

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

Daniel McCoubrey, Acting-Chair
Historical Commission Offices
Room 576 City Hall

2 October 2002

Present

Daniel McCoubrey, Acting-Chair
Rudy D'Alessandro
Suzanne Pentz

Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also

Harry Perks, Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority
Nicole Morris, Vitetta
Jim Karmolinski, Kelly/Maiello Architects
Robert Shamble, Kelly/Maiello Architects
John Sabatino, Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority
Nan Gutterman, Vitetta
Randy Cotton, Preservation Alliance

Mr. McCoubrey called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.

Mr. Tyler presented the proposal for the demolition in concept of the former Fire Department Head Quarters at 1328-32 Race Street on the grounds of public interest for the expansion of the Pennsylvania Convention Center. He explained that this is the only building within the footprint of the proposed center expansion that appears on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places and thus subject to the Commission's jurisdiction.

Reviews under the National Historic Act of 1966, as amended, and the State History Code will address any other preservation issues. Mr. Tyler continued that Philadelphia's ability to remain competitive in the convention and hospitality industry requires the proposed expansion. He noted the preservation of several significant historic properties that would not have been rehabilitated but for the present Convention Center. They included the Reading Terminal, the PSFS Building, City Hall Annex, One East Penn Square and the Girard Bank complex.

The architects included three schemes for the site: one calls for reconstructing the façade of the firehouse at its present location on the block but moved onto the property line; the second includes reconstructing the façade in another location on the center; and the third calls for the complete demolition of the building. The first two of these were essentially studies, and all parties involved only want the third considered. Mr. Tyler noted that the first two options reduce the building's façade to wallpaper.

The staff recommended approval in concept of the demolition based on public interest with several conditions:

HABS recordation prior to demolition

Salvage of artifacts, including 2 fireplaces and exterior details of engaged columns, shields, fireman spring stones and pedestrian doors and surrounds for possible reuse in the future exhibition space within the convention center
Issuance of demolition permit only after building permits are secured
Issuance of demolition permit only after a certification that all monies are secured for the project

Randy Cotton of the Preservation Alliance asked about the historical importance of the building and if any part of it could be incorporated into the design of the center. Nan Gutterman and Nicole Morris of Vitetta explained that the Convention Center expansion will create the needed 500,000 square feet of contiguous space on the second floor and facilitate moving in and out of the complex. The footprint of the firehouse contains 14,300 square feet with the floor plates at levels different than the proposed center. If only the façade of the firehouse is kept in situ, it would affect 2,000 square feet on each floor.

Mr. Tyler stated that no survey of Philadelphia firehouses exists. The city built this firehouse in 1925 and John Molitor, City Architect, designed it. A number of firehouses from the 1920s exist in the city, including the one on Evergreen Avenue in Chestnut Hill and one just above Girard Avenue in Northern Liberties.

Harry Perks of the Convention Center Authority stated that the Authority has had numerous meetings and reports for the proposed expansion. The project will retain the Liberty Title and Trust building at the corner of Broad and Arch Streets and the Philadelphia Life Insurance Company building, as well as its addition. The building will include a 3,000 square-foot exhibition space dedicated to the history of the Convention Center site. The project will also dedicate \$1 million for the exhibition and an addition \$1 million in a trust for off-site historic mitigation.

Mr. Perks questioned the condition of the issuance of the demolition permit after the building permits are secured. He stated that once the authority secures the funding, the demolition would begin while the architects finished the construction documents. However, he did say that the firehouse could be the last building demolished. Owing to the relocation of owners and tenants, environmental reviews, bidding and actual demolition, it will take one and one-half years to prepare the entire site.

Committee members agreed that the firehouse is an excellent example of civic architecture, but that it would be extremely difficult to incorporate it into the project. Also, they noted that the expansion of the convention center is a worthy public interest.

Ms. Pentz made a motion to approve in concept the demolition based on public interest with the following conditions:

HABS recordation prior to demolition

Salvage of any artifacts for possible reuse in the proposed exhibition

Issuance of demolition permit only after certification of funding for the project

This is the last property to be demolished on the site.

Mr. McCoubrey seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura M. Spina
Historic Preservation Planner