

THE MINUTES OF THE 346TH STATED MEETING

OF THE

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

10 October 1990

City Council Caucus Room

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman

Present: Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chair
David Brownlee
David Hollenberg
Jason Nathan
Reverend William D. Thompson
William L. Brown
Peter Aborn, Deputy Commissioner,
Department of Public Property
James Cuorato, Department of Commerce
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director,
City Planning Commission
John Street, Esq., City Council
Scott Wilds, Office of Housing and Community Development
David Wismer, Department of Licenses and Inspections

Maria Petrillo, Esq., Chief Assistant City Solicitor
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Sara Jane Elk, Historical Research Technician
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

Also: F.M. Rivinus, Friends of the Wissahickon
Robert Levy, Valley Green Inn
Lonne E. Rice, Drexel University, resident architect
Larry Graybill, Grayboyes Windows
Carl Roberts, Dilworth Paxson Kalish Kauffman
attorney for Philadelphia Newspapers Incorporated
Mark Bower and Carol Benenson, Kise Franks Straw,
consultants for Philadelphia Newspapers Incorporated
Ira Kauderer, preservation consultant

The Minutes of the 345th Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 12 September 1990, Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman. There being neither comment nor correction, the minutes were adopted.

The Report of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 27 September 1990, David Hollenberg, Chairman. Mr. Hollenberg provided a summary of four applications reviewed by the Committee.

Approval in Concept

Valley Green Inn: The Committee recommended an approval in concept for a proposal to construct a new banquet facility and kitchen behind the Valley Green Inn, constructed along Wissahickon Creek in the early nineteenth century. The Committee first reviewed plans for this proposal at its meeting of 26 July 1990. On 8 August 1990, the Commission accepted the recommendation of its Architectural Committee and approved, in concept, this proposal.

In September, the Committee reviewed a model which incorporated previous design recommendations. Following considerable discussion, the Committee recommended an approval in concept, with the following design guidelines:

- that the trellis in front of the addition remain open, without a solid roof.
- that the landscape to the rear of the Inn remain clear of HVAC or other mechanical systems. As an alternative, the Committee recommended the installation of a small structure on the roof of the addition behind the Inn. This structure should not be visible from surrounding public spaces.
- that the design retain the present contours of the patio roof.

The Committee commended the architects for their sympathetic incorporation of a new structure into this historic site.

Dr. Brownlee seconded the recommendation of the Committee and the Commission unanimously voted its approval.

Approval**730-732 S. Broad Street, Franklin Hose Company #28:**

Architect Samir Mukherjee presented drawings for the restoration of the facade of this Second Empire firehouse, constructed circa 1868. The scope of this restoration includes the masonry, wooden doors, windows, cornice and mansard roof. This work constitutes the first phase of the rehabilitation of this building for use as an arts center by the Brandywine Workshop. The Committee recommended an approval, contingent upon the following conditions:

- removal of an existing concrete transom infill alteration on the south side of the facade and installation of a reproduction of the spandrel glass in the adjacent bay. If this treatment is not feasible, then the existing infill may remain. The applicant may not, however, duplicate this alteration on the adjacent bay.

- deletion of the proposed patching of the marble facade with a glass-fiber concrete treatment, and
- deletion of the proposal to grind the marble in order to smooth or clean its surface. As an alternative, the Committee recommended a gentle cleaning with water. The Committee reminded the applicant to obtain staff approval of a test patch for all proposed cleaning and patching.

Drexel University, Drexel Institute: The Committee reviewed a proposal to replace existing wood sash on the Drexel Institute with aluminum. The Committee deferred its review of this proposal at its meeting of 28 June 1990, because the drawings were inadequate. The Commission ratified this decision on 11 July 1990. Next, members of the Committee met on-site with Lonne Rice, resident architect of the University, on 16 August 1990. At that time, the Committee confirmed the deterioration of the existing sash. However, drawings submitted subsequent to that site visit still failed to address several significant concerns.

At the September meeting, the applicants reasserted that the condition of the existing wooden sash and frames presented operational and energy problems. Although the University considered wood reproductions, their cost exceeded the allotted budget for this project. Mr. Rice indicated that there was a cost differential between wood reproduction and aluminum replacement of \$260 thousand dollars. The installation of operable, insulated glass required wider window jambs. Although the dimensions desired by the Committee could be attained, this task would require removal of the existing wood before panning. This labor-intensive task would increase the cost of the project considerably. To mitigate the impact of this alteration, the university proposed to restore the auditorium windows on the northern facade.

The Committee stressed that the most recent drawings contained internal inconsistencies and still depicted a considerable difference between the dimensions of the existing and replacement windows. The Committee retained reservations regarding the differential in the dimensions of the jamb head, meeting rail and transom. Mr. Hollenberg indicated that no previous proposal for panning entailed such a dramatic change in these dimensions. However, the Committee acknowledged a justifiable interest in replacing the existing windows. Given the expressed financial hardship of this non-profit corporation, the Committee forwarded the following recommendation:

Approval of the proposed replacement, contingent upon:

- the restoration of both the auditorium windows on the northern facade and those within the arch of the main entrance on Chestnut Street, and
- the submittal of internally consistent drawings of record which accurately depict the existing conditions. These modifications may be approved by the staff.

Mr. Wismer seconded this recommendation, which the Commission adopted unanimously.

Disapproval

City Hall, "T" Level Observation Platforms: The Department of Public Property presented a conceptual plan to install new observation platforms in the "T" Level of City Hall Tower. A platform encircling this level offers spectacular views of Philadelphia through large oculus windows. To allow visitors to span an existing two-foot gap between the platform and windows, the Department has proposed to cantilever decks from the iron platform.

The Committee expressed a commitment to preserving the existing space at "T" Level. The present views through the oculus windows offer visitors superb vistas of Center City. The Committee stressed the value of retaining the original design for this level, which offers dramatic views upward along the curves of the metal structure toward the sculpture of William Penn, downward to the levels below, and out upon the City of Philadelphia.

Mr. Thompson seconded the recommendation of the Committee. Deputy Commissioner Aborn suggested that "T" Level is not the only place where visitors could admire the drama of the architecture; it is however, the only level which offers a direct view through the oculus windows. The Commission adopted the recommendation of its Architectural Committee by a vote of 7-3. Opposed were Mrs. Kaplan, Mr. Wilds and Deputy Commissioner Aborn.

ADDENDUM TO THE REPORT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE

John Wanamaker Store

Mr. Tyler provided a summary of a proposal made by the owners of the John Wanamaker Store at 1320 Market Street. They proposed to use the second bay on Thirteenth Street as a service bay. Two members of the Architectural Committee abstained from comment and vote on this proposal. The others recommended approval.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Nathan to approve this proposal. Councilman Street seconded the motion, which the Commission approved unanimously. Mr. Hollenberg abstained.

The Report on Staff Activities, September 1990. Mr. Montgomery indicated that the staff report was acceptable for incorporation into the record. Mr. Tyler reminded members that, on 17 October, the Commission staff would move from 791 City Hall to Room 1313 of the United Gas Improvement Building (UGI), 1401 Arch Street.

Comment as Certified Local Government on Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places. Dr. Brownlee provided a summary of the nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for two districts.

Diamond Street Townhouse District. A coherent group of 1890s townhouses on the 3000-32000 blocks of Diamond Street which has retained a high level of integrity.

Brewerytown. This late nineteenth century community of German brewers has retained considerable integrity among its residences for both managers and workers as well as its industrial architecture. Although it also includes a large parcel used as an Acme warehouse, built 1930, it is generally a fine mixed use district.

Mr. Tyler noted that the impetus for both nominations had been to provide further economic incentive for the development of low to moderate income housing.

Dr. Brownlee recommended that the Commission forward both nominations to the state with favorable endorsements. Mr. Hollenberg seconded this recommendation, which the Commission adopted unanimously.

Appointments to the Architectural Committee

Given the quorum requirements for Committees within the recently adopted Rules and Regulations, Mr. Tyler suggested an expansion of the existing Architectural Committee to a total of seven members, the maximum allowed by the Rules and Regulations. He then suggested the appointment of J.W. Cornell and Tony Atkin to the Committee.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Hollenberg to appoint J.W. Cornell to the Architectural Committee. Dr. Brownlee seconded the motion, which the Commission adopted unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Hollenberg to appoint Tony Atkin to the Architectural Committee. Mr. Nathan seconded the motion, which the Commission adopted unanimously.

The Report of the Thirty-Seventh Meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation held on 17 July 1990, David Brownlee, Chairman. Dr. Brownlee presented one nomination deferred from the Stated Meeting of September 1990. The hearing for the nomination had been deferred, upon request of the owner, for three months.

The Philadelphia Inquirer Complex, Elverson and Rotogravure Buildings, 400-440 N. Broad Street. Before preceding with the hearing, Mr. Tyler offered several technical corrections to the nomination. On page one, second paragraph, second line reads "seven bays," it should read "six bays." On page two, the first full paragraph, second line reads "38 registers," it should read "39 registers."

Dr. Brownlee described the building and provided an overview of its historical significance. The Philadelphia Inquirer complex was built in two distinct phases: the Elverson Building and the Rotogravure Building. The buildings possess significance as fine representatives of their respective architectural styles, as examples of the work of their respective architects, and as symbols of their institutional owners.

The form of the Elverson Building is that of a stepped-back skyscraper, a design influenced by the zoning ordinance of New York City. The building is largely in the Classical idiom, moving toward Art Deco. Randall, Kellogg and Crane were from MIT, whose training was similar to that of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. The firm, nationally visible for its entries in competitions, also designed Thirtieth Street Station.

The Rotogravure Building was designed by the architectural firm of Albert Kahn Associates, who invented the idiom of industrial architecture in America. Most famous for its design of airport facilities, the firm provided the plan for this color-print processing building.

Mr. Hollenberg seconded the recommendation to place the Elverson and Rotogravure Buildings on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Mr. Montgomery acknowledged Carl Roberts, counsel for Philadelphia Newspapers, Incorporated. Mr. Roberts opposed the designation of these buildings. Having suggested that the presentation made clear what was wrong with the nomination, he alleged that the nomination contained factual inaccuracies, both consequential and inconsequential. Further, he avowed that the Rotogravure Building did not warrant historic designation.

To support his contention, Mr. Roberts introduced Carol Benenson and Mark Bower of Kise Franks Straw. Ms. Benenson intimated that the nomination possessed numerous faults:

that it did not address existing structures like the smokestack on the east side of Broad Street, which provides a context for the property. She added that the nomination did not relate the history of North Broad Street at the time of construction. The nomination did not indicate why the Inquirer built its offices there. Although other buildings nearby were mentioned in the nomination, they were constructed at later dates.

Mr. Montgomery requested a clarification of the contention of PNI. He stated that the presentation, thus far, did not clearly convey the rationale for opposing the nomination. He inquired whether the applicants were contending that the written nomination was flawed or that the buildings themselves were not worthy of designation.

Ms. Benenson indicated that the nomination for the Elverson Building was deficient and that the Rotogravure Building itself did not merit historic designation. Mark Bower stressed that the nomination contained numerous errors. In a circuitous manner, he noted that there was an earlier building on the east side of Broad Street and that the site possessed other many structures associated with the history of The Inquirer. He also noted that the delivery area and rear buildings were not described adequately in the nomination. Finally, he stressed that the description of the Rotogravure Building was not adequate.

Mr. Wilds objected to the tone and nature of this testimony. Contrary to the consultants' claims, Mr. Wilds suggested that the nomination did not have to include a complete description of every building detail to consider it for historic designation. He also objected to the claim that the failure to mention a date stone was not so essential as suggested by the consultant. Mr. Nathan suggested that the enumeration of details deemed highly significant by the consultant was little more than an exercise in architectural bean-counting. Such minutiae was not necessary to consider a building for historic designation.

Mr. Bower resumed his criticism by denigrating the allusion to the Elverson Building's "Art Deco theatricality," while there were no Art Deco elements visible.

Mr. Hollenberg inquired whether Mr. Bower, having had considerable time to study the buildings, was implying that they lacked sufficient significance to warrant historic designation. Mr. Bower responded that he had no access to no more information than did the Commission, which was a visual inspection of the building. Having reminded the consultant that he had mentioned research of historic atlases, Mr. Hollenberg again inquired whether it was Mr. Bower's professional judgement that these buildings did not merit historic designation.

Mr. Roberts interjected that the consultants had addressed this question sufficiently and that he personally had addressed the question in a letter to Mr. Tyler. At this juncture, Ms. Petrillo provided the chronology of events. On 2 October 1990, PNI submitted a letter asserting that the nomination was deficient. This letter had not been circulated to all members of the Commission. On 5 October, Mr. Tyler informed Mr. Roberts that the Commission would proceed with the hearing as scheduled. Roberts objected to counsel's tone.

In response to an earlier question, Mr. Bower acceded that the Elverson Building clearly was an historic landmark. He did not, however, venture an opinion on the Rotogravure Building. Mr. Hollenberg objected to Mr. Roberts dismissal of these architectural assessments offered as gut responses.

Dr. Brownlee disputed the intent and content of the testimony proffered by the consultants. The foremost issue, he stressed, was whether the buildings possessed sufficient significance to warrant historic designation. The nominations are prepared solely to provide sufficient information to answer that question. The purported inaccuracies have no bearing on the primary issue. Specifically, he addressed the consultants' points:

- The nomination did address the development of the area in general and the complex specifically.
- The nomination cited contemporary "commercial hype," because the buildings themselves were designed as hype.
- The plaque, probably added later, was hardly significant.
- The purported inability to examine the original condition of the Rotogravure Building. The Commission possesses photographs of the Rotogravure Building soon after its construction.

Dr. Brownlee concluded that the observations of the experts were not substantial and did not diminish the significance of the buildings.

Mr. Bower indicated that his mention of the flaws in the nomination was a technical issue, but that he believed that the record for the Rotogravure Building was not sufficient for a nomination. In response to inquiry of Miss Petrillo, Mr. Bower indicated that those structures on the east side of Broad Street, including the smokestack, should be added to the nomination.

Mr. Nathan stressed that this building was a landmark and its designation was too important to jeopardize on a procedural or technical matter. Therefore, he suggested deferring a vote on this nomination until the November

A MOTION was made by Mr. Hollenberg and seconded by Mr. Wilds to defer this hearing until the next meeting of the Historical Commission, scheduled for 14 November 1990. The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

Mr. Tyler indicated that the Commission does not usually review the entire nomination, but rather only a summary of the statement of significance. Further, he indicated that the letter of 2 October did not possess a list of objections, but rather only vague resistance. Finally, alluding to his experience reviewing nominations to the National Register, he stressed that these forms were not intended to serve as comprehensive monographs, nor even seminar papers. Rather, public agencies prepared them to assist the general public, as well as consultants, to nominate a property for historic designation. He noted that the staff only would alter the nomination if the materials submitted warranted such changes.

Upon request, Mr. Roberts promised that he would provide a comprehensive list of his clients' objections, as well as any additional research, within a week.

AN AMENDMENT to the MOTION was suggested by Councilman Street, who stressed the importance of receiving all relevant information within a reasonable period.

THE MOTION, as amended by Councilman Street, was to defer this hearing until 14 November 1990, contingent upon the submission of all relevant materials to the staff by the end of the week. This motion was duly seconded and approved unanimously.

Old Business

Germantown Avenue: Demolition Permit Application Ms. Kaplan inquired into the status of this application first reviewed by the Commission at its meeting of _____. Mr. Tyler responded that the Commission consultant had not submitted his report to date.

Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District: Ms. Kaplan also inquired into the status of the Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District. Mr. Tyler indicated that the hearing on this district may resume in January.

A MOTION was made to adjourn until the next Stated Meeting of the Commission, scheduled for 11 November 1990. The motion was adopted.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary

meeting.