

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL HARDSHIP
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Wayne Spilove, Chair
Commission Conference Room
One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor

22 June 1998

Present

Wayne Spilove, Chair
David Brownlee, Ph.D.
Barbara Kaplan, Director, City Planning Commission
Robert Thomas
Scott Wilds, Office of Housing and Community Development

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
R. Scott Jacob, Executive Secretary

Also

Jeremy Moore, Daily News
Johnson E. Collins, Jr.
Jay Falkenstein, Temple University
Gerald Wilkinson
Francis Odyniec
Robert Backman
Robert Cirillo
Allison Kelsey, Preservation Alliance
Kristl Wiernicki, Temple University
George Yu, George Yu Architects
George Ingram, Temple University
Martin Dorph, Temple University
Marvin Gerstein, Temple University
Patricia Clifford, Temple University
Michael Fink, International Consultants, Inc.
Carl Zucker, Attorney for Temple University
James O'Neill, Philadelphia Inquirer
Edward Cunninham
Mr. Wolfram
Mr. Macos

Mr. Thomas, Vice Chair, recognized and quorum and called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m.

Martin Dorph, Vice President, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer of Temple University, provided financial information to demonstrate that financial hardship considerations warrant the demolition of Thomas Hall and 1940-1948 Park Mall and the rowhomes located at 1820-1830 Park Mall. He explained that these demolitions will allow the University to accomplish two critical projects: the

construction of a new 500 bed residence hall at the corner of Broad and Norris Streets including the site of Thomas Hall, and the construction of a pedestrian quadrangle within the 1800 block of Park Mall. The University plans an overall mixed use development and reuse of the remainder of the Park Mall rowhomes.

Mr. Dorph stated that Temple University only decided upon the Thomas Hall site after careful consideration of several other locations on or abutting the main campus. The cost of new land acquisition, extension of campus utility systems to these locations, and other economic considerations led the University to determine that the Thomas Hall site best suited the need for a new residence hall. At present, Thomas Hall houses some functions of the Esther Boyer College of Music, which uses it largely as a secondary rehearsal space for opera students. The University considered Thomas Hall for reuse as a full rehearsal or performance facility, but cannot owing to its lack of stage wings or flyspace. As a result, this under-used building does not meet the University's functional or operational needs. The stabilization alone of Thomas Hall will require the expenditure of over \$1.56 million.

The University presented four design alternatives for development of the new residence hall and detailed the total cost and construction cost of each. The Preferred design alternative necessitates the demolition of both the 1886 and 1900 portions of Thomas Hall. This plan will result in 507 beds in a five story building at an estimated cost of \$22.54 million (\$44,449 per bed). Design alternative one confines the new residence hall to the present vacant parcel to the west of Thomas Hall on Broad Street. This alternative does not incorporate Thomas Hall into the residence hall. This alternative yielded a 488 bed, eight story building with a cost of \$22.8 million (\$46,679 per bed). Including the cost of stabilizing Thomas Hall, the total cost of this option rises to \$24.35 million (\$49,895 per bed). The second design alternative considered an adaptive reuse of Thomas Hall through its incorporation into the new residence hall. Two schemes were developed for this alternative. Both resulted in a five story building, one with 498 beds and one with 502 beds. The lesser cost alternative of these two schemes cost \$27.12 million (\$54,458 per bed). The third design alternative sought to retain the 1886 portion of the Thomas Hall. This alternative called for the demolition of the 1900 addition and incorporation of the 1886 church building into the residence hall as recreational and lounge space. This plan offered 500 beds in a five story building with an estimated total project cost of \$25.83 million (\$51,652 per bed).

Committee members asked for clarification of the University's preference for the five story residence hall over the eight story alternative. Kristl Wiernicki of Temple University explained that the trends in the selection of housing by students demonstrate that mid-rise residence halls with double suites constitute the preferable option. Committee members noted the minimal difference between the five and eight-story alternatives. Mr. Brownlee stated that he serves on the Student Housing Board at the University of Pennsylvania and that in his experience the high-rise residence halls are the preferred alternative at that university.

Committee members and representatives of Temple University discussed issues concerning construction costs. Mr. Wilds expressed concern that the costs provided appear about a third higher than necessary. Jay Falkenstein of Temple University commented on the costs of recent building projects and compared them to the current proposal. Committee members acknowledged the validity of the construction costs. Mr. Brownlee asked that the University not include the cost of stabilizing Thomas Hall when determining the cost of retaining it and building only on the vacant lot next to it. Mr. Dorph explained that, although the money used to preserve Thomas Hall would not come from the housing budget, in the end the University must meet the expense from its overall budget.

Mr. Wilds commented that the University should have budgeted money for ongoing maintenance of Thomas Hall and its other historically designated buildings. Mr. Falkenstein stated Temple University must put its scarce funding where it is most needed, and not into buildings as under-used as Thomas Hall. Committee members asked about the restoration of several historic structures on Temple's campus. Mr. Falkenstein explained that outside financial support partially aided in the restoration of buildings such as Shusterman, College and Rock Halls.

Gerald Wilkinson, Francis Odyniec and Robert Cirillo, all former employees of WRTI radio station when it was housed in Thomas Hall, explained that the Broadcast Pioneers will help the University seek funding to retain Thomas Hall as a broadcast museum and archive. Mr. Wilkinson stated that he spoke with someone from the Pew Charitable Trust who may wish to help fund such a museum, but would require an application from the University. Mr. Wilkinson claimed that the University refused to cooperate with him regarding this. Mr. Dorph stated that he had heard nothing about this until that moment. Committee members explained to Mr. Wilkinson, Mr. Odyniec and Mr. Cirillo that they would have to take this issue up with the University itself.

Mr. Wilkinson also requested a deferral of any decision on Thomas Hall until after September owing to the lack of any public awareness of the University's plans and the absence of interested persons during the summer. Mr. Tyler noted the media coverage of Temple's capital program, including this project, during the past year.

Ms. Kaplan made a motion to recommend approval of demolition of Thomas Hall owing to financial hardship. Mr. Wilds seconded the motion which carried with three votes. Mr. Brownlee dissented, for he questioned the assignment of the cost of stabilizing Thomas Hall to the development budget of the proposed residence hall.

Ms. Kaplan left the meeting.

Mr. Dorph explained that Temple University has entered negotiations with a developer who proposes a mixed use development for the 1800 and 1900 blocks of Park Mall. The developer deemed it economically unfeasible to extend the proposed redevelopment to 1820-1830 Park Mall because there is a lack of market acceptance for a redevelopment encompassing all of the Park Mall rowhouses. The developer will not undertake the redevelopment if some of the rowhomes remain vacant, as this would negatively impact the marketability of the other properties. Indeed, initially the developer proposed only to undertake the 1900 block of Park Mall, and incorporated the buildings at 1800-1818 Park Mall upon Temple's insistence. Mr. Dorph stated that without the proposed demolition, the University will lose the opportunity to redevelop the remaining properties.

Mr. Thomas made a motion to recommend approval of the demolition of the six rowhomes in the 1800 block of Park Mall to alleviate the financial hardship that preserving all the homes on Park Mall would create, and to provide space for a plaza. Mr. Brownlee seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



R. Scott Jacob
Executive Secretary