

M. Simon

The twelfth meeting of the Advisory Commission on Historic Buildings held on April 9th, 1957, in Room 813, City Hall Annex. The scheduled meeting to be held on ~~April~~ 26th, 1957, was postponed until this date because of illness and absence from the City. The following members were present:

Grant M. Simon, Chairman
Harry A. Batten
Charles E. Peterson
R. Norris Williams, II
Richard J. McConnell, Director of Finance
William T. Gennetti, Deputy Commissioner of Public Property

Also present were:

Dr. Margaret B. Tinkcom, Research Historian
William D. Valente, Law Advisor
Theresa V. Pulice, Executive Secretary

The meeting was called to order at 3:35 p.m.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and approved.

Questionnaire of February 11th:

The various policy questions brought up in the memorandum of February 11th, 1957 were discussed as follows:

#1 - Mr. Valente pointed out that this Commission would not have authority over historic buildings controlled by the Fairmount Park Commission because the latter is a State-created agency. Only with the consent of the Fairmount Park Commission could any responsibility be taken over by this Commission. Mr. McConnell suggested that, as a matter of policy rather than the law, the Administrative Board of the City could order such cooperation as is felt desirable. (NOTE: The Administrative Board consists of the Mayor, the Managing Director, and the Director of Finance.) This proposal is to be checked by the City Solicitor.

There are, however, other City-owned buildings which might be placed under the control of this Commission. It was pointed out that an inventory of City-owned historic buildings has never been submitted as requested.

#2 - In commenting on this subject, Mr. Valente stated that he had not seen the "proposals for historic zones". This matter was discussed later in the meeting.

#3 and #4 - Mr. Valente was of the opinion that these were not legal questions but rather matters of policy and politics.

#5 - Mr. Valente felt that this proposal was definitely unconstitutional.

Renewal of the Six Months Delay:

It was felt that the delaying restraint laid on demolition and alteration permits by this Commission might be renewed once which would result in a total period of one year. This is considered a discretionary matter and not to be extended indefinitely

Second Street Market Restoration:

Mr. McConnell has no final word on this problem but expects to talk with the Mayor again soon.

Historic Zones:

Messrs James H. Ward, Executive Director of the Zoning Advisory Commission and Matthew Bullock, Assistant City Solicitor, were introduced to the Commission. A draft of an ordinance dated March 22, 1957, prepared by Solicitor Bullock, was introduced by Mr. Ward. To this was attached a series of seven fundamental questions raised during the study. Some of these matters were discussed informally. Mr. Bullock stated two leading questions in his mind, as follows:

1. Where would the administrative responsibility finally fall in (a) defining historic areas and (b) approving of building permits for demolitions, alterations and new structures?
2. What are the objectives and standards of the program? (Mr. Bullock suggested that this Commission prepare regulations and precepts for that purpose.)

It was stated that the proposed ordinance would not be a zoning ordinance in the usual sense, but special legislation imposed upon the City zoning plans.

It was pointed out that zoning should be upgraded in the Society Hill area to Residential.

Mr. Ward showed a map on which he had plotted all the buildings in the Old City which were found on the Certified List of historic buildings and in the preliminary list of approximately 700 buildings for Society Hill.

The "700 List":

It was admitted that the list of buildings to be preserved in the Society Hill area will take a great deal of time to perfect and that efforts should be unremitting towards that end. It was agreed that for the time being, the list as prepared and as illustrated by the special new photographs is the best that could be done so far. It was felt that the list might be needed in an emergency.

Proposed Abattoir near Old Swede's Church:

The Chairman read a copy of the letter he had sent to support the Reverend Roak in his campaign against the abattoir.

Independence Hall West Wing:

It was mentioned that the U. S. National Park Service wishes to locate public toilets in the basement underneath the Public Information Office now in the West Wing, a structure built in 1897. This had been approved by the Chairman. The City Architect is endeavoring to help the Park Service get this permit which involves some plumbing problems.

Cuthbert Street Houses:

A letter from Chairman Dallett of the Landmarks Society's Study Committee urging that the five very old houses in the 100 block of what is now Cuthbert Street (originally Coombe's Alley) be added to the special list of Certified Buildings. This was voted in the affirmative.

Old Kirkbride's Hospital:

The Landmarks' Study Committee also recommended the listing of Kirkbride's Hospital at 44th and Market Sts. and it was agreed to add this to the Certified List.

Jayne Building:

This early skyscraper structure at 242-244 Chestnut Street in the Independence Park area was mentioned in the Landmarks Society letter, but was not discussed to any conclusion at this meeting.

Fish Town:

The Chairman expressed his interest in having Dr. Tinkcom study this area.

Fourth and Cherry Area:

Dr. Tinkcom reviewed her study of this area. It was believed there are no 18th century remains of importance to be found there.

Assistance by Mrs. Earle Kirkbride:

The need for additional research assistance was brought out and it was agreed that Dr. Tinkcom should inquire on what terms she could secure the assistance of Mrs. Earle Kirkbride as a searcher of old newspapers, etc.

Definition of "Historic Building":

Mr. Peterson stated his belief that before long we would have to define an historic building and offered the following as a suggestion to be discussed later by members:

"For the purposes of this ---- legal instrument an historic building is defined as a building which:

- (1) Has been identified by documented fact or by long-established legend with important or interesting events or people.
- (2) Has stood so long as to be a valuable example of architectural design and construction."

Preserving "Historic Atmosphere":

Mr. Peterson offered the following draft of a precent for maintaining architectural character in an historic zone:

"The historic atmosphere of an area can be maintained only by the strictest preservation of all remaining original architectural features visible from the adjoining streets. When original architectural features have already been removed or altered, the most beneficial results can be obtained by restoring them authentically. When authentic restoration of the missing features is not feasible the exteriors should be completed with new parts which harmonize with the old."

Scully - Clarkson & Biddle Map:

This fine and unusually accurate copperplate map showing Philadelphia buildings in 1762 was recently re-published by the Society of Colonial Wars. A copy was displayed and recommended for purchase by this Commission so it would be available on our walls for easy consultation.

City Charter:

It was pointed out that the "Philadelphia Home Rule Charter", adopted by the electors on April 17th, 1951, sets up the Department of Recreation with "a new function of managing and operating City historical shrines and of historic shrine planning." It was the impression of those present that the Department of Recreation is not very much interested in the subject and has accomplished little or nothing along those lines.

Hill-Plystick-Keith House:

It was mentioned that one of the national patriotic societies had recently inspected the old mansion on South Fourth Street, which is now owned or controlled by the Pennsylvania Hospital with the idea of using it as a headquarters by their national offices now kept in Washington, D. C. Mr. Lawrence M. C. Smith had interested a Mr. Fish of Philadelphia in the proposal. A figure of more than \$80,000 was mentioned as necessary for rehabilitating the structure for the purposes under consideration.

Spruce Street Architecture:

Mr. Peterson stated his belief that Spruce Street from Little Dock (now Mattis) Street to Eleventh Street contains a most remarkable series of old houses built between 1740 and 1840. In fact, it constitutes perhaps the most remarkable collection of that period in the country. He recommended that the street, which has very few modern intrusions, be kept as nearly intact as possible. Because of the current threat to the old structures on the north side of Spruce Street between Dock and Third, it was urged that some of the most important ones be identified as soon as possible. Those selected were:

Nos 268 and 272 S. 2nd Street; two at the N. W. Cor. of Mattis and Spruce; and Nos. 217 and 227 Spruce Street.

It was urged that a chain of title be secured for these six buildings as soon as possible.

The meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Charles E. Peterson,
Secretary

Excerpt From Minutes - April 9, 1957

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