

**REPORT OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**7 NOVEMBER 2007
CITY HALL, ROOM 578
10:00 A.M.**

PRESENT

Vincent Rivera, AIA, Chair
Robert Thomas, AIA
Rudy D'Alessandro
Herb Levy, FAIA

Jonathan Farnham, Acting Historic Preservation Director
Erin Cote, Historic Preservation Planner II
Leonard Reuter, Assistant City Solicitor

ALSO PRESENT

John Gallery, Preservation Alliance
Liz Blazeovich, Preservation Alliance
Richard DeMarco, Esq., Klehr Harrison Harvey Branzburg & Ellers, LLP
George Thomas, Civic Vision
Neil Sklaroff, Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, LLP
Sandra Tatman, Athenaeum
Roger Moss, Athenaeum
Matt McClure, Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, LLP
Carey Yonce, Venturi Scott Brown & Associates
Craig Schelter, Schelter & Associates
Larry Silver, Esq., Langstrom Stevens & Silver, LLP
Paul Boni, Society Hill Civic Association
Taryn D'Ambrogi
David Brill, Independence Place
Don Haviland
Suzanne Binswanger
Rebecca Vieyra, Venturi Scott Brown Associates
T. Robb

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Rivera called the special meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Messrs. D'Alessandro, Thomas, and Levy joined him on the Committee.

223-225 S. 6TH STREET

Owner: John J. and Mary Elizabeth Turchi

Applicant: Neil Sklaroff, Esq.

History: 1956-1957, architect G. Edwin Brumbaugh for Mayor Richardson and Anne Dilworth

Project: Remove rear and side wings, construct 16-story building

OVERVIEW: This application for final approval proposes to remove the side and rear wings and retain the main block of the former home of Mayor Richardson Dilworth, which is listed as significant in the Society Hill Historic District. It also proposes to construct a mid-rise residential condominium building behind the remaining section of the historic building. The new building would connect to and wrap around the historic building at the north and east. It would also cantilever over the rear of the historic building. The application also proposes the addition of a doorway in the south wall of the Athenaeum building to the north to access a storage area in the residential condominium building.

The Commission approved an in-concept version of this application in September 2006. At that time, the Commission explicitly determined that the proposed demolition is not a “demolition in significant part” and therefore does not require a finding of financial hardship or necessity in the public interest for approval. In-concept approvals are valid for one year. In September 2007, before the September 2006 in-concept approval expired, the applicant requested and received an extension of the approval in concept for six months to March 2008. The project currently proposed is consistent with the project approved in concept in 2006.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends final approval of the application, pursuant to the Commission’s approval in concept of September 2006.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Farnham presented the application to the Architectural Committee. Property owner John Turchi, attorneys Matt McClure and Neil Sklaroff, architect Carey Yonce, consultants Craig Shelter and George Thomas, and Roger Moss and Sandra Tatman of the Athenaeum represented the application.

Mr. McClure summarized the Commission’s approval in concept in September 2006. He stated that the Commission determined that the proposed removal of the north and east wings would not be a demolition, but would be an alteration. He stated that the Commission had approved in concept the location, height, massing, and basic materials of 16-story tower. He added that Harris Steinberg, a former member of the Commission, stated in 2006 that the tower would “elevate the importance” of the Dilworth House. He noted that the Committee and Commission had suggestions in 2006 for reworking some aspects of the design; those suggestions have been incorporated into the current design. He stated that the architect would explain the design responses to those comments. He said that the comments relate to three aspects of the design: the access to the second floor of the historic building, the design of the south party wall of the Athenaeum, and the design of the south wall of the new condominium tower. He again noted that the Commission had found “that the proposed demolition is not a ‘demolition in significant part’” during its meeting in September 2006. Mr. McClure then introduced Mr. Yonce.

Mr. Yonce explained that the tower would be 16 stories tall and would house 11 full-floor condominium units and one multi-level unit. It would include storage for the Athenaeum and the residents. He stated that the new wall at the south party wall of the Athenaeum had been redesigned based on a recent engineering analysis. He is now proposing to reattach the stucco wall of the Athenaeum to the historic building’s structure rather than constructing a new wall against the stucco wall to buttress it. The rehabilitated stucco wall will project about 6 inches

further to the south than it currently does and will be stuccoed to match the Athenaeum's north wall. He noted that the south wall of the Athenaeum was stuccoed when the historic rowhouses that stood on the Dilworth House site were demolished in 1956. He turned to the south wall of the new tower. He stated that he had amended the design. It is no longer brick red in color, but will now be clad with buff brick to better blend with the towers to the north. It will also better highlight the brownstone front façade. Mr. Rivera asked him what type of brick he planned to use. Mr. Yonce stated that it would be panelized brick. It would be fabricated off site and attached to the building in 12' x 30' panels. He stated that it would not be possible to lay real brick above the Lippincott Building. The installation must be quick. Mr. Yonce explained that the north wall of the tower would step back like a typical Philadelphia rowhouse. The setbacks would protect the Athenaeum and its garden. The north wall would be brick as well, but without the pattern of the south wall. He stated that the rear or east wall would serve as a transition between the north and south walls. It would be solid at the north and patterned at the south, where the balconies are located. He plans to erect a new stuccoed garden wall with parking opening at the rear. He stated that the windows would be aluminum. He has used them successfully on other projects. Mr. McClure pointed out that the window specifications and railing details were provided with the application. Mr. Levy remarked that the mullions appear very heavy. Mr. Yonce replied that they are; Robert Venturi, the architect, deliberately selected windows with heavy mullions. Mr. Yonce stated that the brownstone cladding on the front would have reveals. He also noted the limestone at the top arcade. Mr. Rivera asked how the brownstone would be attached to the building. Mr. Yonce responded that it would be laid in the traditional manner. Mr. Yonce turned to discuss the connection to the Athenaeum. He stated that the designer of the addition to the Athenaeum had anticipated a connection to the south stairwell and had included a knock-out panel where he would now like to place a door to the storage area. Mr. McClure added that the second floor of the Dilworth House would be accessible via a stair and perhaps an elevator. Mr. Yonce reported that the Dilworth monument would be moved from the north front yard to the south. He also stated that he is proposing to restore the historic house. All connections between the historic house and the new building would be minimized. The connections would be expansion joints only, to prevent water infiltration.

Mr. Levy asked Mr. Yonce if he had taken birds into account with his design. Mr. Yonce did not respond at first, but then noted that the building does not include large panes of glass that can be hazards to flying birds. Mr. Levy stated that he was inquiring about the maintenance problem birds might create with the low roof behind the historic house. Mr. Yonce assured him that the roof could be maintained. Suzanna Barruco asked from the audience if plans of the roof had been presented for review. Mr. Yonce stated that they had and offered them to her.

Robert Thomas of the Committee asked Mr. Yonce to explain the windows on the south façade. He stated that he could not understand them because he had not been given the interior plans for the upper floors. Mr. Yonce explained that the windows near the center of the façade light the elevator. The windows at the western edge relate to the windows at the front and open into the living space. Mr. Levy asked about the windows on the south wall at the penthouse level of the Lippincott Building. Mr. Yonce stated that the windows to the south begin at the fifth living level and extend up to the top floor. Several Committee members noted discrepancies in the drawings of the windows. One drawing showed windows at lower levels, looking directly into Lippincott windows. Mr. McClure assured the Committee that that was a drawing error. He stipulated that the south façade windows would be placed no lower than the fifth living level.

George Thomas, the preservation consultant, stated that his team had analyzed the stucco on the Athenaeum building to ensure that the south wall of the Athenaeum would be treated

appropriately. He stated that they would replicate the stucco that currently existing on the north wall of the Athenaeum when the south wall is repaired. Mr. Yonce added that they would retain the ghost outline of the north wing of the Dilworth House, which slated for removal, when the north wall of the main block of the Dilworth House is refaced. George Thomas stated that they have analyzed the paint on the wood trim on the Dilworth House and will replicate the original limestone color when it is painted.

George Thomas reported that he has completed the HABS paperwork and will submit the HABS form with copies of the original architectural drawings of the Dilworth House. Mr. Yonce displayed a page of the original architectural drawings.

Attorney Larry Silver, who represents the Preservation Alliance and Society Hill Civic Association, introduced John Gallery of the Preservation Alliance. Mr. Gallery stated that the presentation by the applicants was competent and complete. He also acknowledged that the applicants had addressed the issues raised by the Alliance at earlier meetings including the interior of the Dilworth House and the south wall of the new tower. He stated that he appreciated the changes. He stated that he still has two fundamental objections to the application. First, he stated that the removal of the wings is a demolition, not an alteration. Mr. McClure objected, contending that the Commission had resolved the demolition question at its September 2006 meeting. Mr. McClure stated that the demolition vs. alteration question should not be raised at this meeting. Mr. Reuter, the Commission's attorney, advised the Committee on the matter. He read from the Commission's Rules & Regulations, §6.7.c.3, which states:

An endorsement of a review in concept of a development program shall not constitute a final review for permit purposes, shall not vest a right in a permit, and shall be subject to review of the final plans by the Commission before the Commission takes final action on a permit application and before a permit may issue.

Mr. Reuter concluded that the Committee may either defer to the Commission, accepting its contention that the removal is not a demolition under the ordinance, or it may reconsider the question of the demolition. Mr. McClure reminded the Committee that it deferred to the Commission in this matter when it last reviewed this proposal. He noted that the Commission had, through a separate motion at its September 2006 meeting, determined that the removal of the wings would not be a demolition, but would be an alteration. He added that the Commission had also approved the project in concept at that meeting. Mr. Gallery asserted that the Commission's decision to consider the removal an alteration, not a demolition, was in concept and therefore open to reconsideration. Mr. McClure asked the Committee to base its recommendation on the Commission's decision to approve this project in concept. Mr. Gallery asserted that an alteration is a mild intervention; a demolition is a significant intervention and this is a significant intervention. Mr. Gallery returned to his presentation. He stated that this proposal does not comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The proposed tower is not compatible. He displayed a drawing comparing this proposal to Mr. Turchi's proposal to convert the house into his residence. He noted that the Commission's concern with the first project was the view of the new construction from the square. He remarked that the tower would be very visible from the square. However, the most prominent view would be from the southwest along 6th Street. He displayed a large photomontage with a rendering of the new building overlaid on a photograph. He objected to the south elevation of the tower and suggested flipping the plan to move the utility core to the north and the recessed, fenestrated area to the south. He noted that the Committee requested alternate designs from the applicants for the Curtis Institute; he suggested that the Committee require alternate designs in this situation as well. He concluded that the reasons for the proposed plan with the core at the south are not self-evident. He requested that the Committee recommend denial.

Paul Boni of the Society Hill Civic Association stated that he opposed the project. He stated that he is still “smarting from what happened at the Commission last year.” He noted that the architect barely mentioned the historic Dilworth House in today’s presentation. He asserted that, from the very beginning of this process, the developer has wanted to demolish the Dilworth House. He stated that the compromise plan was not driven by legal or preservation principles, but by politics. He stated that he “finds it interesting that Ballard Spahr is referring to Harris Steinberg as an authority on planning.” Mr. McClure objected. Mr. Boni defended his right to make the comment. He asserted that the applicants have implied that the project is compliant with zoning; it is not. He contended that the applicants have misled the Commission regarding the project’s zoning status. He claimed that the applicants refuse to flip the plan and fenestrate the south wall of the tower because of a business arrangement with the Athenaeum. He asserted that the developer’s business interest conflicts with the public interest. He suggested that the reasons for not articulating the south wall are not architectural. He stated that he is opposed to the proposed treatment of the Dilworth House and the south wall of the tower. He requested that the Architectural Committee assert its independence from the Commission and recommend denial of the proposal.

Attorney Richard DeMarco, who is representing the neighbors in the Lippincott Building, Independence Place, and St. James Court, addressed the Committee. He stated that the south façade of the tower should be articulated. He asked the Committee to reconsider the demolition question and recommend denial of this proposal. He asserted that the removal of the wings would be a demolition in significant part. He concluded that the proposal does not satisfy Standard 9. He asked the Committee to cite the Standards in any recommendation it might offer.

David Brill, a 21-year resident of Independence Place and its association president, addressed the Committee. He stated that he is “completely unqualified” to talk about this project architecturally. However, he would like to convey the opinions of his complex’s residents. He stated that his complex has 484 units and approximately 700 residents. He objected to any approval of this proposal. He claimed that the site is too small for the project. He claimed that this 16-story building would be almost as tall as a 24-story building. He stated that his residents would have to look at a very tall, blank brick wall every time they exited their building. He stated that the project would be inconsiderate to the neighbors. He opined that it would very difficult to construct and he worried that the Dilworth House might be accidentally destroyed during the construction. He requested that the developer guarantee in writing that the Dilworth House will be restored.

Don Havilland, an attorney and resident of the Lippincott Building, addressed the Committee. He stated that the Architectural Committee always asserts that property owners should be good custodians of their historic properties, but Mr. and Mrs. Turchi have not and will not be good custodians of their property. He stated that the Dilworth House is in disrepair and the rear yard is a “cesspool.” He claimed that the applicants have selected their words very carefully to avoid any real commitments about the project or property. He claimed that the demolition is not a fate accompli. He asserted that the “pay to play” period is over in Philadelphia; he noted that the city has a new mayor. He claimed that Mr. Turchi knew the property was historic when he bought it. He claimed that Mr. Turchi has not been forthright about how he would use the property. He claimed that the Dilworth House will look like a child grabbing its parent’s leg when juxtaposed with the tower. He concluded, asking the Committee members to think seriously about their recommendation. He asked the members if they would be proud to have their names on a plaque at the site of the new tower stating that they had approved it.

Suzanne Binswanger, a resident of the Lippincott Building, asked Mr. Yonce when the proposed building had been extended to the east; the rear facade was, at one point in the design cycle, 36 feet from the street; it is now 24 feet. Mr. Yonce stated that that design change was made many design iterations ago, but he was unable to remember exactly when. Ms. Binswanger noted that the tower would block her living room windows. She asked Mr. Yonce about the finish of the windows. He stated that they would be powder coated aluminum. Ms. Binswanger asked about the connection of the two buildings. Mr. Yonce stated that they would not touch one another. There would be an expansion joint and a space between them.

Ms. Barucco explained that John Gallery had requested that she attend the meeting and comment. She stated that the architects had done a "great job." She stated that she is "neutral" about the project. She asserted that the Committee should consider the removal of the wings as a demolition. She stated that the Committee should not take the demolition decision lightly, but should be able to justify it to the average homeowner appearing before the Committee.

Mr. Levy noted that the representative of Independence Place had objected to the tower, which he had claimed would be as tall as a 24-story building. He asked about the height of the Independence Place towers. Mr. Brill stated that they are 25 stories tall.

Mr. D'Alessandro stated that the south wall should be more articulated or fenestrated. He contended that the utility core could be designed to accommodate more penetrations and architectural detail. He stated that it did not "feel comfortable" with the current design and did not want to put his name on it. He contended that the Athenaeum access would be possible even if the design was flipped. Mr. Rivera noted that flipping the plan would move the setbacks away from the Athenaeum, which was unacceptable. Mr. Levy stated that the residents on one side of the building or the other will complain depending on the location of the elevator core. Mr. D'Alessandro again asserted that the south wall should be redesigned.

Mr. Levy stated that there are several other tall buildings in the immediate vicinity. He asserted that the tower does fit in its context. He approved of the design. He reminded the Lippincott residents that windows in a party wall are always a gamble; there is always a chance that they will be closed by the abutting property owner. He concluded that the architect had addressed all of his concerns but one, the birds. He stated that he remained concerned about the birds. He conceded that he does not know enough about the psychology of birds to reach a conclusion on this issue.

Robert Thomas stated that he would not object to the Commission's approval in concept. He stated that the Committee must be guided by the Commission's decisions as well as the Standards. He noted that it was difficult for him to provide comments on the redesign of the upper part of the south façade because the floor plans for the upper floors were not provided. He suggested that the south wall could be redesigned. He stated that the architect should try to further articulate it, perhaps with more windows, but noted that he would need additional information to reach a conclusion on the south façade. Mr. Yonce asserted that Robert Venturi, the architect, would not build a solid wall at the Athenaeum, out of deference to the National Historic Landmark.

Robert Thomas again stated that he would respect the Commission's decision on the demolition. He asked his fellow Committee members if they too would respect it; they stated that they would. He concluded that the Committee should recommend approval of the proposal, provided the south wall is redesigned.

Roger Moss, the outgoing director of the Athenaeum, stated that the original Athenaeum design was predicated on a freestanding building. He stated that the former buildings on the Dilworth site abutted the Lippincott Building at the south property line. The Lippincott Building was not freestanding; the Athenaeum was; the Athenaeum design was predicated on openness. Changing subjects, Mr. Moss asserted that the opposition, not the developer, was eeking inappropriate agreements behind the scenes. He objected to a backroom deal he claimed Mr. Gallery had offered him. He reported that Mr. Gallery offered to cease objecting to the demolition of the Dilworth wings if the Athenaeum allowed the floor plan of the tower to be flipped, placing the setbacks at the south. He contended that the opposition to the demolition repeatedly raised by the third parties is nothing more than a "smokescreen." Mr. Moss stated that the Athenaeum is a National Historic Landmark. Building the tower against its south wall would place "some of the greatest rooms in America in a black hole." He objected to prioritizing the 1950s Dilworth House over the highly significant Athenaeum. He reminded the Committee that the Independence Place residents had objected to the recent addition to the Lippincott Building, claiming that it too would spoil their views.

Mr. Rivera stated that he agreed that the south wall should be redesigned to include more penetrations. He asserted that the plan should not be flipped to achieve that goal. He suggested a redesign of the south wall, but retention of the overall scheme. Mr. Yonce stated that he would be open to adding more windows on the south wall. Robert Thomas stated that he would like to see additional floor plans for the tower before he can comment further on the south wall. Mr. McClure noted that the staff had considered the application complete without the upper floor plans.

Mr. Silver asked Mr. Rivera to restate the motion before the Committee, if there was one. Mr. Rivera replied that the Committee would recommend approval, but with more windows on the south side. Mr. Reuter reminded him that the Committee must recommend approval without or without conditions or denial; he suggested that they restate the motion. The Committee members agreed that a recommendation of approval was appropriate, but they decided that the south façade details were too important to delegate to the staff. Mr. Farnham noted that the Committee, rather than the staff, has, in the past, reviewed details of very important projects. Mr. Reuter recommended against this course, owing to the possibility of an appeal of the Committee's decision on the details. Mr. Sklaroff urged the Committee to proceed, stating that the Committee's recommendation is non-binding; the Commission may or may not adopt it. Mr. Silver asked the Committee to defer any recommendation until it has had an opportunity to review alternate plans for the south wall.

ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: The Architectural Committee voted unanimously to recommend final approval of the application, provided the south wall of the tower is additionally fenestrated and articulated, with the Architectural Committee to review for final approval the details of the revised south wall design, pursuant to the Commission's approval in concept of September 2006.

ADJOURNMENT

The Architectural Committee adjourned at 11:55 a.m.