

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

11 July 2000

**One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor
David Brownlee, Chair**

Present

David Brownlee, Ph.D., Chair
David Baldinger, City Planning Commission
Janet Klein
Bruce Laverty
Hyman Myers
Stephanie Wolf, Ph.D.

Julianne Dunn, Historic Preservation Planner
Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also Present

Agnesus A. Ahn
Richard A. Ash
Joan R. Boyer
Armono Chapadeau
Maria Duncan
Mary Louise Fleisher
Susan Green
Scott Homil
Asalee Huffman
Sheryl Jaslow, Powers & Co., Inc.
Herbert Lovitz
Jerry Martin
M.L. Martin
Wenda McCowan
Kevin McNamara
Carlos Peraza
John J. Pettit, Jr.
Robert Powers, Powers & Co., Inc.
Roberta A. Reiner
Frances Rogalski
Essie Rubin
Margaret Rubin
Miguel Santiago
Al Wachlin, Jr.
Albert Wachlin
Kevin J. Walshe
Jon Wexler
Cathy Zukoski

Spring Garden Historic District

Mr. Brownlee called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and stated the Committee's agenda to discuss a proposed historic district. After introductions, Mr. Brownlee stated that the Committee acts as an advisory committee to the Commission, the body that actually votes. He indicated that at today's meeting, the Committee would review documentation for the proposed Spring Garden Historic District. He reiterated that the Committee itself does not create the district, but rather provides a recommendation to the Commission. Mr. Brownlee stated that the Committee would discuss three components of the district. First, Laura Spina of the Historical Commission staff would present issues of historic significance regarding the district. Second, the Committee would review a map to define the district boundaries. Finally, at a meeting on July 26, Mr. Brownlee indicated that review of any unfinished work and a discussion of the district inventory would take place.

Mr. Brownlee introduced Ms. Spina. Ms. Spina indicated that Powers & Co., Inc., a preservation consultant firm, prepared the nomination for the Spring Garden Historic District. The district meets the following criteria of the Historic Preservation Ordinance: a, c, d, e, h, and j. Ms. Spina stated that the district possesses excellent examples of mid-to-late nineteenth century development during the industrialization of the City from 1850-1930. The district provides an array of significant architectural styles as well as work by prominent architects. Finally, the terraced gardens in front of many of the homes provide a visual feature unique to the neighborhood.

Ms. Spina presented slides of the proposed Spring Garden Historic District and read from the nomination regarding the historic and architectural importance of the neighborhood. The Act of Consolidation in 1854 likely spurred the development of the area in the 1850s. The area's speculative housing, often in the Italianate style, was located on wider streets and offered front terraces. This design provided residents with more open space than the congestion of Rittenhouse Square and Society Hill. In the 1870s, more established families began to move to the neighborhood and commissioned architects to design new or remodel existing houses. Ms. Spina showed slides of significant buildings in the district and discussed their architectural styles and architects. To support the residents of the district, other types of buildings began to develop in the area. Ms. Spina showed slide examples of carriage houses, commercial venues, the Wills Hospital, a fire house and schools including the William Penn High School for Girls, the Masterman School and the Wheeler School. Religious structures, such as the United Church of Christ, Enon Baptist Church, St. Andrews Lithuanian Catholic Church and St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church, were noted for both their architecture and their importance in tracing the faith and social class of residents of the district.

The Committee members discussed the social history of the district. Ms. Spina indicated that the class system of Philadelphia prompted the nouveau riche and Jewish residents to move to the Spring Garden district. Mr. Myers stated that while there may have been bias, families also moved north owing to a lack of space in Center City. Ms. Klein, Mr. Myers and Mr. Tyler discussed the book *North of Market*, dating from 1876, that provides evidence of the social stigma that existed with living above Market Street. Ms. Klein stated that the later publication of Theodore Dreiser's book *The Financier* described the Spring Garden area in a more positive way.

Mr. Brownlee asked if the members of the Committee had any questions with regard to the significance of the district. Ms. Klein made an amendment to the introduction of the

statement of historical significance to state that the district reflects the “impact” of industrialization and demographic growth of Philadelphia. A discussion with respect to transportation in the district ensued among Mr. Tyler and Mr. Myers. Mr. Myers questioned whether residents of the district could historically afford transportation. Committee members commented that the white-collar workers in the district commonly walked to work.

Mr. Brownlee stated that he appreciated Mr. Powers’ work on the district and opened the discussion to questions from the audience. Mr. Powers noted that Sheryl Jaslow of his office deserves the credit for the nomination.

Mary Louise Fleisher commented on the transportation discussion and stated that her family owned a yarn factory, whose employees who lived in the district walked to work.

Richard Ash raised concerns over a restaurant located at 17th and Green Streets. He objected to a new sidewalk eating area that had been installed and questioned if the Commission has any jurisdiction over the restaurant. Mr. Tyler responded that the Commission works with existing conditions in the district and cannot force the owner to remove the addition. Mr. Ash questioned if zoning had been approved for the eating area.

Audience members asked several questions regarding the Commission’s review process. Mr. Brownlee explained the Commission’s authority to review building permit applications for structures listed on the Philadelphia Register. He stated that a weakness in this occurs when owners do not obtain building permits prior to commencing work. Mr. Brownlee answered a question with respect to curb cuts by encouraging the audience member to contact the Department of Streets. Ms. Wolf added that if the Commission approves the front terraces of district homes; however, curb cuts could fall under Commission review if they threatened historic fabric. Mr. Tyler stressed that the Commission relies on neighborhood residents to inform the Commission of any on-going work that may not have building permits. In those cases, stop work orders can be issued.

Mr. Tyler answered a question with regard to the plans for the former location of the Hess Service Station. Plans for new housing for that location will be reviewed at the Commission meeting on 12 July 2000.

Scott Homil, an investor in the neighborhood, questioned the Commission’s ability to govern Philadelphia Housing Authority properties. Mr. Tyler responded that any Philadelphia Housing Authority properties will be subject to Commission review if they are located within the proposed district. Mr. Tyler added that a Commission staff member also reviews and oversees Philadelphia Housing Authority work when federal funding is used. Mr. Tyler also responded to Mr. Homil’s question regarding vacant buildings and stated that when a vacant structure is in a locally designated district, it is subject to Commission review. The Commission can have the Department of Licenses and Inspections issue violations to the owner of a vacant structure, if its condition constitutes demolition by neglect, and have the building sealed. Mr. Homil asked if the Commission had any jurisdiction with respect to missing street lamps. Mr. Tyler responded that the Commission designates the district with existing conditions and that missing street lamps may be best remedied by alerting the Department of Streets.

Kevin Walshe raised concerns on behalf of his neighbors regarding notification of Committee and Commission meetings. In addition, Mr. Walshe expressed concerns that the creation of an historic district would impede development in the neighborhood. Mr. Tyler commented that the jurisdiction of the Commission can only affect properties when an owner

applies for a building permit. Ms. Spina added that historically sensitive repairs to a structure are not necessarily more expensive than insensitive repairs. She stated that the Commission staff provides property owners and developers with technical assistance to satisfy both the standards of the Commission and the budget of the owner. Mr. Brownlee stated that homeowner handbooks produced by the Commission assist owners of a property in an historical district with repairs and that the Commission will likely produce such a manual for the Spring Garden Historic District.

Albert Wachlin, owner of the former bank building located at 18th and Fairmount Streets, expressed his desire to have the district drawn around his building. His concerns focused the excessive expenses that he believed he would incur if the Commission reviewed his plans for renovation to the building. Robert Powers commented that Mr. Wachlin would be eligible for an investment tax credit of 20% since a National Register District includes his building. Mr. Brownlee reiterated that the Commission does not oppose adaptive reuse of buildings that once served different purposes.

Carlos Peraza, a resident whose home would not be included in the district, questioned how likely it is that boundaries would be changed to include his home. Ms. Spina responded that Fairmount Avenue provides a strong northern boundary to the district and therefore his home would not likely be located in this district.

The Committee commented on the statement of significance. Mr. Myers questioned the Committee as to why there was no mention of street furniture, curbs and streetlights in the statement of significance for the district. Mr. Powers responded by stating that the inventory did mention sidewalks, but the statement of significance did not. Ms. Spina added that while important features of the district such as gardens are mentioned, the remaining street features offer little or no historic importance to the district. A discussion among Committee members ensued with respect to street materials. Mr. Myers recommended adding one line to the statement of significance stating that surviving street features of the district do exist. The Committee approved this revision. Mr. Myers also questioned whether architect Frank Furness had remodeled any houses in the district. Mr. Powers responded that no evidence of Furness's work existed; however, he would check again. Several Committee members made minor corrections to the nomination.

Mr. Baldinger made a motion to recommend approval of the architectural description and statement of significance. Ms. Klein seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Mr. Brownlee raised the issues of boundaries to the Committee and stated two considerations with respect to boundaries. First, he stated the importance of devising a line that defines an historic district. Second, he stressed the importance of a reasonably sized district for review purposes. Mr. Brownlee reintroduced Ms. Spina who presented a map of the district to the Committee. The map showed buildings drawn in pink which represented non-contributing buildings located near the corner borders of the proposed district boundaries. Ms. Spina suggested that these pink buildings not be included in the district. Buildings drawn in blue on the map represented buildings near the borders that, while non-contributing, Ms. Spina recommended stay within the district. Ms. Spina stated that in delineating borders both the simplicity of a border line and the strength of properties near the edge are considered. The Commission prefers to have clean edges as opposed to creating a gerrymandered border. In addition, the Commission prefers to have properties of historic importance, buildings that are contributing, at the borders of a district. Ms. Spina presented slides to the Committee to illustrate the proposed borders of district. Ms. Spina also explained the difference between contributing and non-contributing buildings to the audience.

Ms. Spina focused her presentation to the Committee on the non-contributing properties at the southeast end of the district. While the service station, located at 22nd and Spring Garden Streets, does not contribute to the district, the four adjoining properties along Spring Garden Street do contribute. Mr. Myers advocated that although some non-contributing properties exist along the Spring Garden Street and Pennsylvania Avenue borders, it remains important to retain those streets as solid borders to the district. Mr. Brownlee commented that the Committee's consideration should be that the borders of the district consist of historic, contributing properties. He then asked for comments from the Committee members. Ms. Wolf expressed her concerns over the four contributing properties located on the 2200 block of Spring Garden Street. She stated the importance of both the properties' inclusion in the district and the need for a strong border. Mr. Myers concurred and asserted his view that Pennsylvania Avenue should be the border for the district since it continues the residential nature of the area and represents the location of an historic railroad. Mr. Tyler countered these views and stated that no historic fabric remains on Pennsylvania Avenue. Ms. Wolf and Mr. Myers reasserted their views that the buildings on Spring Garden Street should remain in the district for consistency and strength of border and that the border should stretch to include Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Committee discussed the corner of 24th Street and Fairmount Avenue where several non-contributing buildings exist. The conversation returned to the southeast corner of the district when Mr. Baldinger commented that either all of the non-contributing properties should be eliminated or should be included to Pennsylvania Avenue. Mr. Baldinger rejected the idea of gerrymandering the border to eliminate the service station. Mr. Myers added that the border of the district that runs along Spring Garden Street should include the entire width of the street to respect the garden median and the location of an historic trolley line. The Committee agreed to draw the boundary along 15th Street, however, in the center of the street.

At this point, Mr. Wachlin readdressed the Committee with respect to his property at 18th Street and Fairmount Avenue. Mr. Wachlin reiterated that he does not want the building included in the Spring Garden Historic District. Ms. Wolf reminded Mr. Wachlin that the Commission review process does not forbid adaptive reuse of buildings. She stated that Mr. Wachlin would not be required to return the building to its historical use as a bank building. A volunteer from the audience offered to retrieve an historical photo of Mr. Wachlin's property to provide him with guidance on the original appearance of the building.

Ms. Klein made a motion to recommend removal of the non-contributing buildings in the district's northwest corner from inclusion in the Spring Garden Historic District. Ms. Wolf seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to retain 1800 Fairmount Avenue as part of the Spring Garden Historic District. Mr. Lavery seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Mr. Baldinger made a motion to remove the properties from 638 to 650 North 17th Street from the Spring Garden Historic District. Ms. Wolf seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to delay a vote on the boundary at the northeast corner of the Spring Garden District. Ms. Klein seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

The Committee resumed discussions of the southeast corner of the district. Mr. Lavery expressed his opinion that the buildings at the southeast corner should be included in the district

to create a strong boundary. Mr. Tyler urged the Committee to reconsider and stated that extension of the boundary to Pennsylvania Avenue would create a soft border or a buffer zone. Mr. Tyler added that borders of districts should contain contributing buildings and that the Pennsylvania Avenue border composition consists of non-contributing buildings. Mr. Baldinger concurred with Mr. Tyler and stated that non-historic buildings should not be located on district borders. Ms. Wolf argued that Pennsylvania Avenue, because of its railroad history, maintains an historic boundary and shape to the area.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to retain Pennsylvania Avenue as a Spring Garden Historic District boundary and extend the border to the curb encompassing the entire street. Mr. Lavery seconded the motion, which carried with a vote of three to two. Mr. Baldinger and Ms. Klein dissented and Mr. Brownlee abstained.

Respectfully submitted,

Julianne L. Dunn