

**THE MINUTES OF THE 350TH STATED MEETING
OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

13 March 1991

City Council Caucus Room

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman

Present

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman
Christine Washington, Vice-Chairwoman
William Brown
David Brownlee
David Hollenberg
Jason Nathan
Reverend William D. Thompson
Joseph Certaine, Deputy Commissioner, Dept. of Public Property
James Cuorato, Department of Commerce
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director, City Planning Commission
John Street, Esquire, City Council
David Wismer, Department of Licenses and Inspections

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

Also

Rittenhouse Savoy Condominium Association:
Lenard L. Wolffe, Esq., President, Rittenhouse Savoy Condo Assn.
Dr. Max Mintz, Window Committee, Rittenhouse Savoy Condo Assn.
Robert McCauley, architect, Ueland Junker & McCauley
Lane Fike, Streets Department
Edward Bernstein, Hugh M. Hosford, Thelma B. Richman, Ellis
Ginsberg, J. Daly, M. Hallowell, Joan F. Jaffe, J. Hamilton,
L. Goldner, J. Hamilton, R.B. Schatz, Esq. and others.

The Minutes of the 349th Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 13 February 1991, Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman. A MOTION to adopt the minutes, made by Mr. Wismer and seconded by Mr. Thompson, received unanimous approval.

The Report of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 28 February 1991, David Hollenberg, Chairman. The Committee reviewed five applications and forwarded the following recommendations:

Approval

The Committee recommended approval of plans to install security grates and three awnings on the 1927 Commercial Style facade of Wallach's Inc., 1610 Chestnut Street. This submission differs from a previously approved design in that the awnings will

project less and will be separated by less space. The applicants also proposed a single awning spanning the entire facade, based on a decision by the Art Commission. This awning, however, would obscure the architectural arrangement. The Architectural Committee preferred the three awning design, which related more harmoniously with the three-part vertical division of the facade, and recommended its approval. Mr. Nathan seconded this recommendation and the Commission approved it unanimously.

Approval in Concept

The Committee recommended approval in concept for proposed alterations to the Strawberry Mansion Bridge. Built in 1897 to convey the Fairmount Park trolley over the Schuylkill, the Bridge remains a landmark, though trolley operations ceased in 1946. The lattice-girder construction of the bridge, its decorative railings, flat steel bottom and asphalt cartway have fallen into disrepair; it is unlikely that it could support the weight of trolley anymore. The Department proposes to replace, in kind, the deteriorated floor beams and stringers and to resurface the asphalt cartway. South of the roadbed and separated from it by a decorative rail, the vacated trolley right-of-way remains open. The Department wants to introduce a promenade in this space to provide a view of the Park and the scullers rowing on the Schuylkill. While an exciting prospect, it presents significant problems. The rowing associations stressed the potential hazard of persons dropping heavy objects off the bridge onto rowers and expensive sculls. On the north side, where pedestrians presently can approach the edge, a chain-link fence affords protection. To provide similar protection on the promenade, the Department proposes to install a safety fence. Though pedestrian cages were suggested, their appearance would detract significantly from the aesthetics of this bridge. Other barriers, between the cartway and promenade, may be required by Federal regulations. The Department also proposes to remove the interior decorative railing to use its panels to replace deteriorated segments of the two exterior rails, which will be preserved. Appreciative of the historic significance of this bridge, the Department has retained consultants in the fields of bridge construction and historic preservation to assist them in achieving a sympathetic design for this improvement while addressing legitimate safety concerns.

The Committee expressed appreciation to the Department for an early presentation of its plans. Members then made specific design suggestions. Moving the safety fence three feet away from the decorative railings would leave twelve feet for a promenade, reduce the fence visibility, retain a vista of the Park, preserve the historic appearance of the bridge and facilitate maintenance. However, it would prevent people from looking over the railing and may create a pocket where trash could collect. The Committee encouraged the architects to reduce unnecessary duplication and to avoid a cluttered appearance. Replacing two proposed vertical safety fences enclosing the former track area with a horizontal safety mesh across this space would provide the required protection while retaining a view of the bridge structure. The Committee also suggested merging two light fixtures in this area into one. In all work, the Committee encouraged the integration of the new elements into the aesthetic of the bridge.

The Committee recommended conceptual approval of the proposal, including the reduction of the number of decorative rails from three to two. Final review will focus on the design of the safety fence and light fixtures. This project requires approval by the Art Commission, the Fairmount Park Commission and -- if funded by Federal or state monies -- the respective historic preservation agency.

The Committee also recommended approval in concept for plans to replace the existing windows, frames and sash of the **Rittenhouse Savoy, 1810 South Rittenhouse Square**. Given the complexity of this application, Mr. Hollenberg reserved discussion for later.

Disapproval

The Committee recommended disapproval for plans to alter a circa 1963 brick residence at **1930 Panama Street**, a contributing building in the proposed Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District. The building stands a fine example of modern infill in an historic, residential environment. The owners, who received approval for most of their proposal, appealed one element which was denied. They want to widen, or widen and lengthen, a kitchen window on the front facade. Though it may seem an aberration, it will have been created for a legitimate need -- to allow more light into a small dining area. The Committee noted that lengthening the window, as approved by the staff, alone will increase the amount of light significantly. Widening the opening would detract from the aesthetics of the building and the streetscape. The Committee recommended disapproval of the new plan to widen and lengthen the window and reaffirmed both the denial of the proposed widening and the approval of the proposed lengthening. Mr. Thompson seconded this recommendation which the Commission adopted unanimously. Mr. Nathan abstained.

Rittenhouse Savoy, 1810 South Rittenhouse Square

The Committee also recommended approval in concept for plans to replace the existing milled aluminum windows, frames and sash of the **Rittenhouse Savoy, 1810 South Rittenhouse Square**. Constructed in 1955, the Savoy is a contributing building in the proposed Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District. Its thin, hard-caulked windows possess a fixed upper sash and an upward-lifting lower hopper. The owners submit that these windows possess numerous problems, some of which are structural. The lower sash is difficult to open for some elderly owners, and the windows allow significant water penetration and heat loss. Further, the milled aluminum finish of the windows has become dirty and discolored.

The owners propose to replace these original windows with an antique bronze-colored, aluminum frame, double-hung window in a pattern following the original window scheme. The replacements will operate more efficiently and will conserve energy more effectively. The condominium association stressed that it had searched in good faith to develop a sympathetic proposal. Though some owners argued vociferously for picture windows and more dramatic changes, the Association encouraged more sympathetic and affordable replacements. The double-hung windows were selected for reasons of function and maintenance. Brown was chosen for

the finish color because it seemed attractive and harmonious with other buildings around the Square.

The Committee has approved window replacements when the profiles were similar to those of the original windows. This proposal, however, would conspicuously change significant window dimensions. It would create a much heavier, uniform appearance while removing the subtleties of the existing windows. Further, the proposed exterior screens would replace the existing glazed finish with a dull, matte finish. Finally, the brown color proposed is inappropriate for the design of the windows and the building. The Committee suggested an alternative window with a fixed upper sash, reducing the need for thick mullions. It also encouraged internal screens to preserve the existing appearance of the wall. Retaining the original color of the frames with an anodized finish to prevent oxidation would preserve the character and diminish the problems with the existing finish. The Committee recommended approval in concept for window replacement, but indicated that significant revisions were necessary prior to final approval. To discuss this proposal further and to explore alternative treatments, several Committee members met on-site with the architect, window manufacturers and the owners.

At this on-site meeting, the Committee reached a series of conclusions which represented an attempt to retain the horizontal arrangement of the windows and their complexity. Mr. Wolffe agreed in writing to four of the five aforementioned conditions. The final recommendation, therefore, is to approve the proposed work with the following conditions:

- that the finish will be silver (polychron silver III) and not the proposed antique bronze color;
- that the architect will submit an elevation of the building which depicts the masonry, brick vents and pattern for the windows. The proposed pattern will be compatible with the original, though not a restoration; the number of window types will be reduced from fifteen to three.
- the Committee encouraged a "cosmetic experiment," using a darker paint color on the head of the window, to attempt to reduce the heavy profile of the window.
- that screens are permissible, but they may not cover more than forty percent of the windows. The Committee encourages the varied placement of these fixtures to recall the variety of the original windows.
- that the applicant explore the possibility of reducing the dimension of the vertical mullions on the twenty four corner windows facing Rittenhouse Square.

Mr. Nathan seconded this recommendation.

Councilman Street asked for the owners' response to this recommendation. Lenard Wolffe, President of the Savoy Condominium Association, introduced his comments by pointing out the number of property owners in attendance. He discussed the

substantial cost of the project, the difficulty of developing a proposal agreeable to a majority of his association and his efforts to ensure that this proposal was consistent with the aesthetics of the Square. He then suggested that historic designation imposed onerous restrictions on property owners in the proposed Rittenhouse Fittler Historic District. A resident of the district since 1924, he stressed that the area is dynamic and must be able to change. Although the association would accept the recommendation regarding the color of the window finish, he felt abused by this restriction. Mr. Wolffe suggested that one of the problems of a public entity like the Historical Commission is that it lacks the expertise required to understand building materials. He then introduced a man possessed of such expertise, Dr. Max Mintz. Dr. Mintz presented a sample of soot collected from the window sill on a damp paper towel. He used this exhibit to stress the reasoning underlying the owners' desire for a brown finish. It is more attractive and less susceptible to discolor in the City's environment. Dr. Mintz stressed that 85% of the owners voted in the window referendum. Given this overwhelming cooperation and support from the association, he was particularly aggrieved by the delay imposed by the Commission. He concluded by stressing that further delay would only increase the cost of this work.

Mr. Hollenberg interjected that the proposal first appeared before the Architectural Committee on 28 February 1991, that the Committee then held a special meeting, after which he personally spent another seven hours talking to members of the association. There has been no delay, and he considered the insinuation that the Commission, Committee or staff have not been cooperative both absurd and offensive. He felt abused while trying to resolve this issue and took offense that several people continued to abuse the Committee as it negotiated a compromise. Having addressed procedural matters, Mr. Hollenberg focused on the merits of the proposal. He suggested that rubbing a damp towel across any building surface in the City would reveal dirt. The proposed brown color is inappropriate for the building. The original hue is clear. Though the Committee abandoned hopes of retaining the pattern and detail of the original windows, it wanted to maintain the color, the one remaining aspect which preserves the original character. Dr. Brownlee added that the light metallic frames of these windows is what draws interest to the building. In contrast, using a brown finish for the frames would add the appearance of weight.

Miss Petrillo observed that the condominium association initiated this project four years ago. Yet, she first learned of it in a conversation with Mr. Wolffe in December 1990 regarding another topic. The association could have applied as early as it wished, and could have received the free advice of the members of the Architectural Committee as early as it wanted. She concluded by stating that contrary to Mr. Wolffe's intent, this hearing was not a referendum on the proposed Rittenhouse Fittler Historic District.

Frances Draver, an owner whose apartment has three corner windows, requested that the Commission not require single-pane windows for the corners. It only would cost more for an

inconvenience. Mr. Wismer observed that the Committee had not required single-pane windows. Mr. Montgomery added that the corner conditions will be reviewed only by the staff or Committee. Another owner, Jane Hamilton, expressed concern that the issue did not seem resolved. Mr. Tyler allayed her concern by noting that the project could proceed and that only the design for twenty-four windows required further examination. Mr. Hollenberg reinforced that the slight modification of the design of these few windows did not require a delay in ordering the other several hundred.

Owner John Sauder expressed doubt that Mr. Wolffe possessed the authority to accept the silver finish. Owner Robert Johnson supported this comment and stressed that the association voted to approve only the brown exterior/white interior windows. They never considered the silver finish and he doubted that he would vote for the project at all if this color were required. After noting that the silver becomes dirtier faster, he asserted that the brown finish enhanced this International Style building. Mr. Johnson noted that the Claridge has dark windows, and that some owners in the Savoy already changed their windows. Mr. Hollenberg clarified that only a few on the rear facade had been altered. Though Mr. Sauder insisted that the Commission examine the moral and legal issues broached, Mr. Montgomery stated that the Commission could not rule on the legal issues regarding the association, and would only vote on the recommendation of its Committee. Mr. Wolffe acknowledged that he may be required to return to the association for a final vote on the color. Ms. Petrillo asked him to clarify his authority to enter into negotiations and an agreement. Mr. Wolffe responded that he received an affirmative vote of the condominium council to accept the aluminum finish.

Ellis Ginsberg, a long-time resident of the Savoy, suggested that the proportion of concern for the windows seemed exaggerated. Given far more dramatic changes that have occurred around the Square, the attention given to the finish of these windows seemed unfair, as though the owners of the Savoy were singled out for stringent controls. He added that many people were leaving Philadelphia because their interests and grievances were being ignored by City officials. Mr. Hollenberg reaffirmed that the Committee had been more than cooperative, had compromised on many points and, if anything, had been lenient in its review. Mr. Tyler noted that the alterations made to other buildings around the Square occurred before the Commission gained jurisdiction over the area.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Montgomery called a vote on the recommendation of the Architectural Committee. The Commission voted unanimously to approve this recommendation. Councilman Street requested that the staff resolve the corner condition within seven days of submittal. Mr. Tyler received this suggestion favorably.

The Report on Staff Activities, February 1991. After commenting that the staff of the Commission remained rather slim, Mr. Tyler commended Randal Baron in particular for his work.

New Business**FY '92 Capital Program Budget**

Mr. Tyler briefly discussed the FY '92 Capital Program Budget, and funds allocated to address the problem of City owned historic properties. Mr. Tyler discussed a proposal to contract with someone to administer and participate actively in this program, with immediate supervision at the staff level and oversight by the Commission and a small committee representing the Commission, and several other departments. The Commission then would enter other contracts to inventory all City owned resources on or eligible for the National or Philadelphia Registers, conduct a condition assessment of each in varying degrees of detail, and prepare a management plan for them. Mr. Tyler suggested a motion to approve this conceptual plan. A MOTION was made by Dr. Brownlee to allow the staff to proceed with the previously outlined plan for the FY '92 Capital Program Budget. After Mr. Cuorato seconded this motion, the Commission, approved it unanimously.

Having completed the agenda, Mr. Montgomery offered special thanks to Mr. Hollenberg and the members of the Architectural Committee for their service. He stressed that many of the comments directed toward its members were inappropriate. Once more, he commended the Committee for its responsiveness and for being exemplars of public service.

Mr. Street broached a discussion regarding the image of government among the citizens of Philadelphia. While the real estate conditions and other factors broached by Mr. Wolfe had no bearing on the application, Mr. Street indicated that negative conditions are often used to support positions wholly independent and unaffected by those conditions. Rather than dwelling on the negative aspects of this meeting, he suggested viewing the critical comments made as a challenge to strengthen the resolve of the Commission to convey the value of historic preservation to citizens. Given an atmosphere of skepticism about government, he encouraged the members to redouble their efforts to achieve the mission of the Commission.

Following this discussion, the Commission adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary