Carr, Captain, Fire Department
Samuel Rappaport, owner, Victory Building
Morris P. Hershman, Esquire, counsel, Victory Investments
Theodore W. Garrison III,
Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority
Thomas W. Ventulett III, Kenneth T. Bryson and Jack Plaxco
Thompson Ventulett Stainback & Associates
Nan R. Gutterman, Vitetta Group/Studio Four
Howard Kittell, Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia
Charles Thomson, KYW

Mr. Montgomery called the meeting to order and announced the presence of a quorum. The Commission first reviewed those matters discussed at the April meeting, which lacked a quorum.

The Minutes of the 350th Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held 13 March 1991, Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman. A MOTION to adopt these minutes, made by Mr. Nathan and seconded by Mr. Thompson, received unanimous approval.

The Report of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 28 March 1991, Herbert Levy, Presiding Chairman. Following a brief summary of this report by Mr. Hollenberg, the Commission approved the following recommendations of its Architectural Committee:

- To approve work undertaken without a permit to the General Wayne Hotel, 5058-5060 Germantown Avenue;
- To disapprove proposed alterations to the Wetherill Apartment Building, 1830 Rittenhouse Square;

- To refer a demolition request for the **Jayne Estate Building, 2-16 Vine Street**, to the Committee for Financial Hardship; and to authorize the retention of an independent consultant to examine this application.

[Regarding the Jayne Estate Building, Mr. Cuorato noted that the June 1987 appraisal could not have effected a bid made a month earlier. The staff indicated that it would correct the minutes accordingly].

The Report contains a complete record of these applications.

The Committee also reviewed a demolition request for the **Victory Building, 1001-1013 Chestnut Street**. Constructed in 1873 as Philadelphia's first commercial building in the Second Empire style, it was enlarged by five stories in 1890 and expanded westward with a ten-story addition in 1901. In recent years, the building has suffered considerable deterioration from water infiltration and vandalism. On 29 October 1990, the Department of Licenses and Inspections ordered the owner to repair or demolish loose roof elements and requested an engineering study of the structural viability of the building. The Department sought legal remedy through the Court of Common Pleas. There Judge Lehrer ordered that the owner "forthwith repair or demolish the dangerous premises." The owner inferred that the order regarded the entire building and applied for complete demolition. [Note: This order later was voided by an administrative error; the judge who signed the order did not hear the case.]

On 28 March 1991, the Committee inquired into the maintenance of the building and broached the issue of demolition by neglect. The ground floor openings, which were sealed with tin, have been breached by vagrants. The Committee urged the owner to seal these openings with masonry. Mr. Rappaport objected that this work would not address either the danger to public safety or the prohibitive cost to rehabilitate the building. He maintained that only a costly, comprehensive engineering study could ensure the structural integrity of the building. To conduct such an assessment would require scaffolding the entire building, at a cost in excess of \$1 million. The Committee stressed that it could not evaluate these remarks without an actual estimate or report from an engineer. Following further testimony, the Committee recommended a deferral and requested that the owner submit a complete application as specified in the Rules and Regulations. This submittal should include: a pro forma for reasonable reuses, including office use as well as mixed uses of office/retail and office/residential; an estimate of the cost of stabilization, and; an estimate for the preparation of an engineering study. The Committee also urged the owner to secure the building from the elements and vagrants to avert further deterioration, vandalism and the charge of demolition by neglect.

A re-inspection on 27 March 1991 revealed numerous Code violations, but no imminently dangerous or other dangerous conditions. The Department report of this inspection, issued on 4 April 1991, was clear:

This building is designated historical and must comply with

historical orders as follows: exterior and interior are under demolition by neglect by water intrusion through roof, windows, skylights, flashing, (and) vandalism by trespass at street level. Make repairs as follows: repair roof, flashing and make roof drains operable. Seal windows and remove all broken glass in windows throughout entire building. Close all open roof and skylights to water intrusion. Seal building (from) trespass at street level with masonry seal. Contact Historical Commission for approval of repairs and all work performed.

Any repairs undertaken to remedy this violation require a building permit and prerequisite approval by this Commission.

At the meeting of the Commission on 8 May 1991, Morris Hershman, counsel to owner Samuel Rappaport, reported that he did not have the information requested by the Architectural Committee. He also indicated that the building recently suffered several fires, and that the owner subsequently sealed the building again. Mr. Rappaport then briefly repeated his testimony to the Architectural Committee. Though he maintained a strong affection for the building, its problems have made him fearful of it. After his former business partners impaired his attempt to rehabilitate it using Federal income tax credits, he bought their interests in the building for \$5.5 million. His subsequent solo attempt to rehabilitate this building was hampered by changes in this Federal program. Numerous other financial incentives that he offered to attract partners drew no commitment. Now, he cannot conceive a strategy to finance this endeavor with private funds alone. He has carried its costs through the past nine years even though it has remained vacant and generated no income. He also worries that some architectural ornament may fall on pedestrians. Though willing to continue carrying its costs, Mr. Rappaport does not want to undertake the mandated repairs. Their cost does not seem justifiable to him given the current prospect for rehabilitation and reuse, which has been diminished by a flat office market, a number of other restored historic buildings and the long-term vacancy of the Victory Building. Recently, he sought the advice of the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation. Though he found their ideas interesting, he did not believe that they offered viable development strategies. Though he does not want to demolish the building, the inundation of violations has made it a constant problem for him and the City. Though willing to prepare the requested reports and to sustain his search for a development partner, Mr. Rappaport conveyed grave concern for the public safety and heightened skepticism toward rehabilitation given the current economic climate, the pending increase in City taxes and the new fees for the Center City District.

Harold Hairston, Deputy Commissioner of the Fire Department, stated that the building could be made safe by: removing all combustibles, broom-cleaning every floor and sealing the first two floors with masonry. These fire prevention measures, along with careful monitoring, would secure the building. Mr. Rappaport objected that he could not comply with these requirements. Considerable discussion ensued regarding the scope and cost of the alterations ordered to abate the existing

violations. Don Kligerman, former Commissioner of the Department of Licenses and Inspections, noted that a typical masonry seal for one opening cost approximately \$300. The Commission noted that the cost to seal the building would not be onerous. Commissioner Kligerman then indicated that the applicant had begun to undertake measures to comply with the outstanding violation notices. The Department is scheduled to appear in the Court of Common Pleas regarding this property on 16 May 1991.

Mr. Tyler remarked that some of the rehabilitation strategies suggested by PHPC warranted further consideration. He then stressed that the owner had not submitted any further materials in support of his application for demolition. Following further discussion, the Commission voted to accept the recommendation of its Committee, as previously described, [pp. 2-3].

Finally, the staff referred a demolition request for 5324-26-28 Germantown Avenue to the Committee on Financial Hardship. This application will be discussed as "Old Business."

The Report on Staff Activities, March 1991. This report, which described legal matters related to the Elisha Webb Ship Chandlery, Laning Hall of the Naval Home and the Boyd Theater, as well as the schedule for hearings on local historic districts and staffing levels, was incorporated into the record.

Formal Adoption of the Record of the Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held 10 April 1991, Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman. A MOTION to incorporate this document, the informal minutes for a meeting lacking a quorum, into the record was made by Mr. Wilds and seconded by Mr. Thompson. The Commission approved this motion unanimously.

The Report of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 25 April 1991, David Hollenberg, Chairman. The Commission heard the report of its Committee, which reviewed plans for proposed alterations to four properties.

The Committee recommended approval for a minor revision to previously approved plans to construct a third-story roof addition on two mid-nineteenth-century carriage houses at 309-311 South Chadwick Street. This application returned to the Committee because of a grievance by the neighbors to the rear. Though questions remained whether the proposed windows complied with zoning and building standards, the Committee recommended approval as the plans were in accord with good historic preservation practices. Mr. Wilds seconded this recommendation, which the Commission adopted unanimously.

The Committee also recommended approvals in concept, with specific design recommendations, for the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, the Fairmount Waterworks and the Reading Railroad Terminal. The Commission adopted the recommendations of its Committee for each of these.

The Committee reviewed proposed alterations to the **Athenaeum of Philadelphia**, 219 South Sixth Street, a National Historic Landmark built 1845-47 as the first Italianate building in America modelled on a Renaissance Palazzo. A structural condition survey of the building revealed roof problems and overloaded trusses on the third floor. The Athenaeum responded to the most pressing concerns immediately. It has canceled its public recital and lecture series and closed its collections until January 1992. The Athenaeum proposes to reinforce the roof trusses and clad the roof with copper; strengthen the second floor with steel I-beams; and to remove its collections from the third floor. While addressing these significant structural concerns, the Athenaeum wants to alter the building so that it may serve more completely as a public research institution with exhibition space. Alterations include: changing the first floor plan, hanging several interior, glass doors to create a climate-controlled exhibition space and installing new exterior, glass doors. The historic, wooden doors will remain opened inward during hours of operation and the new exterior, glass doors will swing outward. The Committee acknowledged the interest of promoting a more inviting, public image, but maintained reservations regarding the reflective quality of the glass and the modern design of the exterior doors. **Therefore, the Committee encouraged further study of the exterior glass doors and suggested adding a thin metal frame and simplifying the door handles.** Otherwise, it recommended approval in concept for the proposed interior alterations, including those for the reading room and gallery. Mr. Cornell and Mrs. Batcheler abstained.

The Committee also reviewed plans for an adaptive reuse of the **Fairmount Waterworks**, a National Historic Landmark and National Engineering Landmark. Chart House, Inc., proposes to use the riverfront level as a restaurant. In 1990, the Commission granted conceptual approval for a plan which would have glazed the Greek Temple Pavilion for use as the main entrance. The Chart House altered this design in response to revisions required by the Art Commission. A more conventional entrance with a glass vestibule at the Engine House has been substituted for the glazed entry at Greek Temple Pavilion. The new plans, however, propose to create a skylight in the deck of the pavilion to allow light into the restaurant. They also revived the previously approved plan to construct a glass enclosure on the patio of the Engine House. A representative of the Fairmount Park Commission noted that although the plans showed conceptual treatments for landscaping, forebay excavation and kitchen ventilation, these items were not part of the current proposal. These are all beyond the lease area, which is demarcated by a line along the forebay side of the deck.

The Committee recommended approval in concept for some form of protected entry at the Engine House and for a skylight in the deck sheltered by the Greek Temple Pavilion. It also suggested recreating the historic design of the landscape in front of the Engine House if any work is undertaken there, and using the chimney of the Watering Committee Building for ventilation and exhaust.

Finally, the Committee reviewed plans for an adaptive reuse of

the Reading Railroad Terminal, 1115-1141 Market Street. Built 1891-93, the shed is the only surviving single-span, arched train shed in the United States. Once a terminus for the steam locomotives pulling freight and passengers for the Reading Railroad, it served as a passenger depot until 1984 when the convenience of the Commuter Rail Tunnel rendered it obsolete. On 14 December 1988, the Commission granted a conceptual approval for plans to integrate this National Historic Landmark into the Pennsylvania Convention Center. The southern end of the shed will serve as a monumental entrance to the Center, via the Headhouse on Market Street. The northern end will house conference rooms and a ballroom amid a modern structure within this space. A bridge on the northern end will provide access to the exhibition halls inside a new building on the site bounded by Arch and Race Streets, and 12th to 13th Streets. In its review of the preliminary plans, the Commission stressed the importance of preserving the open space of the structural spans of the shed, so that it may "remain visible to the fullest extent possible."

In November 1989, the Commission granted conceptual approval for proposed alterations to the Reading Terminal Market. Through its review of these plans, the Commission emphasized the importance of maintaining the character of this beloved Philadelphia landmark. Once more, the Commission encouraged the architects to proceed with design development.

On 25 April 1991, the Architectural Committee reviewed more completely developed plans for the trainshed. Restoration architect, Hyman Myers presented slides which illustrated the existing conditions of the historic fabric, as well as a few test patches of exterior cleaning. Then, Project Architect Thomas Ventulett presented renderings and a model of the proposed alterations for the Pennsylvania Convention Center. In general, the Committee commended the architects for having integrated the shed more fully into the design for the Convention Center. It did, however, express reservations and other comments regarding an array of design considerations for the roof, skylights, clerestories, ballroom facade, ballroom ceiling, Grand Hall and the link structure. Its primary reservation regarded the proposed removal of the top, gabled light monitor, sometimes called the "doghouse." While this structure originally vented smoke from the trains, it also allowed light into the shed. This monitor is a signature element of the trainshed's profile. The Committee strongly recommended disapproving its proposed removal.

At the meeting of the Historical Commission, Thomas Ventulett presented a model of the trainshed. Though his discussion, the Commission revisited the primary issues raised by the Architectural Committee. After a general discussion of the model, Mr. Ventulett indicated his concurrence with the Committee regarding the value of the top light monitor. However, he noted that preserving this structure, which would not admit more light inside the shed, will increase construction costs an estimated \$230,000. It will also add to long-term maintenance costs. With a fixed budget, this addition would require the deletion of some other element. Mr. Nathan suggested that the Commission had been flexible in its review and that this architectural feature was highly visible and worth preserving. Mr. Wilds stressed the

value of this top monitor to the "fifth facade," the roof, especially for those people who most often view the Terminal from their offices in taller buildings. The Commission agreed with its Architectural Committee and strongly urged the retention of this structure.

The Committee recommended approval in concept for the proposal to alter the skylight so that it is of uniform width. It also recommended that the architects allow some natural light in through the lower roof clerestories. The Committee commended the architects for the new goose-neck ducts for SEPTA and the smaller ventilation units for the Market, the latter being hidden behind a small parapet. Mr. Ventulett indicated that he will work with the lighting consultant to allow some light in through the clerestories and bounce it onto the ceiling to prevent glare.

Other discussion regarding the exterior touched on the north and south elevations. For the north elevation, the architects proposed to copy the historic glass wall similar to that of the south elevation. In the area where trains once entered the shed, the architects proposed a grid wall which would continue the treatment of the new Arch Street bridge. The Committee recommended approval of the proposed historic restoration, but requested that the architects treat the former train entrance level with black panels so that it appears as an opening. The Committee also commended the proposal to restore the south elevation. This application did not include any proposed alterations for the Headhouse because the Convention Center Authority only possesses an easement through this building which is owned by the Reading Company.

Discussion then moved toward the proposed interior alterations. The Committee commended the architects for their modifications to the ballroom facade. The alterations to the design have reduced its mass and make it appear less like a building and more like an element within the larger space of the trainshed. The Committee encouraged the architects to design the pylons at the fore of this structure to reflect their function as elevators. Further refinement of their design may enhance the space more than the proposed sculpture. The Committee also suggested deleting the fountains shown in the renderings.

Considerable discussion ensued regarding the ballroom itself. The Committee conveyed general satisfaction with reduced mass and added curvature to the proposed ceiling structure. This design retains a better view of the trainshed ceiling than the previous one. This "false ceiling" is proposed to reduce the scale of the space, enhancing its ambience so that it does not seem like an industrial space. The structure also provides tracks for sound and lighting equipment, without affecting the historic fabric. Some Committee members expressed concern that this false ceiling cluttered the space and distracted from the view of the shed. It recommended reducing the size and number of elements in this "false ceiling" to afford the maximum view of the shed possible.

Within the link building, the Committee recommended retention of the existing openings between the trainshed and the headhouse and discouraged the creation of a second arch.

The architects indicated that they would present a complete palette of finishes and colors at another meeting. The Committee suggested that the architects use their discretion in the selection of colors. The interior roof trusses need not replicate the original black. The Committee discouraged a proposal to demarcate the interior trusses by using lighter grey bands across the dark-gray roof exterior. Though it discouraged this concept because the roof never possessed exterior divisions, the Committee noted that it would examine a sample before making a final decision.

Finally, the Committee recommended that the architect meet with Eric DeLone from the Historic American Building Survey and submit measured drawings, not necessarily to HABS standards, for archival purposes.

Following considerable discussion, the Historical Commission voted to accept the recommendation of its Architectural Committee and voted to recommend an approval in concept, with the aforementioned design recommendations.

OLD BUSINESS

5324-26-28 Germantown Avenue: Mr. Tyler reported that the staff received additional materials from Michael Young, the owner of these properties, in support of his application for a demolition permit. A MOTION to refer this application to the Committee on Financial Hardship, made by Mr. Wilds and seconded by Mr. Nathan, was adopted unanimously.

Ms. Petrillo indicated that decisions were pending from the Board of Licenses and Inspections Review and the Pennsylvania Supreme Court regarding Smith Hall and the Boyd Theater respectively. She also noted that a recent ruling on the U.S. Naval Home will result in the demolition of Laning Hall.

Mr. Tyler reported that hearings on the Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District will resume in August. Letters will be mailed starting 1 June. Mrs. Kaplan suggested meeting with concerned residents, at forums convened by local preservation associations, to assuage remaining concerns. Mr. Wilds advocated the preparation of pamphlets addressing basic designation questions.

Mr. Tyler indicated that he would convene an ad hoc committee, including Mrs. Kaplan and Mr. Wismer, to discuss the content of violation orders.

The Commission adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary