

THE MINUTES OF THE 344TH STATED MEETING

OF THE

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

8 August 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
Peter Aborn, Deputy Commissioner,
Department of Public Property
James Cuorato, Department of Commerce
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director,
City Planning Commission
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: Howard Kittell, Executive Director
Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia

The Minutes of the 343rd Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 11 July 1990, Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman. There being no objections, additions or corrections, the Commission adopted the minutes.

The Report of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 26 July 1990, David Hollenberg, Chairman. Mr. Hollenberg presented a summary of four applications reviewed by the Committee, as well as its recommendations for each.

Approval in Concept

The Committee recommended an approval in concept for a proposal to construct a new banquet facility and kitchens to the rear of Valley Green Inn. This proposal will entail the demolition of a later rear addition to this mid-nineteenth century inn. The Committee recommended approval in concept for design alternative #1 which presented the addition as an elongated, stone structure with an open-air porch. Mr. Wismer seconded this recommendation, which the Commission adopted unanimously.

Approval

The Committee recommended approval for two projects: 408 S. Van Pelt Street and 1724-1732 Locust Street, the Curtis Institute of Music. The applicant for the Van Pelt Street property proposed to rebuild the facade of this carriage-house in the proposed Rittenhouse Fidler Historic District. The Committee recommended approval contingent upon staff review and approval of a final design for the facade after the removal of wood sheathing on the second floor. The Committee also noted that the applicant could paint the facade a brick-red color with white lines to suggest mortar joints if the applicant could not achieve a sufficiently close brick match.

The Committee also recommended approval of a plan to alter the main entrance door of 1724-1732 Locust Street, the Curtis Institute of Music. Based on existing safety problems posed by this particular door, the applicant proposed to remove wooden panels in the paired doors and to replace them with glass. The Committee recommended approval of this proposal and noted its preference for a clear glass pane without decorative ironwork.

Mr. Wismer seconded these recommendations which the Commission approved unanimously.

Diamond Street properties

Mr. Hollenberg next presented the recommendations of the Architectural Committee for plans submitted for 1716, 1718, 1727 and 1733 Diamond Street. The Philadelphia Housing Authority awarded Glenn Smyth a contract for exterior alterations to each of these properties. Given differences among the existing conditions of these buildings, the Committee examined each property individually and forwarded separate recommendations.

The Committee recommended approval of a proposal to restore the existing brick facade of 1716 Diamond Street using details characteristic of this row in the Diamond Street Historic District. This recommendation, however, is contingent upon:

- the correction of both the placement and dimensions of the windows on the plan of record; and
- the revision of the sash to follow the arch of the lintel.

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

The Committee recommended approval to demolish the existing stuccoed brick wall of the facade of 1718 Diamond Street and to rebuild the wall in brick to match adjacent buildings which reflect its original condition. The Committee stressed that it did not consider the proposal a necessary treatment of this facade and emphasized that it would not

have required removal of the stucco. Mr. Wismer seconded this recommendation, which the Commission adopted unanimously.

Finally, the Committee reviewed a proposal to demolish existing brick facades at 1727 and 1733 Diamond Street, which would be rebuilt with new brick. The Committee tabled this application because of insufficient information about structural conditions. The Committee recommended that the Philadelphia Housing Authority retain a structural engineer with experience in historic preservation to determine the viability of the front walls of these two brick dwellings. The Committee also requested, if the walls could be saved, that the engineer recommend a treatment for stabilizing them. Mr. Wismer seconded this recommendation, which the Commission adopted unanimously.

Tabled

Next, Mr. Hollenberg presented information regarding an application previously tabled by the Architectural Committee and the Commission. At its June meeting, the Committee reviewed a proposal by Drexel University to replace the existing wood sash of the Drexel Institute with aluminum sash. At that time, the Committee tabled the application based on insufficient information. Subsequently, the Committee met on-site with the University's in-house architect, Lonne Rice. Following that meeting, Mr. Rice submitted revised drawings of the proposed sash. Although they more closely approximated the contours of the original sash, they were not acceptable. Mr. Hollenberg indicated that he had informed the applicant of this consensus of the Committee.

The Report on Staff Activities, July 1990. Mr. Montgomery indicated that the staff report was acceptable for incorporation into the record.

Inquiry: Commission Staff Coordination of Capital Projects Affecting Historic Properties

Mr. Cuorato inquired into the report's allusion to an enhanced role for the Commission in the capital program for publicly owned historic properties. Mr. Tyler replied that the Department had suggested that the Commission staff assume a major coordinating function for capital projects affecting buildings such as City Hall, Eastern State Penitentiary and the New Market Headhouse.

Mrs. Kaplan commended this proposal as a means of accelerating public review procedure which ultimately could diminish project costs.

Introduction of Deputy Commissioner Peter Aborn

At this time, Mr. Tyler introduced Peter Aborn, the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Public Property. By the terms of Section 14-2007 of the Philadelphia Code, Commissioner Andres Perez named Mr. Aborn as his designee to serve in his stead. Mr. Montgomery and the other members of the Commission greeted Deputy Commissioner Aborn.

Inquiry into Placement of Entire City on National Register

Mr. Hollenberg inquired into the suggestion of determining the entire city eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Mr. Tyler explained that this idea emerged from the recent review of the Community Development Block Grant Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement by the Pennsylvania Bureau for Historic Preservation, (BHP). A representative of the BHP suggested this concept to facilitate the administration of that program. At present, the Commission staff classifies buildings under review as eligible, not eligible, or a third distinction, "treat sensitive." If a building is found eligible, then the recipient of a grant or loan through a federal program is obligated to ensure that all work undertaken conforms to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The third category of "treat sensitive" has been used in areas where the buildings possess significance but are less obviously eligible for the National Register; this informal designation allows for the conservation of historic fabric without imposing more expensive restoration. While the BHP representatives accepted the benefits of this classification in practice, they expressed reservations because the federal review process has no such category. Consequently, they suggested the determination of the entire City of Philadelphia as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This distinction would leave the staff the easier task of deciding only whether a building were contributing or non-contributing. The effect would be to facilitate the administration of these programs. Mr. Tyler indicated that this benefit, however, may be negated by the broader policy impact of such a finding. Consequently, he stated his intention to discuss this suggestion with all relevant agencies.

Mrs. Kaplan objected to this concept and implied that it would burden existing regulatory review. She cautioned that it could raise certain areas above a particular threshold, accelerating processes which the City may want to regulate more carefully. Specifically, she warned of opening vast areas to gentrification. Although this action would not automatically make all properties eligible for income tax credits, it represented a first step in that direction. Further, by determining the entire city eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, this suggestion seemed to diminish the importance of historic designation, as it equated historic landmarks with far less historically significant areas.

Mr. Nathan declared his vehement opposition to this suggestion, and warned that this effort to ease bureaucratic burdens ran contrary to common sense.

In response to inquiry by Mr. Hollenberg whether this policy had been adopted elsewhere, Mr. Tyler responded that it had not.

Commission Review of Public Housing

Mr. Tyler proceeded to a related issue regarding staff review of alterations to public housing. The Philadelphia Housing Authority plans to undertake considerable improvements to its scattered site properties and to its housing projects. This program is subject to the processes prescribed by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. A meeting of representatives of the several concerned agencies agreed to enter a Memorandum of Agreement that would assume the National Register eligibility of the housing projects erected before 1945 and the ad hoc evaluation of the scattered site properties. The Memorandum would also delegate to the Commission much of the state-federal review authority. All participants recognized that the execution of the plan may entail demolition and reconfiguration. No one seeks to preserve the conditions that exist in some of the facilities and that redesign may alleviate. Rather, we shall achieve mitigation through recordation, documentation and the deposit of original drawings. The assigning to the Commission of a primary responsibility for the actual implementation of the Memorandum will result in a much more expeditious response to the Authority than the normal regulatory process allows.

Rules and Regulations

Miss Petrillo indicated that the draft of the Rules and Regulations before the Commission conformed to law and offered her recommendation that the Commission adopt the document. Mr. Tyler explained a brief amendment regarding continuing education in the field of historic preservation for the staff and members of the Commission. There being no objection to the suggested change, the amendment was incorporated into the draft.

Mr. Brownlee introduced a clarification to Section 6.3.c, regarding building permit applications. As written, the provision posed an irreconcilable semantic dilemma. Mr. Brownlee, therefore, suggested changing the language to clarify the intent of this section. Specifically, he suggested that the section read as follows:

- 6.3.c The staff shall review and may approve without referral to the Architectural Committee....Similarly, the staff shall review and may approve without referral to the Architectural Committee....

Miss Petrillo indicated that this proposed revision may have differed from the essence of counsel's comments to the Center City Residents Association. A group within that association wanted assurance that the Commission staff would review and approve interiors, without delay or referral to the Architectural Committee. Mr. Hollenberg noted that the interests of this small group were not necessarily shared by the entire civic association. He added that other civic associations encouraged more meticulous review. He and others suggested that rather than adjusting the document to suit the interests of this particular group that the Commission promulgate a document which reflected its past experience and general intent. Considerable discussion followed on this point.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Hollenberg to adopt the Rules and Regulations. Mr. Nathan seconded the motion which the Commission adopted unanimously.

Request to Re-introduce Nomination of the Bond Hotel

Mr. Tyler conveyed further public comment from Donald H. McNeil regarding the nomination of the Bond Hotel for entry on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. McNeil registered his extreme dissatisfaction with the Commission's decision to decline to designate this building as historic.

Mr. Tyler indicated that he read these comments upon the request of Mr. McNeil, who could not attend the meeting. Mr. Tyler acknowledged the sincerity and commitment of Mr. McNeil, but recommended that the Commission reject the nomination for the same reasons as stated at the June hearing. Mr. Brownlee, chairman of the Committee for Historic Designation, concurred in this opinion. Mrs. Kaplan added that the City had undertaken several mitigating actions in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Convention Center project. Through this project, the City not only preserved the historic Reading Terminal Trainshed, but also acted to preserve other historic resources in the area.

Mr. Tyler addressed a related issue of whether the Commission would designate a building for which a demolition permit already had been issued. This ostensibly theoretical consideration may become a real concern if a demolition permit expired. Mr. Wismer noted that the Department of Licenses and Inspections could not revoke a demolition permit already issued. However, if a permit for such a building lapsed, the Department may consider historic designation as grounds to refuse to re-issue the permit.

There being no further business, the Commission adjourned at 11:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel W. Simcox,
Executive Secretary