

THE REPORT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Arlene Matzkin, Chairperson

Commission Conference Room
Suite 1301, 1401 Arch Street

1 December 1992

Present

Arlene Matzkin, AIA, Chairperson
William Cornell, P.E., Carpenters' Company of Philadelphia
Don Stevenson, AIA
David Hollenberg, National Park Service
Penelope Batchelor, Historical Architect, Independence National
Historical Park
Herb Levy, AIA

Jane Hix, Esq., City of Philadelphia, Law Department
Richard Tyler, Ph.D., Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Ira Kauderer, Executive Secretary

Also

George Workman, N.V. Holmes & Sons
Lorna Katz, Society Hill Civic Association
Louise Cruz Vizcaino
Nan Guttermann, Vitetta Group
Albert M. Tantala, Tantala Associates, Consulting Engineers
Joseph A. Felici, Tantala Associates, Consulting Engineers
S. Neil Schlosser, SRK Architects
Judith Flaxman
Robert D. Sichel
Daniel Greenstein, Esq.
Howard Kittell, Preservation Coalition
M. Altshuler, Old City Civic Association
Harry Perks, Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority
Theodore W. Garrison, III, Pennsylvania Convention Center
Authority
Kenneth J. Bryson, TVS and Associates
Roger Prichard, Old City Civic Association
Richard W. Thom, Old City Civic Ass'n, Historic East Market
Street

Approval

230 Pine Street: This proposal calls for legalizing a garage

door installed without a permit. In 1989 we reviewed a metal coiling garage door at this location also installed without a permit. This application involves a wooden paneled sectional roll-down garage door that replaced the metal door. Though the staff would generally recommend a side swinging gate, they agreed that this door is considerably better than the first.

Ms. Viscaino stated that she thought the Committee had approved this second door. The Committee, however, produced letters showing that they had stated that they had not approved a design for a new door but rather requested that she produce a drawing in order for them to review the work before it was constructed. Lorna Katz of the Society Hill Civic Association stated that she would prefer to see a swinging or sliding type gate in Society Hill, however she recognized that the existing gate is better than the first one.

The Committee voted to recommend approval of the existing wooden garage door, but focused attention on how it could be improved. They recommend that two mismatched boards that comprise a header be replaced with a single larger board of uniform stained color. Staff will review improvements before work begins.

1520 Spruce Street, The Touraine: This proposal, which the Committee has seen twice before, involves a railing and windscreen for the roofdeck of the penthouse of the Touraine Building. Mr. Workman altered the design previously presented so that it no longer includes the pergola. Also, in this new proposal the railing attaches to the back of the flower boxes and benches instead of to the parapet. Mr. Workman intends to minimize the visual impact of this railing by painting it grey. Drawings still show the windscreen at the edge of the building.

The Committee considered the design of the windscreen and agreed that the southernmost portion should be reconfigured so that it is not visible from Pine Street. With this change they recommended approval of the plans as presented.

3424-30 Sanson Street, White Dog Cafe: This proposal calls for adding a stairtower in the areaway between the rear ends of two buildings. The stairtower will project out further than the rears of the buildings and will be visible from the food court of the Shops at Penn.

The Committee suggested that the architect simplify the design by using fewer materials and changing the shape of the proposed pentagonal window near the top of the stairtower. They voted to approve the proposal with these suggestions. Ms. Matzkin

abstained from the vote.

1115-41 Market Street, Reading Terminal Trainshed: Ms. Gutterman came to the committee to get input on issues such as; the detail of the intersection of the glass wall with the roof truss, the windows for the outside of the trainshed and the colors for several surfaces.

Ballroom Curtainwall: Ms. Gutterman presented a drawing showing a 19" member at the intersection of two planes of glass that intersect in front of the roof truss. The Committee approved this as presented.

Color for skylight and clerestory: Presented with a choice of several grays, the Committee chose the darkest one for the end wall of this structure.

Color for north curtainwall: The section representing the void will be inset five feet and colored dark grey. The curtain wall above will be in two tones of lighter grey to represent the glass divided by the pattern of the mullions. The existing ironwork will be painted a tone of brown determined historic through paint analysis.

Replacement Windows: Architects have discovered that profile of the window frames on the second and third floor levels differ from the frames on the first floor level. The Committee approved the architect's plan to re-mill all replacement window frames to a single profile. The one not chosen will be recorded for the Commission's records.

21-25 North Second Street:

This proposal calls for the complete demolition of an 1898 commercial building designed by Collins and Autenrieth. At the outset of the meeting Mr. Tyler briefly outlined the history of applicant's proposal for demolition.

The rear portion of the subject premises suffered a fire on 25 May 1992. Applicants came to the Commission with a permit for complete demolition. This was signed because the Department of Licenses and Inspections listed the rear portion of the property as "imminently dangerous" and the rear of the property appeared inaccessible. Later the same day it became apparent that construction on Church Street would be completed within several weeks, making the property accessible from Front Street. Mr. Tyler reported that as far as the Department of Licenses and Inspections was concerned, the building permit was for the

imminently dangerous portion of the building only. Mr. Tyler added that for the whole building to be demolished adequate public notice and the approval of the Commission would be required. The permit for the demolition of the front portion of the building was rescinded pending Commission review. In the interim the applicants submitted several pieces of information in support of an application for demolition based on hardship.

Attorney Daniel Greenstein appeared before the Architectural Committee for the applicants. He stated his belief that the demolition permit was for the entire building. Greenstein further asserted that rehabilitation of the front building would require prohibitively expensive new systems and interior renovation, since the building sustained water damage during the fire. Greenstein said that though his clients, the Sichels, have occupied the building since 1951, they have never been notified of its listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. He also denied that the building merits preservation since the owners altered the building by adding the present storefront in 1951.

The applicants retained Tantala Associates, consulting engineers, to assess the condition of the building. Albert Tantala addressed the Committee and stated that the rear portion of the building is in imminently dangerous condition. He added that the front portion is structurally sound, though it sustained water damage and has a leaky roof, and is repairable.

Mr. Sichel, the owner's husband, stated that he had received a letter from the insurers of the building, stating that the policy would be canceled within 45 days of October 17th if the building was not demolished. Mr. Greenstein added that if the property continues to stand as is, it is likely that someone would be killed inside. He stated that it would be more cost effective for his clients to demolish the entire building at once, rather than demolish the imminently dangerous portion immediately and the structurally sound front portion at a later time.

Mr. Sichel addressed the Committee and asked if it would not be better to replace the existing building with something that would be "more historic," given the modern storefront on the existing building. Mr. Sichel added that he could not envision a possible desirable reuse of the building. He stated that he envisioned the lot holding two colonial style townhouses. He doubted, however, that permission for a residential use with parking in the rear was either obtainable from the City or acceptable to neighborhood. He added that if parking was

permitted, it would not be an economically viable use since plenty of parking exists in the neighborhood.

Roger Prichard spoke for the Old City Civic Association. He stated that the Association supports the demolition of the rear portion of the building and its replacement with parking. He added that the Civic Association would support necessary zoning variances to achieve this result. Concerning demolition, Prichard noted that the demolition for the rear was estimated to cost about \$83,000.00, while the demolition for the entire property would cost \$108,000.00, reflecting expense for additional work, not added cost for two separate jobs. In response to these comments the applicant answered that the costs of demolition would be paid out of the proceeds of a fire insurance policy. Concerning notice of historic listing, Mr. Prichard stated that Walter Sichel, the applicant's brother, was an active officer of the Old City Civic Association and an ardent supporter of preservation. As such, it was Mr. Prichard's belief that he would have been aware of the listing of the subject building on the Philadelphia Register.

Mr. Richard Thom, an architect working with the Civic Association addressed the Committee. He stated that in his opinion, after inspection of the building after the fire, there is no reason why it could not be restored to a commercial use. Mr. Thom noted that numerous similar properties in the immediate area have undergone such restoration using the historic tax credit program. Mr. Sichel responded that he had an application from a karate studio for the commercial space, but thought this would be an inappropriate use. Mr. Thom stated that such a use would be acceptable to the community. He added that as project coordinator for Historic East Market Street he considers the property in question an extremely important part of the context of the surrounding area, which is slated for a five million dollars of public and private improvements. He added that demolition of this property would endanger the structural integrity of the adjoining historic buildings also owned by the Sickels, which share a party wall.

Mr. Thom presented a plan where the rear of the property would be cleared and would become a parking lot that he claimed could generate at least \$100.00 per spot per month. He said that this money could be used for the carrying costs of the historic building until it was feasible to restore the property.

Mr. Baron noted that the letter from the Sichel's insurance company, included in the applicant's presentation, did not threaten that the policy would be canceled, but merely required

demolishing a free-standing rear wall, clearing debris, and sealing the front building. Mr. Baron stated that he thought that the Committee was prepared to approve all of these measures immediately.

Dr. Tyler stated that the issue is whether there is a reasonable reuse for the building. This could include a mixed-use scheme combining commercial and residential uses. He stated that it would be helpful to know the rehabilitation costs for such a project, what the expected return would be including revenue from a rear parking lot, what the insurance proceeds would be and how the tax credits would affect the analysis.

Mr. Hollenberg stated that no convincing architectural argument for demolition has been made to the Committee which only evaluates architectural merit and structural problems. He noted that the basis of the applicant's argument is economic and should be considered by the Hardship Committee. This Committee, in his view, could not justify demolition of the front portion of the building. The Committee concurs that the demolition of the rear should take place immediately.

Dr. Tyler stated that as part of the process to evaluate the possible reuse of historic property, the City would, at its expense, retain an outside appraiser acceptable to all parties to make an independent assessment of economic feasibility.

Mr. Greenstein asked what would happen if the case concerning Philadelphia's historic preservation ordinance, now being considered by the state Supreme Court, came down against the Historical Commission. Ms. Hix of the City Law Department responded that even in that case it would need to be shown that the building was listed without owner consent, for it to be deemed not listed.

Ms. Matzkin moved that the Committee approve 1) demolition of the rear, imminently dangerous portion of the property, and 2) that the owner secure the rear of the front building as required by the Department of Licenses and Inspections. She also moved to defer the question of the demolition of the front part of the building to the Hardship Committee since the applicant's argument is an economic one. To conduct its meeting, the Hardship Committee would need an analysis of the costs of rehabilitation and the possible revenue that could be generated by reuse of the building. The Committee requested investigation for three different reasonable reuse schemes such as all residential, all commercial and mixed use. Committee members asked that this come in the form of a pro forma over ten years with all expenses and

income. This should factor in the Historic Tax Credit and the City's Tax Abatement Program. The proceeds from the fire insurance should also be listed.

Both motions passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned.