

**THE MINUTES OF THE 364TH STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

8 July 1992

**City Council Caucus Room
Room 401 City Hall**

Present

Wayne S. Spilove, Chairman
Stephanie G. Wolf, Ph.D., Vice-Chairwoman
William Brown
David Brownlee, Ph.D.
Arlene Matzkin, AIA
Carmen Torres-Rodriguez
James Cuorato, First Deputy Commerce Director, Commerce Department
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director, City Planning Commission
Scott Wilds, Executive Assistant, Office of Housing & Community Development

E. Jane Hix, Assistant City Solicitor, Law Department
Richard Tyler, Ph.D., Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Sara Jane Elk, Historical Research Technician
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

Also

Ted Beitchman, Office of the Mayor
John Connors, Brickstone Realty
Howard Kittell, Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia

The Minutes of the 363rd Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, held 8 April 1992, Wayne S. Spilove, Chairman. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Brownlee, seconded by Mr. Wilds and approved by unanimous vote.

The Report of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held 29 April 1992, Arlene Matzkin, Chairwoman.

Approval

3428-3432 Sansom Street: The Committee recommended approval of plans for the construction of a collective trash and recycling structure at the rear of these mid-nineteenth century houses.

John Wanamaker Department Store - Concourse Entrance, 1301-1324 Market Street: The Committee recommended approval of a revised proposal for alterations to the concourse level entrance to this Philadelphia landmark. Following considerable discussion at an on-site meeting, the Committee accepted a design that entails partial demolition of the west marble pier, removing an existing brass window display box on its east face, cutting a window two panels wide in the north face of the existing fabric, removal of a brass Wanamaker's plaque and constructing a new wall 2½ feet recessed from the plane of the existing one.

Mr. Brownlee seconded this motion for approval and suggested adding a stipulation requiring the

preservation of the Wanamaker sign as an artifact. Mr. Wilds further amended this motion by suggesting that a City photographer document the historic entrance prior to any demolition.

The Commission voted unanimously to adopt the motion for approval, including the preceding conditions.

The Report on Staff Activities, June 1992, Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer.

Mr. Tyler announced that this Commission meeting marks the last of the tenure of Daniel W. Simcox as Executive Secretary. Mr. Simcox has truly been an asset to the Commission. Mr. Tyler offered a formal expression of gratitude to Mr. Simcox for nearly three years of dedicated service. Mr. Brownlee seconded these remarks and heartily called for their acceptance by acclamation.

Mr. Tyler informed the Commission that the Mayor has appointed Ira Kauderer to fill the position of Executive Secretary. Mr. Kauderer previously worked as a consultant to the Commission through the Certified Local Government program. In that capacity, he prepared several superior nominations to the Philadelphia and National Registers of Historic Place.

Certified Local Government, Educational Session on Design Standards for Historic Restoration and Rehabilitation, Randal Baron, Preservation Planner.

Mr. Tyler explained that the Historical Commission enjoys Certified Local Government status with the National Park Service. One condition of that status is that all members must attend eight hours a year in preservation education. At some future time, David Brownlee will discuss the architectural history of Philadelphia. Today, Mr. Baron will discuss design issues in historic preservation, specifically the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation. The Standards are the Bible of historic preservation and like the Bible, there are many interpretations.

Mr. Baron presented slides to enhance his discussion of the Secretary's Standards. Before focusing on design issues, he explained the review process. The historic preservation ordinance, Section 14-2007 of the Philadelphia Code, entitled "Historic Buildings," establishes a Philadelphia Historical Commission and outlines its jurisdiction. Much of the Commission's work is design review, that is reviewing proposed alterations to historic buildings to ensure their appropriateness.

Design Review Procedure

The design review procedure is a three-tiered process involving the staff, the Architectural Committee and the Historical Commission itself. The first step in applying for any building permit, whether the property is historic or not, is to obtain an application from the Department of Licenses and Inspections. There, an applicant meets with a plans examiner who conducts a preliminary review, which includes a check whether the building is designated as historic. The Department, and various other city agencies, has a complete three-volume set of listings for the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The Philadelphia Register includes over 5000 properties. If a property is listed as historic, the examiner sends the applicant to the office of the Historical Commission at 1401 Arch Street.

At the Commission office, the staff reviews the applicant's plans. Nearly 90% of the plans -- those which do not effect significant public interiors or a publicly visible building exterior -- are approved by the staff while the applicant waits. Included in this vast majority are most interior alterations, including sprinkler installation, demolition of non-bearing walls. The staff will approve most interior alterations as well as those which are not visible to the general public. Some applications that simply specify interior alterations, however, must be reviewed carefully. An applicant who wishes to remove a fireplace may not consider that the chimney then would stand unsupported. Windows are exterior alterations. Finally, the staff ensures that no partitions will block a window and that no suspended ceiling hangs below the window head. To ensure

historical accuracy in its design review, the staff refers to an array of historic resources, including insurance surveys -- which provide highly detailed descriptions of buildings -- photographs and plans.

If a proposed alteration is either visible to the public or controversial, the staff will negotiate with the applicant to achieve an acceptable solution. The staff will use historic documentation, including old insurance surveys and photographs, as bases for its advice. If the applicant is not amenable to the staff's suggestions, the application will be forwarded to the Architectural Committee. The Committee, after reviewing an application at a public meeting, will forward a recommendation to the Commission, which takes a final decision. The Commission's decision may be appealed to the Board of Licenses and Inspections Review. In turn, the Board's ruling may be appealed to the Court of Common Pleas.

General Principles of Commission Review

Through the years, the Commission has reviewed many varied applications affecting historic buildings. Over time, the Commission has established certain general principles:

- consistency; all applicants must be treated equally;
- treat work already undertaken without a permit in the same manner as proposed alterations; to review plans otherwise would reward illegal work performed without permits;
- the heritage of the City is a silent defendant in all applications; while an applicant is usually present, the Commission must be aware that many people who benefit from or enjoy Philadelphia's historic resources are relying on the Commission to protect them; even if these people are not present to speak at a particular hearing;
- issues of money and crime warrant documentation; while many applicants will allude to financial hardship or fear of crime, there are provisions in the ordinance to document the former and, as a practice, it has been useful to request that an applicant document the latter as well.

The Secretary's Standards provide guidance for preservation decisions. However, these decisions do not provide clear instruction for every situation. Applications vary widely and require the expertise, creativity and discretion of the members of the Historical Commission and its committees.

The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Mr. Baron reviewed each of the standards and presented slides illustrating positive and negative manifestations of each. The following offers a general summary of his points:

1. *"Compatible Use"*: Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure or site and its environment, to use a property for its originally intended purpose. The Philadelphia historic preservation ordinance does not actually provide jurisdiction over use. However, in some cases, the question of use is significant to design decisions. In the very few cases where the City owns the property, like the Eastern State Penitentiary, the Commission may influence the actual use of an historic resource. Occasionally, other applications will involve the question of compatible use.
2. *"Preserve Historic Fabric"*: The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alterations of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible. *This standard is probably the most important and most often used by this or any other historical commission.* Showing a rowhouse near 12th & Locust Streets, Mr. Baron explained the damage done by removing original windows and by filling a former entrance. The alterations ruined the integrity of the building and obscured its historic character. The ordinance not only protects the form of the building but also

the actual materials that comprise it and imbue it with character.

3. **"Recognize Buildings as Products of Their Own Time":** All buildings, structures and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged. Mr. Baron showed an example of a building that the owner tried to make "Colonial" by adding a pediment on the facade. The building never would have had this inappropriate, false "historic" alteration.
4. **"Significant Alterations":** Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected. Mr. Baron showed a slide of a building along Portico Row that had Victorian alterations, undertaken by the publisher of an influential nineteenth-century journal. This alteration possesses significance itself and was protected by this Commission.
5. **"Preserve distinctive stylistic features":** Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity. Mr. Baron contrasted an ornate brownstone detail with an insensitive attempt to repair a similar feature in stucco. The craftsmanship was buried and much of the building's character damaged. The details of a building often distinguish it.
6. **"Repair, when possible, rather than replace":** Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures. Mr. Baron showed a slide of a tax credit rehabilitation on the 400 block of Bainbridge Street. The owner preserved thirty percent of the historic wood siding and replaced the balance with a beaded board to match. He also showed a slide of a hotel on Locust Street where an historic entrance had been restored. Finally, he noted a poor brick match undertaken because the owner found "some historic brick." Though old, the brick was a poor match, resulting in a very peculiar facade.
7. **"Clean gently":** The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken. Mr. Baron discussed the problems of sandblasting, which will remove the hard surface from a brick, exposing its softer core to the weather and accelerating its deterioration.
8. **"Preserve archeological resources":** Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archeological resources affected by, or adjacent to any project. Though the Commission does not often see archeological matters, it occasionally has been involved in excavations; for example, the Hertz Lot along Delaware Avenue.
9. **Contemporary design:** Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property, neighborhood or environment. Mr. Baron showed an example of compatible, contemporary construction. He noted that while the scale, materials and roofline were similar to that of adjacent historic buildings, the new construction clearly differed in style.

10. *Alter in a reversible manner:* Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired. Mr. Baron showed the restoration of the Widener Building, where an arcade that had been hidden by earlier unsympathetic alterations was restored. In contrast, he showed a restaurant on Locust Street that altered its facade in a manner that removed the whole brick wall and many signature Greek Revival features.

Common Issues before the Historical Commission

Mr. Baron provided a brief summary of some common issues faced by the Historical Commission.

A. Demolition: This is the most serious issue faced by the Commission and a whole session will be devoted to demolition and claims of financial hardship. In cases where the request for demolition is based on structural instability, the Commission generally requests an inspection by the Department of Licenses and Inspections. At times, the Commission may retain an independent structural engineer.

B. "Facade-omy": Mr. Baron discussed the Penn Mutual building on 500 block of Walnut Street. While fortunate that the facade was preserved, it was tragic that the last example of Egyptian Revival architecture in the city was demolished. However, at that time, the Commission could only delay demolition for six months. Given its authority to deny a demolition permit under the current ordinance, Mr. Baron expressed his opinion that the Commission probably would deny such a request today.

C. Partial demolition

D. Aluminum siding: Aluminum and vinyl siding is wholly undesirable. It obscures historic fabric, damages such fabric through its attachment and not infrequently hides, without solving, significant structural problems.

E. Integrity

F. Roofing The roof of a building can often be considered its "fifth facade." Some roofs possess a texture and color highly significant to the building's character. Though an asphalt shingle roof is cheaper in the short run, in the long-run it may be more economical to roof with metal or slate.

G. Masonry openings: Though not desirable, sometimes the Commission has allowed an owner to close a masonry opening, if it's not on a major public facade and there is an important reason for doing so. In these cases, the Commission always has ensured that there is a small reveal to evoke the former opening.

H. Chimneys

I. Masonry: Sometimes alternate materials can replicate the look of masonry, such as on the Widener Building, where the acanthus leaves of the capitals were re-fabricated of aluminum.

1. *Brownstone:* There is no truly satisfactory repair method for this beautiful, though difficult material. Some of the options include patching with colored stucco and synthetic materials.
2. *Repointing:* Contemporary mortar is harder than that used on many historic buildings. The Commission requests review of mortar specifications and asks that a substantial amount of lime be used in order to allow the brick room to expand, thereby preventing spalling and cracking.
3. *Air conditioning:* The Commission has disapproved proposals to cut holes through masonry for the installation of air conditioners. Window units are permitted.

4. Cleaning: Cleaning is beneficial mainly for its psychological effect in demonstrating reinvestment in a building. The Commission primarily ensures that it is done properly with as little damage to the surface as possible.

5. Sealing is discouraged because it retains moisture and can accelerate deterioration.

J. Windows tell much about the style and age of a building. Window replacement is a common issue before the Commission. The Commission has asked that windows be replaced in-kind, with matching molding profiles and has not allowed snap-in muntins or changes in the look of the historic windows. Proposals to install window bars, for security purposes, also appear regularly.

K. Roof decks have been present in Philadelphia since the eighteenth century. Mr. Baron showed a photograph of a deck on the Man Full of Troubles Tavern. The proper placement and set-back of a deck can keep it from overwhelming the architecture.

L. Roll-down security grates and grilles. The Commission has encouraged the latter, which are "see-through." The former, which are solid, generally have been disapproved. The Commission encourages applicants to explore the possibility of installing any grille on the interior.

M. Satellite dishes, which have a peculiar space-age presence on historic buildings, have been approved by staff only where they can be hidden at the rear of buildings behind a deck or fence.

N. Rear ells are sometimes visible and highly significant.

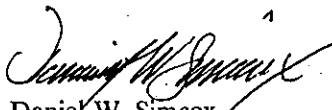
O. Demolition by neglect. The ordinance allows the Commission to force an owner to stop demolition by neglect. Though not full-scale restoration. This sometimes involves roof patching, sealing windows or downspouts.

P. Unique historic resources Some resources, though legally protected are difficult to monitor and regulate because they are outside the building permitting process. Mr. Baron showed a slide of the granite steps on Wood Street as an example.

The Chairman expressed gratitude to Mr. Baron for a fine and informative presentation. The Commission conveyed its appreciation with applause.

There being no further business, the Commission adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary