

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

**WEDNESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2026
REMOTE MEETING ON ZOOM
EMILY COOPERMAN, CHAIR**

CALL TO ORDER

START TIME IN AUDIO RECORDING: 00:00:00

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. The following Committee members joined her:

Committee Member	Present	Absent	Comment
Emily Cooperman, Ph.D., Chair	X		
Suzanna Barucco	X		
Jeff Cohen, Ph.D.	X		
Bruce Lavery	X		
Debbie Miller		X	
Elizabeth Milroy, Ph.D.	X		

The meeting was held remotely via Zoom video and audio-conferencing software.

The following staff members were present:

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director
Kim Chantry, Historic Preservation Planner III
Heather Hendrickson, Historic Preservation Planner II
Ted Maust, Historic Preservation Planner II
Allyson Mehley, Historic Preservation Planner III
Josh Schroeder, Historic Preservation Planner I
Dan Shachar-Krasnoff, Historic Preservation Planner II
Alex Till, Historic Preservation Planner II

The following persons attended the online meeting:

Allison Weiss, SoLo Germantown
Christopher Josten
David Traub
Eric Bodzin, Esq.
Gabe Robinson
Hanna Stark, Preservation Alliance
Jay Farrell
Jingyi Luo
Kathi Maschhoff
Kevin McMahon
Leonard Reuter, Esq., Law Department
Lynn Nichols
Michael Phillips, Esq., Klehr Harrison
Nancy Pontone
Oscar Beisert, Keeping Society

Pam Bracey, SoLo Germantown
Paul Steinke, Preservation Alliance
Robert Powers, Powers & Co.
Sherman Aronson
Steven Peitzman

AGENDA

ADDRESS: 4648-62 FRANKFORD AVE

Name of Resource: Circle Theatre

Review: Designation

Property Owner: Sang Koo and Bong Ho Park

Nominator: Historical Commission

Staff Contact: Ted Maust, theodore.maust@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 4648-62 Frankford Avenue, known as the Circle Theatre, and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The two-story structure was built in 1929 for the Stanley Company of America and operated as a movie theater from its opening until 1953, when it was converted for exclusively commercial use. The nomination contends that the property meets Criterion for Designation C as a reflection of the evolving design trends of neighborhood movie theaters built between 1913 and 1930. The nomination further argues that the theater's architects, Hoffman & Henon, make it worthy of Criterion for Designation E, as the firm gained national recognition for their work and significantly shaped Philadelphia's built environment through their commissions for theaters and Catholic institutions.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the property at 4648-62 Frankford Avenue satisfies Criteria for Designation C and E.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 00:07:52

PRESENTERS:

- Mr. Maust presented the nomination to the Committee on Historic Designation.
- No one represented the property owner.

DISCUSSION:

- Ms. Barucco asked about a sentence on page 38 of the nomination, italicized in its surrounding paragraph:
 - "The design of the exterior of the Circle Theatre beyond the primary elevation reflects the functional architectural typical of movie theaters of the period. It is distinctive for its large scale in contrast to the residential buildings along Griscom St, and Hoffman-Henon were a firm accomplished in working within practical parameters. *However, the details of its construction, including openings for windows and doors and vestiges of fire stairs, reflect historical code requirements and functional constraints rather than architectural style, and are not character defining to the building.*"
 - Mr. Maust commented that he had included that sentence describing ceration features as not character-defining in an effort to prevent the features from becoming an impediment to adaptive reuse.
 - Ms. Cooperman stated that she understood the intention but suggested that the statement could be clearer. She commented that the massing, exterior masonry, and fenestration pattern are important to preserve and compliment the design of the backstage area. She felt that the narrow drive aisle did not need to be addressed but suggested that the fire stair could be described as in poor condition.
 - Ms. Barucco stated her objection to the premise of the sentence and asked that it

be struck from the nomination. She asserted that the role of a nomination is to identify elements that are significant. She contended that the side and rear elevations are significant.

- Ms. Cooperman noted that nominations should guide subsequent reviews but argued that the specific scope of the sentence in question is irrelevant.
- Mr. Maust acknowledged that, on reflection, the sentence was overly broad and vague.
- Mr. Cohen expressed gratitude for the thorough research of the nomination including the appendices, which will support future nominations about Hoffman-Henon's work and movie theaters of the era.
- Ms. Cooperman wished there had been more of an exploration of the connection between the elaborate, fantastical, interior design of the atmospheric theaters and the escapism of movies and other entertainments in that environment.
- Mr. Lavery requested that the Uptown Theatre be added to Appendix F, given that it is a notable theater, opened the same year as the Circle Theatre, and is still standing.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- David Traub of Save Our Sites commented in support of the nomination.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS:

The Committee on Historic Designation found that:

- The rear and side elevations, though less eye-catching than the front of the building, are architecturally significant and the massing, masonry, and fenestration pattern are character-defining.
- Surviving movie theaters from the early twentieth century are a rare and important element of the built environment and that the Uptown Theatre at 2240-48 N. Broad Street should be added to the list of theaters in Appendix F.

The Committee on Historic Designation concluded that:

- The nomination demonstrates that the property reflects trends in movie theater architecture of its era and satisfies Criterion for Designation C
- The nomination demonstrates that the architects Hoffman-Henon significantly influenced the development of the city, and as such the property satisfies Criterion for Designation E.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: The Committee on Historic Designation voted to recommend that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 4648-62 Frankford Avenue satisfies Criteria for Designation C and E and suggested two amendments: removing the third sentence on page 38, beginning "However, the details of its construction...; and adding the Uptown Theatre (2240-48 N. Broad Street) to Appendix F.

ITEM: 4648-62 Frankford Ave MOTION: Satisfies Criteria C and E; recommend minor text edits MOVED BY: Milroy SECONDED BY: Cohen					
VOTE					
Committee Member	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Emily Cooperman, Chair	X				
Suzanna Barucco	X				
Jeff Cohen	X				
Bruce Lavery	X				
Debbie Miller					X
Elizabeth Milroy	X				
Total	5				1

ADDRESS: 123 S BROAD ST, UNIT 1

Name of Resource: Main Banking Room, Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Building

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Unit 1 Partners LP

Nominator: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

Staff Contact: Heather Hendrickson, heather.hendrickson@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the Main Banking Room of the Fidelity–Philadelphia Trust Company Building, located at 123 S. Broad Street, and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination asserts that the Main Banking Room meets Criteria for Designation C, D, and E. Under Criteria C and D, the Main Banking Room is identified as a significant example of Classical Revival architecture, with its design reflecting early twentieth-century banking institutions’ efforts to restore public trust by evoking classical ideals and employing materials that conveyed restraint, stability, and permanence. Under Criterion E, the nomination emphasizes the importance of the room’s three influential designers and artisans. These include the Philadelphia architectural firm Simon & Simon, responsible for the overall design of the building and the Main Banking Room; the sculptural elements attributed to the renowned Piccirilli Brothers; and the monumental stained-glass window, *History of Philadelphia*, created by D’Ascenzo Studios, one of the most successful and influential stained-glass firms in the United States during the early twentieth century.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the Main Banking Room of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building at 123 S Broad satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 00:29:50

PRESENTERS:

- Ms. Hendrickson presented the nomination to the Committee on Historic Designation.
- Hanna Stark of the Preservation Alliance represented the nomination.
- Attorney Michael Philips represented the property owner.

DISCUSSION:

- Mr. Cohen praised the nomination as well written and well researched. He noted that the space has a theatrical quality and highlighted how the bank's investment in stained glass and sculpture reflected the bank acting as a cultural patron. Mr. Cohen also emphasized that the interior of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company building was conceived as a public space that was as important as the exterior.
- Ms. Barucco strongly agreed with the prior praise of the nomination. She described the interior space as one of Philadelphia's most impressive semi-public interiors and emphasized that this banking hall was a rare survivor. She applauded the owner's willingness to not oppose the nomination and acknowledged the owner's future-use concerns while stressing the space's exceptional historic value.
- Ms. Cooperman reflected on the nomination's discussion of the banking hall as a dual-purpose interior as both a banking hall and a lobby for commercial tenants. She noted the blurred boundary between public and private use, based on personal experience.
- Mr. Laverty commended the nomination's emphasis on the relationship between architects and craftsmen. He highlighted the contributions of D'Ascenzo Studios and the Piccirilli Brothers. He framed the building as part of a broader Philadelphia architectural-craft tradition from the 1890s to the 1930s and contrasted it with the PSFS building, noting how the two contemporaneous banking halls addressed the same function very differently. He expanded on D'Ascenzo's role in establishing stained glass as an all-American art form, citing other major works such as the Valley Forge Memorial Chapel.
- Ms. Milroy expressed her wholehearted agreement with all the previous speakers and described a personal appreciation for the interior space. She characterized the nomination as persuasive, well-written, and important. She emphasized the need to protect the interior.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- None.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS:

The Committee on Historic Designation found that:

- The nomination is strong and persuasive.
- The Main Banking Hall is a rare and highly significant surviving interior.
- The space was intentionally conceived as a public, civic interior and is worthy of preservation.

The Committee on Historic Designation concluded that:

- The nomination demonstrates that the property satisfies Criteria C and D as a significant example of Classical Revival architecture.
- The nomination demonstrates that the property satisfies Criterion E, owing to the three influential designers and artisans associated with the Main Banking Room: the architectural firm Simon & Simon, the architectural sculptors Piccirilli Brothers, and the stained-glass artists of the D'Ascenzo Studios.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: The Committee on Historic Designation voted to recommend that the nomination demonstrates that the Main Banking Room at 123 S. Broad Street satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E.

ITEM: 123 S Broad St, Unit 1 (interior) MOTION: Satisfies Criteria C, D, and E MOVED BY: Barucco SECONDED BY: Milroy					
VOTE					
Committee Member	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Emily Cooperman, Chair	X				
Suzanna Barucco	X				
Jeff Cohen	X				
Bruce Lavery	X				
Debbie Miller					X
Elizabeth Milroy	X				
Total	5				1

ADDRESS: 29 AND 31 W BELLS MILL RD

Name of Resource: Sugar Loaf Orchard

Review: Designation

Property Owner: AOB Sugarloaf LLC

Nominator: Kevin McMahon, Powers & Co., Inc.

Staff Contact: Kim Chantry, kim.chantry@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the properties at 29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road and list them on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Subdivided in 1917 from a larger Chestnut Hill estate and renamed Sugar Loaf Orchard, the properties include a 1917 cottage, a 1919 main house, and a 1924 tool house, in addition to a garage and barn. All five buildings and structures were designed in the Colonial Revival style by Philadelphia architects Martin & Kirkpatrick. The nomination contends that Sugar Loaf Orchard satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E. Under Criteria C and D, the nomination outlines how the buildings exemplify the revival of Colonial Era domestic architecture in the early twentieth century. Under Criterion E, the nomination claims that the buildings are significant as the work of architects Martin & Kirkpatrick – later known as Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick – a firm which made significant contributions not only to the development of the country house, but also to institutional, commercial, and religious architecture in Philadelphia and beyond between 1912 and 1931.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the properties at 29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road satisfy Criteria for Designation C, D, and E.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 00:44:10

PRESENTERS:

- Ms. Chantry presented the nomination to the Committee on Historic Designation.
- Kevin McMahon represented the nomination.
- Attorney Eric Bodzin represented the property owner.

DISCUSSION:

- Ms. Milroy applauded the nominator for the quality of the research and writing in the nomination.

- Ms. Cooperman noted that the site map included in the nomination is critical to understanding properties with more than one building. She thanked Mr. McMahon for including it.
- Mr. Cohen agreed that the nomination was extremely well written. He commented on the wide and subtle design of the Colonial Revival main house.
- Ms. Cooperman commented that the design is very academic, and the architects had been looking very carefully at eighteenth-century Philadelphia buildings and recognized that they are not as symmetrical as assumed.
- Mr. Lavery praised the nominator for the quality of the nomination and the quotes included in it.
- Ms. Barucco commented in support of all outbuildings being included in a designation.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- None.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS:

The Committee on Historic Designation found that:

- The properties include a 1917 cottage, a 1919 main house, and a 1924 tool house, in addition to a garage and barn, all designed in the Colonial Revival style.

The Committee on Historic Designation concluded that:

- The buildings exemplify the revival of Colonial Era domestic architecture in the early twentieth century, satisfying Criteria C and D.
- The buildings are significant as the work of architects Martin & Kirkpatrick, satisfying Criterion E.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: The Committee on Historic Designation voted to recommend that the nomination demonstrates that the properties at 29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road satisfy Criteria for Designation C, D, and E.

ITEM: 29 and 31 W Bells Mill Rd MOTION: Satisfies Criteria C, D, and E MOVED BY: Cohen SECONDED BY: Barucco					
VOTE					
Committee Member	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Emily Cooperman, Chair	X				
Suzanna Barucco	X				
Jeff Cohen	X				
Bruce Lavery	X				
Debbie Miller					X
Elizabeth Milroy	X				
Total	5				1

ADDRESS: 7001-09 GREENHILL RD

Name of Resource: Morris Estate House

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Kathryn Maschhoff & Paul Anziano

Nominator: Greenhill Farms Preservation Club

Staff Contact: Alex Till, alexander.till@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 7001-09 Greenhill Road as historic and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. A nearly identical nomination for 6953 Greenhill Road was submitted simultaneously, but the owner of that property requested and was granted a continuance of the review until the July 2026 meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation. The two nominations document an “unusual paired residential complex” of two stone houses with a shared twin garage on the adjacent properties, which were constructed between 1916 to 1919. The nominations argue that the mirror buildings reflect the environment in an era characterized by the Colonial Revival style with English stylistic overtones, satisfying Criterion C. Additionally, the nominations assert that the houses are unusual examples that reflect the local vernacular architecture of the eighteenth century and that embody distinguishing characteristics of the Colonial Revival style through their textbook use of historically inspired forms, materials, and compositions, satisfying Criterion D. Additionally, the nominations argue that the properties comprise a significant masterwork of the architectural firm of Mellor, Meigs & Howe, a prominent partnership that influenced the built environment of the Philadelphia region, satisfying Criterion E. Finally, the nominations contend that the buildings at 6953 and 7001-09 Greenhill Road satisfy Criterion J as part of the early twentieth-century subdivision and development of Green Hill Farm by the Morris Estate in West Philadelphia.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the Committee on Historic Designation decline to review the nomination for 7001-09 Greenhill Road at this time and recommend to the Historical Commission that it table this review and remand the nomination to the Committee on Historic Designation at its July 2026 meeting so that the nominations for the paired buildings can be reviewed together. The owner of the property at 6953 Greenhill Road will not have an opportunity to fully participate in the deliberations about the shared significance of these paired properties if the nominations are reviewed at separate times. To ensure that both owners are afforded equal opportunity to participate in the reviews of the nearly identical properties, the review of the nomination for 7001-09 Greenhill Road should be postponed.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 00:58:12

PRESENTERS:

- Mr. Till presented the nomination to the Committee on Historic Designation.
- Oscar Beisert represented the nomination.
- Kathryn Maschhoff represented the property owner.

DISCUSSION:

- Ms. Cooperman asked the staff to clarify that there are two separate nominations for the two properties on Greenfield Road.
 - Mr. Till confirmed that two separate nominations were submitted, one for 6953 and another for 7001-09 Greenfield Road, but that they are largely identical and much of the argument for significance is based on them being a unique residential pair. He noted that it is difficult to separate the arguments for significance of the two. The review of the nomination for 6953 Greenfield Road

was continued at the property owner's request. He referred to the staff recommendation, which suggests tabling the nomination for 7001-09 Greenfield Road until the nomination for 6953 Greenfield Road can be heard. He stated that it would prejudice the second review if they are considered sequentially rather than simultaneously.

- Mr. Cohen asked if they are essentially mirror images of one another.
- Mr. Till confirmed that they are essentially mirror images with some updates over time. They share a common garage building between them and the two houses face each other across a garden space.
- Ms. Milroy asked if they were written by the same author.
- Mr. Till confirmed they were and they were submitted at the same time, but as two separate nomination documents for two separate parcels.
- Ms. Milroy commented that the nomination lacks an argument for Criterion J.
- Ms. Cooperman asked the Committee members if they wanted to table the review until both nominations could be reviewed together or if they wanted to proceed and review this one nomination now.
 - Ms. Milroy responded that they are still separate parcels and separate properties. However, the properties share many similarities and were designed at the same time. She compared them to a townhouse or rowhouse development where multiple properties were designed together. She suggested that one nomination for both properties would have been more appropriate.
 - Ms. Cooperman asked Mr. Farham if he could add any additional information from the staff's perspective.
 - Mr. Farnham explained that the owner of 6953 Greenhill Road only recently purchased the property and intends to retain a professional consultant to assess the nomination. He noted that the staff is concerned that discussing the significance of the property at 7001-09 Greenhill Road without the ownership of 6953 Greenhill Road present could potentially lead to a situation where the Historical Commission makes a decision on the first nomination and prejudices the review of the second. To ensure that both owners have an equal opportunity to participate in the review process, the staff recommends tabling this review until both owners are present. Mr. Farnham noted, however, that the Committee may proceed however it wishes.
 - Mr. Cohen commented that it does not seem like there is a downside to waiting.
 - Ms. Cooperman pointed out that the Commission, not the Committee, makes the actual decision to table or not. She noted that the Committee could provide its opinions on the one property based on the one nomination. She suggested that, since the owners of the 7001-09 Greenhill Rd property are in the meeting today, the Committee could ask them if they would like to wait until both properties can be reviewed together or have a discussion today.
 - Ms. Maschhoff responded that she would like to hear a discussion today.
 - Ms. Cooperman noted that the owner has made the time to attend today's meeting but also suggested that the owner should consider attending the future meeting when the adjacent property is discussed.
 - Ms. Maschhoff commented that she is clearly in support of the nomination for her home and acknowledged that they are not discussing the neighboring property but that she feels they are very significant and she intends to participate in future meetings.
- Ms. Cooperman asked the other Committee members how they would like to proceed.

- Ms. Milroy responded that she is happy to discuss the first nomination today.
- No one else objected to the proposal.
- Ms. Cooperman stated that the Committee will discuss the first nomination today and the Historical Commission may decide whether to table the review.
- Mr. Beisert commented on the nomination. He thanked the Committee for its time and the owner for deciding to nominate the property. He described the property as a remarkable work of Mellor, Meigs & Howe and an example of the early development of the neighborhood. He also stated that the property is a significant design whether considered on its own or in conjunction with its neighbor.
- Ms. Barucco commented that she appreciates the nomination especially for its explanation of how larger properties like this one were developed. She mentioned she was “fascinated” by this kind of paired dwelling and thinks it worthy of designation either alone or with its neighbor. She additionally thanked the owner for pursuing the nomination of her own property.
- Ms. Cooperman commented on the nomination and compared it to the previous discussion of the Sugarloaf Orchard building in terms of its design and its relationship to other Colonial Revival buildings in and around Philadelphia. She additionally noted the proposed significance under Criterion E and the significance of Mellor, Meigs & Howe. She explained that the proposed Criteria of C, D, and E seem appropriate in this case.
 - Ms. Barucco agreed on the point about the use of the Colonial Revival style at this property and that the value of that design style is often overlooked. Mellor, Meigs & Howe were master architects, which is evident at these buildings. The Colonial Revival style is often taken for granted because of the frequency of its use. Even today, contemporary buildings borrow from the Colonial Revival.
- Ms. Milroy commented on the use of Criterion J. She described it as “gooey” and that applying it can be very subjective, but in this case, she was struck by the extensive amount of publicity that this particular design seemed to have generated in architectural magazines and other publication of the time. She stated that that was interesting to see and could potentially contribute to a Criterion J argument.
- Ms. Cooperman commented on a point in the nomination comparing the property to the “Cotswold Village” houses in Chestnut Hill. She described these houses as being considered very modern at the time and how that was associated with Philadelphia. She noted that it also speaks to the freedom of interpretation that local designers used with their Revival designs during the period. There is not a hardline definition of “Cotswold” or similar names as styles compared to other revival styles, but they and the subject property represent a continuity that is typical of Philadelphia and recognized at the time as being a very important modern house design.
- Mr. Lavery commented that the work of Mellor, Meigs & Howe “stands for itself” and presents a unique solution to suburban design.
- Mr. Cohen commented on the design of the building. He described Mellor, Meigs & Howe as frequently working in a slightly more English Medieval forms and that can be seen here with the roughness of the materials and the character of the mortar and how it is brought close to the surface in a “barn rendering.” He added that the design also shows marks of handiwork and has some details that might be more closely related to the Arts and Crafts movement as well.
- Ms. Milroy further addressed her question on applying Criterion J to this nomination. She asked: since it is not directly addressed in the nomination, do they really need to include it?
 - Ms. Cooperman responded that the Commission only needs to find that a

- property satisfies one Criterion to designate.
- Ms. Milroy added that she thinks the nomination stands on its own without invoking Criterion J.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- Christopher Josten, a neighbor who assisted with the nomination, commented in support of the nomination.
- Lynn Nichols, a neighbor, commented in support of the nomination.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS:

The Committee on Historic Designation found that:

- The nomination for 7001-09 Greenhill Road was submitted along with a second, very similar nomination for the neighboring property at 6953 Greenhill Road. The review of that second nomination has been continued, but the subject property also stands on its own as significant.
- The Colonial Revival style of architecture is important to the history of Philadelphia and this property is a good example of it.
- The architectural firm of Mellor, Meigs & Howe is a significant design firm of the period.
- The property represents an important example of the early suburban development of the Overbrook neighborhood.

The Committee on Historic Designation concluded that:

- The nomination demonstrates that the building reflects the environment in an era characterized by the Colonial Revival style with English stylistic overtones, satisfying Criterion C.
- The nomination demonstrates that the house is an unusual example that reflects the local vernacular architecture of the eighteenth century and that embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Colonial Revival style through its textbook use of historically inspired forms, materials, and compositions, satisfying Criterion D.
- The nomination demonstrates that the property comprises a significant masterwork of the architectural firm of Mellor, Meigs & Howe, a prominent partnership that influenced the built environment of the Philadelphia region, satisfying Criterion E

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: The Committee on Historic Designation voted to recommend that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 7001-09 Greenhill Road satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D and E.

ITEM: 7001-09 Greenhill Rd MOTION: Satisfies Criteria C, D, and E MOVED BY: Milroy SECONDED BY: Lavery					
VOTE					
Committee Member	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Emily Cooperman, Chair	X				
Suzanna Barucco	X				
Jeff Cohen	X				
Bruce Lavery	X				
Debbie Miller					X
Elizabeth Milroy	X				
Total	5				1

ADDRESS: 419 W CLAPIER ST

Name of Resource: Outbuildings

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Shelby Lane LLC

Nominator: SoLo Germantown

Staff Contact: Jon Farnham, jon.farnham@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 419 W. Clapier Street, near McKean Avenue in southwest Germantown, and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Several outbuildings, some interconnected, stand on the property. They were associated with the house on the adjacent property at 5000 McKean Avenue but were subdivided off in the 1950s. The same nominator has submitted a nomination for 5000 McKean Avenue. The review of that nomination has been continued at the request of the property owner and will be reviewed at future public meetings.

The Historical Commission reviewed and rejected a nomination to designate this property at 419 W. Clapier Street on 14 November 2025; the Commission concluded that the nomination failed to demonstrate that the property satisfies any Criteria for Designation. The Historical Commission's jurisdiction over the property from the first nomination lapsed on 14 November with the rejection of the nomination. Following that rejection, the nominator submitted the current, revised version of the nomination on 23 November 2025. The Historical Commission notified the property owner that it would review the revised nomination on 16 December 2025, initiating its jurisdiction over the property for a second time.

On 19 November 2025, before the submission of the revised nomination, the property owner submitted demolition permit application DP-2025-001255 to the Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I). The application proposed to demolish all structures on the site. The Historical Commission informed L&I that it had no jurisdiction over the permit application on 19 November. L&I issued the demolition permit on 12 December 2025. The demolition activities authorized by the permit are not subject to the Historical Commission's review or approval. All structures on the site can be legally demolished regardless of the action the Historical Commission takes on this nomination.

The original nomination argued that the property satisfied Criteria A and J, owing to its association with the James Mapes Dodge family. The Historical Commission rejected that

argument. The current, revised nomination argues that the property satisfies Criteria C and J. To satisfy Criterion C, a resource must “reflect the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style.” The nomination asserts that the “adaptively reused collection of auxiliary buildings harmoniously designed with romantic, picturesque detailing and features, creating a stylistic through line, ... satisfies Criterion C.” Although unrelated to architectural style, the nomination also claims that the group of outbuildings with the house on the adjacent parcel constitute “the most complete surviving suburban ensemble in Germantown, satisfying Criterion C.” To satisfy Criterion J, a resource must “exemplify the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.” The nomination asserts that the “property’s continuous occupation by upper-middle class and affluent Philadelphians of professional and civic distinction underscores Germantown’s historic significance as a domestic retreat for the city’s mercantile and industrial elite” satisfies Criterion J.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the revised nomination fails to demonstrate that the property at 419 W. Clapier Street satisfies any Criteria for Designation. The nomination fails to associate any distinctive architectural style with the group of modest outbuildings; therefore, the nomination fails to demonstrate that the property satisfies Criterion C. The nomination asserts that property satisfies Criterion J solely because a series of nineteenth and twentieth-century owners were affluent, but affluence alone is not a measure of historical significance; the nomination fails to demonstrate that the property satisfies Criterion J.

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 01:24:13

PRESENTERS:

- Mr. Farnham presented the nomination to the Committee on Historic Designation.
- Allison Weiss and Pamela Bracey of SoLo Germantown Civic Association represented the nomination.
- Attorney Michael Phillips represented the property owner.

DISCUSSION:

- Ms. Cooperman invited Ms. Weiss to speak on behalf of the nomination.
 - Ms. Weiss stated that she had nothing to say. She asked Ms. Bracey to speak.
 - Ms. Bracey stated that the outbuildings need to be added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. She stated that her organization nominated the service buildings including the gardener’s and chauffeur’s cottage, barn, and greenhouse because they are historic. She claimed that they are the most comprehensive collection of outbuildings to survive in Germantown. She asserted that the greenhouse alone is a remarkable survivor and representative of a community once filled with smaller structures and gardens. She noted that the buildings were associated with the Dodge House at 5000 McKean Avenue, which has also been nominated. She observed that the buildings were part of an estate that was once owned and occupied by James Mapes Dodge and other significant members of his family. She added that many community members contributed their time and research to this nomination. She contended that they provided ample information to prove the worthiness of these structures and are always willing to work with the staff to improve and perhaps add other information to the nomination. She asked the members of the Committee on Historic Designation to tell them what they can do to improve the nomination. She

concluded that they do not want any more historic buildings, whether they are listed on the Philadelphia Register or not, to be demolished.

- Ms. Cooperman invited Mr. Phillips to speak on behalf of his client.
 - Mr. Phillips stated that he represents the owner of the property, Shelby Lane LLC. He stated that his client agrees with the staff's recommendation to reject the nomination. He also noted that his client has a complete demolition permit and intends to act on it. He stated that the nomination is an attempt to stop the redevelopment of the property and that his client fervently objects to the effort to obstruct the reuse of the property. He stated that designating the property would be futile because his client is intent on proceeding with the demolition.
- Ms. Cooperman invited the public to comment on the nomination.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- David Traub of Save Our Sites stated that the gardener's cottage and ancillary structures on the property including the barn, solarium, and workshops in their ensemble comprise a remarkably fine composition firmly girded in by the low, expressive stone bordering wall. Just in front of the cottage, to the side of the driveway, a small courtyard is formed by the setback of the south wall of the barn and workshop. That courtyard serves as the organizing center of the composition. And in that courtyard, or adjacent to it, the modest but charming gardener's cottage, which is a compact, well-proportioned work of architecture, stands. On the gabled front of the gardener's cottage, on its front facade, across the second floor, there is a horizontal row of three windows closely spaced together and banded by wood moldings. Below is the entry door, exactly centered on the facade. As a subtle adjustment by the architect, the center window of the three is wider than the two to either side and is about the same width as the door below and centered on it. Together, the rows of windows and the door beneath them form somewhat of a T-shaped configuration. Positioned up in the gable near its apex is a small, narrow, shuttered window adroitly positioned by the architect to complete the facade design, and to relieve what would otherwise be the blank upper stucco portion of the wall above the lower stone base. These elements, in their total composition, present a delightful architectural picture, pleasing to the viewer's eye. In conclusion, Mr. Traub pointed out that, that in the book *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia Savage McAllister, published by Alfred Knopf, the author identifies this type of house, the gable front and wing family style, as a prevalent style in American architecture of the period. There are several examples in the Germantown area, he noted.
- Steven Peitzman stated that he is familiar with this cluster of secondary buildings and the neighborhood. He reported that he lived in the Erringer Place Apartments for many years, which are nearby. He remarked that he likes to walk around southwest Germantown and therefore truly does know the area. He asserted that the Criteria for Designation fail in this instance because, even though these small surviving structures tell us about the social history of Germantown estates, the Criteria may not recognize that value. He disagreed with the staff's objection to the use of the word "estate" to describe the property with the adjacent house and contended that an estate is a landed property, usually with a large house. He claimed that the structures tell us a lot about the Dodge family's estate and the workers who supported it. He concluded that he supports the nomination.
- Oscar Beisert of the Keeping Society of Philadelphia reported that he is a resident of Germantown. He stated that he is in favor of this nomination and laments the issuance of a demolition permit for this unique complex of outbuildings related to the

house on McKean Avenue. He said that he really does not understand what is so hard to understand about a mansion, a greenhouse, a stable, and a gardener's cottage being one large historic site. He stated that it is inconceivable to him why this was so hard to understand at the last meeting, and it is inconceivable to him now why it is hard to understand at this meeting. He contended that it is pretty obvious that this is one of the few large houses in Germantown with outbuildings that are still present, despite being on two different parcels. Mr. Beisert asserted that this whole neighborhood was filled with houses like this that had similar buildings around them historically. All of the other similar buildings have been demolished. In some cases, a carriage house is still there. In other cases, the house is still there. He again stated that he does not really understand why it is so hard to understand that this is an intact complex of historic buildings. Because of the Historical Commission's decision not to designate this property at the last meeting, these buildings are going to be demolished. This is the last cluster of historic buildings that form a suburban place in lower southwest Germantown. This is an intact suburban dwelling site with all of its outbuildings. It is really sad to see that these buildings could not be redeveloped. No one is against these being redeveloped, even into separate buildings, with additions, with other new buildings on the site. This has nothing to do with stopping a development. This has to do with ensuring that our historic fabric is included in the future development of Germantown. "This isn't rocket science," he concluded.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION:

- Ms. Cooperman observed that Ms. Weiss had raised her hand again and agreed to let her make an additional statement even though she had already had an opportunity to speak.
 - Ms. Weiss stated that she is not trying to stop development, but instead to save historic resources and fulfill her mission to preserve and enhance the historical heritage of Germantown in order to maintain its unique character for future generations.
- Ms. Cooperman confirmed for the audience that the Committee on Historic Designation was only considering the nomination for the outbuildings today. The review of the nomination for the house on McKean Avenue was continued to a later meeting. She noted that the term "estate" is flexible. She stated that, with all due respect to Mr. Traub, the idea that these outbuildings were laid out primarily with aesthetic considerations is not believable. She observed that these are secondary buildings that were arranged for utilitarian purposes. She added that that does not make them necessarily insignificant, but any aesthetic argument for their significance is inappropriate. The nomination for the Bells Mills Road property that was considered earlier was a single nomination for an intact group of buildings including the residence and the dependent buildings. In this case, the house is not under consideration today.
- Ms. Cooperman noted that Ms. Weiss had raised her hand again and stated that she had already had two opportunities to speak and would not be called upon a third time. Ms. Cooperman continued after the interruption by Ms. Weiss. She stated that the nomination does not explain how these outbuildings relate to other similar buildings in Germantown. She stated that it is essential to know how they sit within the historic context, but that information is not provided. Ms. Cooperman then stated that the "last man standing argument" is not a valid argument for significance. Simply because a building may be the last surviving example of that type of building does not mean that it is significant. The nomination does not explain why these

outbuildings are significant.

- Mr. Cohen stated that the suburban dwellers who commuted to the city for work often imagined their suburban properties as rustic retreats. He contended that the architecture of the larger outbuilding with the wide, low gable was distinctly cast as a garden structure compared to the language of the main house. He asserted that there was aesthetic intent in that building. It projects a greater rusticity than the house. He added that the gardener's house in the back is essential to the composition. It creates a stable yard.
- Mr. Farnham interrupted and asked Ms. Weiss to stop using the chat feature in Zoom to try to communicate privately with the members of the Committee on Historic Designation. He noted that, as nominator, she had been elevated to the level of panelist in Zoom, giving her access to the chat feature. She had sent a chat message to the Committee members, not only giving her an unfair advantage in the deliberations but also creating commentary that cannot be incorporated into the official record of the meeting. Mr. Farnham asked Ms. Weiss to resist the temptation to use the chat feature.
 - Ms. Cooperman informed Ms. Weiss that both the nominator comment and public comment periods had been closed. She noted that Ms. Weiss had already had an extra opportunity to speak. She insisted that Ms. Weiss follow the rules.
- Ms. Cooperman stated that she does not see how one can understand these buildings as dependent, secondary buildings that were part of a larger property that included a main house and then conclude that they are significant in their own right. She stated that it is not logical.
 - Ms. Barucco disagreed and noted that barns have been nominated on their own. She stated that she finds the stone buildings to be significant, but not the other, later buildings, which clutter up the site. She stated that there is not enough in the nomination to support the designation of the later buildings. She stated that she appreciated the way that the buildings were incorporated into the stone perimeter wall. She acknowledged, however, that the nomination could have been stronger. It could have explained how the buildings were used.
- Ms. Milroy stated that she would have liked to have learned a little bit more about the larger context of Germantown and perhaps other neighborhoods. She asked if there are other comparable outbuildings and whether these outbuildings are truly the last of the type. She stated that the nomination does not clearly document the chronology of the construction of these buildings. She noted that she wished that there had been some more background context provided.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS:

The Committee on Historic Designation found that:

- The nomination does not provide sufficient information to understand the outbuildings in their context in Germantown.
- The nomination does not provide sufficient information about the uses of the outbuildings.
- The nomination does not demonstrate that this is the last surviving complex of outbuildings in Germantown or in the neighborhood in southwest Germantown

The Committee on Historic Designation concluded that:

- The nomination fails to demonstrate that the property satisfies any Criteria for Designation.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: The Committee on Historic Designation voted to recommend that the nomination fails to demonstrate that the property at 419 W. Clapier Street satisfies any Criteria for Designation.

ITEM: 419 W Clapier St					
MOTION: Fails to satisfy any Criteria for Designation					
MOVED BY: Barucco					
SECONDED BY: Lavery					
VOTE					
Committee Member	Yes	No	Abstain	Recuse	Absent
Emily Cooperman, Chair	X				
Suzanna Barucco	X				
Jeff Cohen	X				
Bruce Lavery	X				
Debbie Miller					X
Elizabeth Milroy	X				
Total	5				1

ADJOURNMENT

START TIME OF DISCUSSION IN ZOOM RECORDING: 02:02:39

ACTION: The Committee on Historic Designation adjourned at 11:47 a.m.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Minutes of the Philadelphia Historical Commission and its advisory Committees are presented in action format. Additional information is available in the video recording for this meeting. The start time for each agenda item in the recording is noted.
- Application materials and staff overviews are available on the Historical Commission's website, www.phila.gov/historical.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

§14-1004. Designation.

(1) Criteria for Designation.

A building, complex of buildings, structure, site, object, or district may be designated for preservation if it:

- (a) Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth, or nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past;
- (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation;
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or professional engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic,

- social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth, or nation;
- (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship that represent a significant innovation;
- (g) Is part of or related to a square, park, or other distinctive area that should be preserved according to a historic, cultural, or architectural motif;
- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or City;
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.