

THE MINUTES OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE MEETING
OF THE

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

David Hollenberg, Chairman

31 August 1989

Present: David Hollenberg, Chairman of the Committee
David DeLong
Herbert W. Levy
Penelope Batcheler

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Assistant Historic Preservation
Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Maria Petrillo, Chief Assistant City Solicitor, Law
Department

Also: Mark Thompson and Randy Henkels of Mark Thompson Associates
regarding Emanuel Court, 22nd and Chestnut Streets.
Kay Githens regarding illegal work undertaken at 521 South
Leithgow Street.
Roger Prichard, Old City Civic Association.
Howard Kittell, Preservation Coalition of Greater
Philadelphia.
John McIlhenny, Barry Bessler and Michael DeSanto of the
Fairmount Park Commission requesting permission to
demolish the Hall Wiley House at 900 Susquehanna Road.
John Taxin, Michael Stack and Stephen Feldman and Patricia
Elkis requesting permission to demolish 136 South Front
Street.
Ellen Miller, Preservation Coalition of Greater
Philadelphia.
William Blades, Philadelphia Historic Preservation
Corporation.
Leonard Ciacotello
Richard Devlyn
Martin McNamara, Foundation for Architecture.
Hank Klibanoff, The Philadelphia Inquirer.
William and Helen Smith and Larry Gilbert regarding proposed
alterations to 2045 Rittenhouse Square.
Sabrina Soong, Dennis Macbeth, Jack Elfman and Robert Rosen
regarding 248 Market Street.

Bob Aibel regarding alterations to 111-113 North 3rd Street.
Mary Holland and Charles Landreth regarding a proposed roof
deck for 723 Rodman Street.

Tom MacDonald, WWDB Radio.

Bud Ross, Architect, regarding alterations to 1907 Sansom
Street.

Marvin Verman, Architect, regarding 1225-33 Locust Street.

Dale Truscott, Paulette Haynes, Faith Lemmer, Sally Lou
Buell, Mrs. Herbert Moody, A. J. Spanse, and Jack Johnson
regarding 227 Stamper Street.

Louise Cruz Vizcaino regarding a new garage door for 227
Stamper Street.

Warner Baxter regarding 5335-37 Germantown Avenue.

John Solether of P & A Associates regarding alterations to
the Corn Exchange Building at 2nd and Chestnut Streets.

Ronald and Jeff Rockwell and Jay Feldman regarding
alterations to 341 S. Camac Street.

SUBMISSIONS

Emanuel Court, 22nd and Chestnut Streets, Mark B. Thompson and Randy
Henkels, Mark B. Thompson Associates. At its meeting of 30 March 1989
the Architectural Committee expressed its on-going concern for the
placement of a large PECO transformer in the garden of Emanuel Court
at 22nd and Chestnut Streets. The plans, as originally approved by
the Historical Commission, indicated placement of the transformer
within a pit. However, when PECO refused to allow the unit to be
buried, the architect had it placed on a pad approximately six feet
above grade near the 22nd Street entrance to the property. This
action was taken without first obtaining the review and approval of
the Historical Commission. As such, placement of the unit above
ground constitutes a violation of the permit.

Mr. Thompson expressed to the Committee his understanding that
placement of the unit in its present position was discussed by the
Committee and determined to be the only reasonable solution prior to
any work being undertaken in the garden area. The Committee and staff
did not recall any discussion of alternate above ground locations of
the transformer until after it had been placed in its present position
on its pad and the violation became apparent.

At its 30 March meeting, the Committee agreed to recommend no action
to the Historical Commission until the landscaping of the site was
complete and a final evaluation of the unit and its impact upon the
development could be made. This deferral of action was undertaken at
the request of the architect.

Mr. Thompson appeared before the Committee today to discuss the

success of the final architectural treatment of the unit and the landscaping surrounding it. Following considerable discussion, the Committee members determined that the placement of the transformer above ground and near the 22nd Street entrance was totally unacceptable. The Committee voted to recommend to the Commission that the PECO transformer be removed from its present location and relocated to either another more appropriate site on the grounds or to an interior space within the building. Clearly, placement on the interior of the building would be preferable. A representative for PECO at a previous meeting informed the Committee that an interior placement was not only possible but also the norm in Center City. The architect was advised to consider alternate locations for the PECO transformer and to submit to the Committee for review plans for relocation of the unit to some other location.

RECOMMENDATION: Denial of PECO transformer in its present location above grade.

521 South Leithgow Street, Kay Githens, Applicant. This application came before the Committee as a result of a stop work order for illegal construction of a highly visible new floor on top of an 1830s rowhouse. The two other houses on the row have an added dormer; however, these dormers are gable roofed, narrower and set back from the face of the building. Ms. Githens explained that her brother is building an office on the top floor for her and that she needs a space larger than just a dormer.

The Committee recommended that the addition be redesigned to set back about three feet so that it would be less visible, and perhaps widened to regain part of the space. It was pointed out that the applicant needs approval from the Department of Licenses and Inspections and perhaps the Zoning Board which might also impact the allowable design. The Committee recommended that the staff work with Ms. Githens and approve a design based on these parameters.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval in concept.

Hall-Wiley House, 900 Susquehanna Road, Dennis M. Feldsher, Fairmount Park Commission. Members of the Fairmount Park Commission staff appeared before the Committee to request permission to demolish this 18th century stone house in Northeast Philadelphia, secluded within Fairmount Park. They explained that the house was occupied until recently when the heating system broke. The house has also had problems with its water pipes which are located close to the surface of the ground and freeze at times in the winter. They showed a list of items to be restored at a total cost of between \$128,000 and \$160,000 which they explained the Fairmount Park Commission could not afford. They also questioned the significance of the house.

The Committee suggested that the house has significance as a rare 18th

century survival in Northeast Philadelphia, which has retained the integrity of its country setting owing to its location in the park. They recommended that the water problems could possibly be solved with additional earth piled onto the pipes and that a new heating system or a fence to moth ball the property could be bought for considerably less than the cited demolition cost of \$8,000. Additionally, it was suggested that the park consider selling or long term leasing the house while retaining title to the ground. The Committee recommended postponing a decision for six months while these matters are researched.

- 136 S. Front Street, John Taxin, Applicant. Mr. Taxin along with his lawyer Michael Stack and financial consultants Stephen Feldman and Patricia Elkins appeared before the Committee to request the demolition of 136 S. Front Street. This building, thought to be a rare remaining example of a ships chandlery is composed of both 18th and early 19th century segments. The building together with an adjacent vacant lot were recently auctioned. At the auction a letter from Mr. Tyler was read which explained that the building is historically designated and that bids should take into account the restrictions on the property. Mr. Taxin paid \$930,000 for the building and adjacent lot. The financial report submitted by Mr. Taxin and his financial consultant claims financial hardship. Additionally, the applicant claims that the demolition of the building is necessary to create parking for his restaurant which he insists is having trouble because of lack of parking. Mr. Taxin stated that he will receive sufficient parking in a new parking garage to be built at Front and Sansom Streets, but that this is two years in the future and he needs this property demolished to provide parking in the interim period.

The Committee expressed dismay over what they perceived to be a financial hardship report based on having paid too high a purchase price, particularly considering the letter that was read at the auction and Mr. Taxin's recent dealings with the Commission over 49 S. Hancock. Mr. Levy who has been on the Committee for over 15 years reminded Mr. Taxin that over this period he has repeatedly applied to demolish historic buildings to create parking with the claim that his business was failing. In fact, he succeeded in demolishing the historic McCrae houses to gain parking. He added that it is not the Commission's job to guarantee the survival of a business that may very well have other causes for its decline besides parking. It was pointed out at the meeting that very few Center City restaurants have any parking, let alone as much as Bookbinder's already has.

The Committee advised that a solution be sought to gain parking space for the two year period until the new garage is built. Mr. Tyler suggested that perhaps the spaces could be found in the adjacent Parking Authority Garage. The Committee agreed to recommend sending Mr. Taxin's financial hardship and alternate uses report to an independent consultant for review. They noted, however, that Mr. Taxin's report gives an acquisition cost for the two parcels but does

not study preservation in terms of the larger development possible on two lots and rests on highest use arguments and a speculative rather than realistic purchase price.

- 2045 Rittenhouse Street, Lawrence Gilbert, Architect. This application calls for rebuilding the front of a simple c.1840 brick rowhouse that was stuccoed many years ago to look like a brownstone. The applicants explained that the wall bows badly and, has major cracks which let in water. The architect showed a design to rebuild the wall in brick based on the house next door in the row. The only difference would be that the new windows made of brown aluminum have already been bought and are approximately two inches shorter than the house next door. The door, also previously bought, can be altered with a transom to fit the design of the original row more closely. The owners who have lived in the house for over 35 years appealed to the Committee on hardship grounds to allow them to use the aluminum windows.

The Committee recommended approval of the application as submitted with the condition that the staff approve the brick color for the new wall before a permit is issued.

- 301 S. 21st Street, Andrew Blanda, Otto Sperr Architect. This application calls for replacing a set of brownstone steps with similar granite ones. The steps are in poor condition having been covered with stucco patches and their design seems to indicate that they were a later addition.

The Committee recommended approval of this application as submitted.

- 248 Market Street, Sabrina Soong, Soong Associates, Architects. Robert Rosen, Engineer. This application asked for the removal of an 1867 mansard roof from an earlier building in Old City. This structure which also received a commercial ground floor, a bracketed cornice and two over two sash window in the Victorian period had already come before the Commission last year for an application to restore the lower floors. Mr. Rosen, a structural engineer, explained that the mansard was originally of poor construction and that its condition is now so bad that it would have to be rebuilt to save it. It retains only two of its dormers, the others having been removed a few years ago. The cost to rebuild the mansard is estimated by the applicant at over \$114,000 which he claims would make it economically unfeasible.

The Committee agreed that the initial construction of the mansard as shown by the engineer's drawings seemed slipshod and recommended approving the removal of the mansard. The Committee did not look at or approve any design for a new roof at this time.

111-113 N. 3rd Street, Bob Aibel. Mr. Aibel appeared before the Committee to request alterations to the c.1960 shopfronts on his two c.1830 brick warehouse buildings in order to better display his antique furniture. He presented several drawings which indicate raising the transom and converting a door to a window.

The Committee recommended approval of the concept of raising the transom, using taller doors and allowing large single panes of glass in the shop windows. They asked, however, that the design be based on the old photos of that and other buildings in the row which show a three light transom over the end bays and no transom over the middle bays. They also asked that staff work with the applicant on details after inspecting the building.

1907 Sanson Street, Budd Ross, Architect. Mr. Ross presented a proposal to modify a storefront for use as a bar. The storefront which was added to a Victorian house around 1915 had been completely covered by wood for a previous bar use. Working with staff Mr. Ross developed several schemes which removed the wood siding and reexposed the old storefront cornice and bulkhead.

The Committee advised that the store bulkhead be of one uniform height rather than being raised in places to hide the banquette and that the door be raised to meet the transom. The awning was found to be acceptable. They asked that Mr. Ross revise the drawings and resubmit them before the next Commission meeting.

723 Rodman Street, Charles Landreth Applicant. This application which appeared before the Committee and Commission last month was revised to sink the deck slightly into the roof and use a wrought iron rail with elaborate sunburst patterns. The deck as shown comes to the very edge of the roof.

Mr. Hollenberg explained to the Committee that the Commission had voted to approve a deck and that the Committee's job was to work with the applicant to come up with the best deck given the circumstances. The Committee applauded Mr. Landreth's decision to hire an architect. They asked that the deck be pulled back approximately three feet from the west edge of the roof but allowed that the roof could be expanded up to three and a half feet toward Rodman Street to in part regain the space. In addition, the Committee asked that an iron spiral stair be substituted for the straight run which would facilitate pulling the deck back. They asked that the rail be simplified with simple thin vertical ballusters rather than the sunburst patterns.

1225-33 Locust Street, Marvin Verman, Architect. Mr. Verman appeared before the Committee to present window, bracket and roof details for this combined rehabilitation of two historical buildings and with surrounding new construction.

The Committee recommended approval of the roof and bracket details as shown but asked that the window details be revised to show the wider vertical muntins of the windows on 1225-27 as well as the true configuration of the glass on the oriel window on 1229-1231 Locust Street.

- 230 Pine Street a.k.a. 227 Stamper Street, Louise Vizcaino, applicant. Ms. Vizcaino came before the Committee with a catalogue picture of the wooden garage door she is proposing to substitute for the illegally installed metal garage door.

The Committee explained to Ms. Vizcaino that she needs to submit a drawing of the door, door frame and mechanical housing in order to get a proper review and secure a permit from Licenses and Inspections to remedy the violations. Ms. Vizcaino's contractor did not appear with this information as requested.

- 5335-37 Germantown Avenue, Warner Baxter, Applicant. Mr. Baxter appeared before the Committee, having received a violation for removing the plate glass store windows from his c.1860 rowhouse/commercial buildings on Germantown Avenue and installing cinder block and stucco infill. Mr. Baxter explained that his building was repeatedly vandalized with broken windows and that he is trying to secure the building while he makes plans to renovate the buildings.

The Committee recommended approval of this work on the condition that the storefront frames be retained and that Mr. Baxter return to the Commission within six to twelve months to discuss further the reopening/restoration of the building.

- Corn Exchange Building, 2nd and Chestnut Streets, John Solether, P. and A. Associates. Mr. Solether presented a proposal to remove the glass and aluminum modern doors of the bank building and reinsert wooden doors with a Colonial Revival panel pattern albeit with glass rather than wood panels. The drawing showed two transoms areas, above the doors, the top one a projecting door head to be used for signage. The plans also called for cutting a new door in the center bay of the building addition on 2nd Street.

The Committee applauded the removal of the modern aluminum doors and their replacement with something more in keeping with the original design. They asked that the architect study the original drawings for the building at the Athenaeum to see if a second transom existed. They requested that the door head with signage be pulled back to the plane of the door and that an exterior lamp hanging from the top of the doorway be used for lighting. They also recommended approval for cutting a new door. The Committee voted to recommend approval pending staff receipt of revised drawings.

341 South Camac Street, Jeff Rockwell, Contractor/Owner. Mr. Rockwell appeared before the Committee as the result of a stop work order for work undertaken without a permit. Mr. Rockwell already removed the brick chimney down to the basement and replaced a sash window with glass block on the highly visible rear facade facing Lantern Court. He also applied to add a third floor rear addition and a deck, enlarge some window openings, install new windows with false muntins at the rear of the property and add a simple-iron railing to the front steps.

The Committee recommended approval of the addition, the deck, the rear window enlargement, and the railing. They asked, however, that Mr. Rockwell stucco only the third floor addition and that he remove the glass block and install single pane casement windows on the rear facade.

The committee was evenly divided on the issue of asking Mr. Rockwell to rebuild the chimney. The argument against rebuilding is that it would involve some expense and would not be functional. The argument made for rebuilding is that a chimney is a highly visible character defining element of early 19th century buildings, built when a fireplace was the sole means of cooking and heating. Also approval would effectively reward the contractor/owner for demolition work without a permit.

The Committee meeting ended at 5:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Randal Baron
Preservation Planner

RB:sj