

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2009, 9:00 A.M.
ROOM 18-029, 1515 ARCH STREET (ONE PARKWAY)
RICHARD DILWORTH, PH.D., CHAIR**

PRESENT

Richardson Dilworth III, Ph.D.
Janet Klein
Bruce Laverty
Jeffrey Cohen, Ph.D.
David Schaaf
Penelope Giles

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director
Erin Coté, Historic Preservation Planner II

ALSO PRESENT

Carole Robinson, 4250 Parkside Avenue
Joyce Smith, 4251 Viola Street
Sean Solomon, 4255 Viola Street
Sharon Mikell, resident
Lorraine Gomez, 4243 Viola Street
Jacqui Greenberg, resident
Michael Birch, 4210 Viola Street
Evette Birch, 4210 Viola Street
Alestra Carter, 4000-block Parkside Avenue
Naomi Smith, 4256 Viola Street

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Dilworth called the meeting to order at 9:16 a.m. Ms. Giles and Klein and Messrs. Laverty, Cohen, and Schaaf joined him on the Committee.

PARKSIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Owner: Various, 110 properties
Nominator: The Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia and the Parkside Historic Preservation Corporation
Proposal: Nomination for district designation

OVERVIEW: The Parkside Historic District represents a unique German community in Philadelphia, built between 1890 and 1900, bordering Fairmount Park, across from Memorial Hall, on land once part of the Centennial Exposition. The original development of the Historic District was possible with the suburbanization of the area with the extension of the suburban transit system in the 1890s. Within the Historic District boundaries, elaborate row houses and apartment buildings were constructed primarily by Philadelphia's brewers and merchants of German descent, and developers associated with the German community. The resulting

buildings are of an architectural style reminiscent of their German heritage, with recessed front porches, providing an urban response to suburbanization, and deviated greatly from the usual brick row house development in other parts of Philadelphia.

The Parkside Historic District meets nine criteria outlined in the Philadelphia Code, Section 14-2007(5) (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, j). Parkside has significant character, interest and value as part of the development and heritage of the city; is associated with the suburbanization of the area following the Centennial Exposition; reflects the environment in an era characterized by distinctive architectural styles; and embodies distinguishing characteristics of those styles. It is the work of several notable architects of the period including Willis G. Hale, (active 1870-1907), Frederick Newman (active 1880-1910), Angus Wade (active 1875-1910) and H.E. Flower (active 1890-1902) whose work significantly influenced the historical and architectural development of the city. The Historic District contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation in the Flemish interpretation of the row house; is related to Memorial Hall and Fairmount Park, a distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; owing to its unique location and singular physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community and city; and exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of Philadelphia's German community.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the proposed Parkside Historic District as defined in the nomination satisfies Criteria for Designation a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, and j, and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

DISCUSSION: Ms. Coté presented the nomination to the Committee.

Mr. Schaaf pointed out some grammatical and spelling errors in the nomination. He also questioned a claim in the Description that the architect J. C. Worthington had designed buildings in Atlantic City. Mr. Cohen stated that Worthington did not design much in Atlantic City; however, several of his buildings can be found in Bryn Mawr. He suggested that the staff insert ellipses in the Description to clarify this.

Mr. Cohen stated that he was in favor of the nomination but was concerned about the paper trail. He stated that the nomination references the 1983 National Register nomination but does not provide hard links to resource material. Mr. Dilworth pointed out that there is a bibliography provided in the nomination. Mr. Cohen stated that there is no documentation linking buildings to architects and developers. He asserted that the proper citations and sources should be integrated into the nomination.

Mr. Farnham suggested that the staff could undertake this research and improve the documentation, but it was unlikely that it could be completed before the Commission reviews the nomination. Mr. Lavery agreed that a better paper trail was needed and offered his assistance in the research. Mr. Cohen did as well.

Sean Solomon, owner of 4255 Viola Street, stated that he is restoring his house and has been for the past 11 years. He has conducted extensive research into the neighborhood, especially Viola Street. He stated that he strongly supports the nomination and added that the neighborhood needs the support and status associated with designation. Mr. Solomon explained that his research includes investigations of census data, city directories, and permit records. He stated that the original residents were business owners of German and English descent. He stated that the neighborhood vastly changed between 1900 and 1910. He stated that, based on his research, the houses Memorial and Marlton Avenues and 42nd Street were

constructed after the residences on Parkside Avenue and Viola Street in 1900. His house was built in 1897. He found a newspaper advertisement for these houses dating from 1898. He stated that Willis Halle only designed 4 houses and the rest were designed by H.E. Flower. Ms. Giles asked if Mr. Solomon knew of any religious significance associated with the design of these buildings. She observed that crosses can be found in design elements. Mr. Solomon responded that there are biblical references in the buildings. He stated that there are terra cotta cherub faces found throughout the row on Viola Street. Ms. Giles suggested that research should be done on the religious aspects of the architecture. Mr. Solomon stated that he researched the town in Germany where Poth, the developer, grew up.

Ms. Giles commended Mr. Solomon on his research and restoration work. She asked him how much time and resources he has invested in the project. Mr. Solomon replied that he had purchased his house 11 years ago for \$5,000. Since then, he has invested approximately \$25,000 into restoring the property. He stated that he does most of the work himself and has been able to salvage materials and architectural features from his neighbors. Mr. Cohen suggested that the staff and any interested Committee members should meet with Mr. Solomon to discuss his research and restoration work. Mr. Solomon stated that he would be happy to share the information that he has found with the staff and the Committee.

Joyce Smith, owner of 4251 Viola Street, stated that she is part of a group of residents on the 4200 block of Viola Street, who are looking to protect and revitalize the street. She stated that the group is in support of the nomination.

Arelestia Carter, a resident and block captain of the 4000 block of Parkside Avenue, stated that she loves where she lives and supports the nomination, but would like to see her block included in the proposed historic district. Her block is adjacent to, but not in the proposed district. She stated that she attended this meeting to ask for help and be a part of the proposed historic district.

Michael Birch, owner of 4210 Viola Street, stated that he moved back to the neighborhood when his mother passed away. He stated that there is new life in the neighborhood. He fully supports the nomination, but would like to see the boundaries expanded to include the south side of Viola Street.

Ms. Giles asked if there were any residents or property owners who were not in support of the nomination or were afraid of the impact of designation. Lorraine Gomez of 4243 Viola Street responded that people are always afraid, but this community is all for the designation of the district. She stated that the area is experiencing revitalization with the Centennial District and the neighborhood is excited about it. She opined that it would be sinful not to have the proposed district expanded to include the south side of the 4200 block of Viola Street. She asked why it was not included. Mr. Dilworth read from the determination of preliminary eligibility memorandum regarding the boundaries.

The group visited Parkside first. All members of the group agreed that Parkside appears to satisfy several of the Commission's designation criteria and therefore is preliminarily eligible for listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, but suggested a reconsideration of the boundaries. The group noted especially recent demolitions of buildings on Leidy and other streets. In the area south of Girard Avenue, it noted the significant loss of integrity on many blocks; for example, porches had been demolished, cornices and other decorative features removed, and aluminum siding, stucco, and other non-historic materials added. It noted the many unique and outstanding architectural

specimens north of Girard, but also noted that the buildings south of Girard are primarily vernacular, speculative, two-story rowhouses like those found throughout sections of the city developed in the late nineteenth century.

Mr. Lavery stated that the boundaries are based on architecture and integrity. The buildings on the south side of Viola and the 4000-block of Parkside are unrelated architecturally to the buildings within the proposed district.

Mr. Farnham stated that the property owners on the south side of the 4200 block of Viola Street and the 4000 block of Parkside Avenue have two options. They can pursue submitting an amendment to the Parkside Historic District, if the Commission votes to designate it, or they can submit a separate nomination for their areas. He stated that the buildings within the proposed district were part constructed as a cohesive development between 1890 and 1900 and have a distinctive German-American architectural style. He asserted that the blocks outside the proposed district are unrelated in terms of architectural history and development history. He remarked that the proposed boundary is not intended to define the current community or reflect its sense of identity. It is based on history only. He also noted that the Historical Commission has limited resources and must designate and then regulate only those areas that merit the form of preservation it can provide.

Mr. Lavery asked how many properties were occupied on the south side of Viola Street. Ms. Gomez responded that there are three vacant properties on the south side.

Naomi Smith, the owner of 4256 Viola Street, stated that she was in support of the nomination.

Carol Robinson, the owner of 4250 Parkside Avenue, stated that she purchased her property in 1980. She asked the Committee to reconsider adding the south side of Viola Street before the December Commission meeting. Ms. Giles stated that adding the two blocks in question would delay the nomination. Ms. Robinson stated that she did not oppose a delay. Mr. Cohen stated that proceeding with the nomination would protect the proposed district from unnecessary demolitions. Ms. Gomez stated that she would like to see the nomination proceed and that she would assist in the work of adding the south side of the 4200-block of Viola Street at a later point.

Yvette Birch, the owner of 4210 Viola Street, stated that is in support of the nomination and happy to be a resident of the area and would love to say that her property is historic.

Mr. Dilworth suggested that the staff do some preliminary research on the 4000-block of Parkside Avenue and the south side of the 4200-block of Viola Street and provide it to the Commission to allow it to decide how to proceed. Ms. Giles concurred.

Ms. Klein asked if expanding the district would require revising the Statement of Significance. Mr. Farnham stated that it likely would and the Commission would likely refer a revised nomination back to the Committee on Historic Designation.

Ms. Gomez stated that she and other residents would like to see the nomination go forward as is and be amended later. Mr. Dilworth encourage the residents of 4000-block of Parkside Avenue and the south side of the 4200 block of Viola Street to attend the Commission's December meeting to present their opinions on the matter.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: Mr. Dilworth moved to recommend that the proposed Parkside Historic District as defined in the nomination satisfies Criteria for Designation a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, and j, and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places with the revisions to the nomination suggested by the Committee on Historic Designation. He also moved to recommend that the Commission evaluate the research on the surrounding areas and determine whether the district should be expanded to include 4000-block of Parkside Avenue and the south side of the 4200-block of Viola Street. Ms. Giles seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Dilworth moved to adjourn at 11:00 a.m. Mr. Cohen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.