

MINUTES OF THE 215th STATED MEETING OF THE PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

7 July 1977

F. Otto Haas, Chairman

Present: Janet S. Klein, Vice Chairman of the Commission
Edward Pinkowski
Val Mogensen, Executive Assistant Director of Finance
Herbert W. Levy, A.I.A., Architectural Advisor to the Commission
David Rosenblum, Esq., Assistant City Solicitor, Law Department
Richard Tyler, Historian
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Executive Assistant to the Chairman

Also: Jeff King, summer volunteer in the Commission office.

Unless otherwise noted, all action taken herein is the result of motions correctly made, seconded and carried.

THE MINUTES of the Stated Meeting, 2 June 1977, were approved and directed to be filed.

REPORTS

The Report of the Architectural Committee, Herbert W. Levy, Chairman, for 15 June 1977 was approved and directed to be filed with the official copy of the Minutes.

The Commission agreed to consent to the demolition of the building situate at 921 South Street, as recommended by the Architectural Committee in its report of 15 June 1977, with the provision that the Redevelopment Authority include in the conveyance of the land to the developer and subsequent owners of the property a covenant requiring the erection and retention of a commemorative marker honoring Paul Sobolewski on that site.

Recommendations by the Staff for the Certification of Buildings, Richard Tyler, Historian.

Dr. Tyler reported to the Commission that the City of Philadelphia had applied under the Economic Development Act for \$600,000 for work on the Mankynk Canal and perhaps some of the buildings along the canal. His response to the latter is to discourage the restoration of the buildings, suggesting that they be stabilized at this time to protect them from further deterioration, and to use those funds for landscaping and the construction of recreational facilities along the canal.

REPORTS

In order for a building to be eligible for the receipt of EDA funds, it should be included on the National Register of Historic Places. Although the canal is not presently on the Register, a letter from the Historian indicating its eligibility has been submitted. This eligibility determination has been concurred with by Vance Packard of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

A favorable eligibility determination should allow for the approval and release of the encumbered funds. However, the Historian suggested to the Commission that local certification, as requested by the City's Managing Director, be undertaken to supplement this.

A question was raised at this time in regard to the legality of certifying a canal since the Historical Commission ordinance specifically refers to the certification of buildings. To clarify this, a motion was made to certify those buildings which are an integral part of the Manayunk Canal and their appurtenances. This motion was seconded and carried. Dr. Tyler will inspect the area and list those buildings to be included in the certification action.

Report on Historical Commission Staff Activities for the month of June, Richard Tyler, Historian. Dr. Tyler's report was approved and directed to be filed with the official copy of the Minutes.

OLD BUSINESS

Concept of District Designation, Richard Tyler, Historian. The Commission's Vice Chairman thanked the Historian and Executive Assistant for collecting the background material relating to district designation distributed to the Commission members at the June meeting for their review.

Before discussing the concept of district designation, Dr. Tyler asked that the members divorce the concept of district from the specific issue of Old City. If district certification proves to be an acceptable means of preservation for the Historical Commission, Old City can be considered at a later time and its eligibility as a district can be determined through the application of district certification criteria.

One consequence of having a landmark perspective rather than a district perspective, as pointed out by Dr. Tyler, is the loss of a building's historical setting. Through the demolition of a number of 19th century and early 20th century buildings in the Independence

OLD BUSINESS

National Historical Park, the National Park Service destroyed the urban context of the area and created an historical environment in the Park. Two examples of this type of limited perspective leading to an altered setting cited were Carpenters' Hall and St. Joseph's Church on Willing's Alley.

Mr. Levy, the Commission's Architectural Advisor, suggested the possibility of creating districts in which any building or structure would come under the Historical Commission's purview for renovation, demolition and construction proposals, while still retaining our power of individual certification. The Commission's counsel noted that designation of such a district could be done through a zoning ordinance. Such a district ordinance, would be presumed valid and provide the Historical Commission with a stronger legal position than a district designation through individual certification could provide.

Mr. Mogensen pointed out that if a district is established by Council, proposed alterations to every building within that district would need to be reviewed by the Historical Commission. By creating such districts, the Commission would gain the ability to review proposed renovations within an area without certifying each building individually. This would lend more credence to individual certification. A question was raised, at this time, concerning the review of new construction in such a district. Dr. Tyler pointed out that he would not like the Historical Commission to have control over new construction because of the tendency of historical commissions to have a conservative influence on new construction. Janet Klein pointed out that within the existing zoning laws limitations are already placed on new construction in such matters as height restrictions, open space, etc.

The Historian pointed out here the staff's recent field trips to the West Philadelphia area for the preparation of eligibility statements on a number of buildings for which money is being requested under the EDA and CD programs and the importance of much of West Philadelphia not as a neighborhood of individual landmarks but as a potential district.

Mr. Mogensen asked for a further clarification on the difference between the concept of district designation and the specific problem of Old City which precipitated the Commission's current discussions. Dr. Tyler pointed out that if the Commission finds district designation valid in itself, we can then return to Old City and determine whether or not it will meet the criteria for a district.

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The limitations of the Commission's present criteria were noted by Mr. Mogensen. He suggested that the Commission consider the possibility of broadening the concept of certification and expanding the present criteria.

It was decided that because of the few members present no action would be taken at this time. A further discussion of district designation will be scheduled for the August meeting. Indeed, these deliberations should continue until all questions are resolved.

NEW BUSINESS

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission Request for Review of Application for Funds for the Powel House, Richard Tyler, Historian. Dr. Tyler reported that a proposal had been submitted for the expenditure of \$18,000 for some renovation work to the Powel House. The Commission, after some discussion, agreed to endorse the approval of this application.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Siemionkowski
Executive Assistant to the Chairman

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