

THE MINUTES OF THE 298th STATED MEETING

OF THE

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

29 January 1986

F. Otto Haas, Chairman

Present: F. Otto Haas, Chairman
Christine Washington, Vice Chairman
Joan Ferreira
Grace Gary
Caroline Golab
David Hollenberg
William Thompson
Paul J. Deegan, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Public
Property
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director, City Planning Commission
Julia Robinson, Director, Office of Housing
John Street, Esq., Councilman, Fifth District
David Wismer, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Licenses and
Inspections
Mark McQueen, Esq., Assistant City Solicitor, Law Department
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Executive Secretary
Terri Koob, Clerk Steno II

Also: Clara Gullen, City Council Technical Staff
Bill Holmes, Office of Housing
Stephanie Craighead, City Planning Commission
Mrs. Dolores Jackson, 2019 N. Van Pelt Street
Ms. Eloise Gaines, 1712 W. Diamond Street
Ms. Queen Dalton, representing Ms. Louise Cooper of 1922 W.
Diamond Street
Ms. Margaret Allen, 1910 W. Diamond Street
Ms. Celestine White, 1625 W. Diamond Street
And others

Unless otherwise noted, all actions taken herein are the results of motions
correctly made, seconded and carried.

THE MINUTES of the 297th Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Com-
mission held on 18 December 1985, F. Otto Haas, Chairman, were reviewed
and unanimously approved.

THE REPORTS of the Architectural Committee Meetings held on 12 December 1985 and 9 January 1986, David Hollenberg, Chairman. Mr. Hollenberg reported that three items left unresolved in the report of the 12 December meeting are still pending:

- a) 423 Vine Street. Mrs. Batcheler and Ms. Siemiontkowski visited the site to inspect the building with Mr. Rosenblum. Further investigation will be needed to document the original appearance of the ground floor. Mr. Rosenblum will report his findings at a later date.
- b) City Hall, Renovations to the Third, Fourth and Fifth Floors. A mechanism for monitoring this project by the Historical Commission and the Art Commission has not yet been established with Public Property Commissioner Sykes.
- c) Philadelphia Maritime Museum, 321 Chestnut Street. The staff is still awaiting receipt of revised drawings.

Mr. Hollenberg further reported that two items from the 9 January meeting warrant special mention:

- a) 13 S. 2nd Street. The Committee recommended that the Commission invoke Section 7(f) of 14-2007 of the Philadelphia Code which requires an owner to show that there is no feasible and economic reuse for a building. The Committee also recommended that the Commission invoke Section 8(c) of 14-2007 of the Philadelphia Code to prevent further deterioration of the structure.
- b) 762 S. Front Street. Mrs. Batcheler and Ms. Siemiontkowski visited the site to determine the appropriateness of alterations undertaken on this building without the Historical Commission's approval. The owner will be notified by letter of the decision reached as a result of this inspection.

The Commission unanimously approved the Reports of the Meetings of the Architectural Committee held on 12 December 1985 and 9 January 1986.

THE REPORT of the Meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation held 8 November 1985, Grace Gary, Chairman. Ms. Gary presented the remaining item in the Report of the Committee on Historic Designation held 8 November 1985, the nomination of the Diamond Street District. Ms. Gary explained that the Committee recommended approval of this district by a vote of 4-0 with one abstention. Mr. Baron presented slides of the proposed district. Mr. Tyler addressed the Commission stating that the Historical Commission's primary goal for this first local district is to preserve the buildings and the community along Diamond Street. Mr. Tyler continued that all legal notifications required by the ordinance were satisfied, i.e., letters were mailed to the owners in November, posters were placed in each block affected by the designation and a legal notice appeared in the newspaper. Mr. Tyler

further stated that a community meeting was conducted by Councilman John Street of the Fifth District, Edward Leftwich of the Office of Housing, Bruce Wiggins of the City Planning Commission, and himself to answer questions and explain the effects of historical designation on the community. As a result of that meeting, Councilman Street had questionnaires delivered to the houses along Diamond Street seeking the views of owner-residents on the proposed designation. From the approximately half dozen responses received by Councilman Street's office, all were positive. According to Mr. Tyler, the Historical Commission letter of November asking for responses resulted in approximately six phone calls, only one of which was in opposition. The opposing opinion came from the owner of an already historically designated property on the north side of the 1600 block of Diamond Street. Mr. Tyler informed those present that the City Planning Commission forwarded to him a letter extending its endorsement of the Diamond Street Historic District. This action was taken at the City Planning Commission's meeting of 23 January 1986.

Mr. Tyler reported that the nomination of the Diamond Street District was researched and written by Mr. Baron with the assistance of Ms. Siemiontkowski.

Following a motion, duly seconded, to approve the creation of the Diamond Street Historic District, the Chairman opened the meeting for discussion.

Mrs. Dolores Jackson of 2019 Van Pelt Street. Mrs. Jackson questioned the boundaries and the effect that historic designation would have upon the properties included therein.

Mr. Tyler responded that the proposed district would include those properties along Diamond Street from Broad Street to Van Pelt Street. The major effect concerns the Department of Licenses and Inspections permit application procedure. Mr. Tyler stated that any alterations or demolitions by either private or public agencies must be approved by the Historical Commission prior to the issuance of a permit. In addition designation will provide a mechanism to encourage repairs to the many vacant houses for use by low and moderate income community people.

Ms. Eloise Gains of 1712 Diamond Street. Ms. Gains asked if owners would be required to sell their homes.

Mr. Tyler replied that no one could be forced to sell his/her property, but may, of course, sell if they chose to.

Ms. Queen Dalton representing Ms. Louise Cooper of 1922 Diamond Street. Ms. Dalton expressed Ms. Cooper's enthusiasm for designation of the proposed district. She believes designation to be a good idea that may help in the refurbishing of the properties in the area.

Ms. Margaret Allen of 1910 Diamond Street. Ms. Allen wanted information on the number of owner-occupied houses in the proposed district. Ms. Allen also questioned the reason for choosing this area for a district rather than Society Hill.

Mr. Tyler responded that 50 of the 230 buildings in the proposed district are owner-occupied, 75 are vacant and the remainder are occupied by tenants. Of these 75 vacancies, 65 are owned by the City. According to Mr. Tyler, this area was chosen as the first locally designated district owing to the fact that North Philadelphia possesses some of the richest domestic late 19th century architecture in the city. Also, historic designation can be used as a planning tool in terms of rehabilitation. Mr. Tyler pointed out that even with the approval of this historic designation still pending, the historic preservation funds have already been awarded by the William Penn Foundation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Office of Housing for the rehabilitation of the 1700 block of Diamond Street. Mr. Tyler emphasized that this extra money would not have been put into the neighborhood if it were not for the possibility of historic designation.

Ms. Celestine White of 1625 Diamond Street recounted a very bad experience she had with a City program in 1979 when she received grant money for the rehabilitation of her property. As a result of this program, Ms. White stated that the house was left in a devastated condition with major portions of the contracted work left incomplete.

Responding to Ms. White's unfortunate experience, Ms. Gary stated that the program which Ms. White described is entirely different and has no connection to the designation program. Ms. Gary continued that historic designation has the potential to improve the many abandoned houses in the proposed district which will improve the property values of all houses in the neighborhood.

One community member expressed the fear that property taxes will increase as a result of historic designation.

Mr. Tyler explained that the act of designation alone will not result in higher property taxes. However, Mr. Tyler further stated that substantial improvements and numerous sales of properties ordinarily leads to reassessment.

Councilman Street described several measures that have been adopted and several that are pending from a recent state constitutional amendment that will afford property tax relief to long term residents.

Another person from the community recounted an unfortunate experience when a City error resulted in an unauthorized interior demolition on Diamond Street.

Mr. Tyler stated that such an incident could have been prevented by the historic designation owing to the fact that all demolition permit applications for designated properties must be approved by the Historical Commission prior to issuance.

The question of the availability of grants was raised by a member of the community for the rehabilitation of the houses in the district.

Mrs. Robinson, Director of Housing, responded by stating that the only grants currently available are for emergency situations such as roofing, electrical, plumbing and heating. According to Mrs. Robinson there are, however, low interest loans available for repairs to owner-occupied houses through the Office of Housing. The rates of interest fluctuate according to the income levels of the applicants.

One community member stated that the City has a reputation for not taking care of the property that it owns. Since the City already owns 65 of the vacant properties in the proposed district, how will the neighborhood be improved?

Councilman Street explained that the houses in the proposed district that are owned by the City will be transferred to the neighborhood development corporation which in this case is the Advocate Community Development Corporation located at 1808 Diamond Street. The neighborhood corporation will in turn own, rehabilitate and rent the houses to low and moderate income people. Mr. Street emphasized the word "neighborhood" corporation - one within walking distance for the residents of the historic area.

The Commission agreed to accept the recommendation of the Committee on Historic Designation of 8 November 1985 and unanimously voted to designate Diamond Street from Broad to Van Pelt Streets as a local historic district. Christine Washington and John Street abstained from voting on this item.

THE REPORTS on the Philadelphia Historical Commission Staff Activities for 15 November - 15 December 1985 and 15 December 1985 - 15 January 1986, Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer, were reviewed and approved for filing.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:36 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri Koob
Clerk Steno II