

**REPORT OF THE HISTORIC DESIGNATION COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
18 December 1998**

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

Present

David Brownlee, Ph.D., Chair
Janet Klein
Ernest Leonardo, Chief, Comprehensive Planning, City Planning Commission
Hyman Myers
Stephanie Wolf, Ph.D.

Kristin Fetzner Cardi, Historic Preservation Planner
Elizabeth Harvey, Historic Preservation Planner
R. Scott Jacob, Executive Secretary
Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also Present

Leon Chudzinski, President, Washington Square West Civic Association (WSWCA)
John Jordan, Treasurer, WSWCA
Mark Brakeman, Weekly Press
Stanhope Browne, Historic District Designation Now!
Virginia Trosino, WSWCA
Vivienne Ehret, Kahn Park Committee
Gail Hauptfuhrer
Denny Hatch
Catharine Apothacker
Louis Brown
Norman Tissian, President, Society Hill Civic Association (SHCA)
Judith Brown
Patricia Wilson Aden, Preservation Alliance
Alik Strakes, Preservation Alliance
Ivan Shomer
Elizabeth Armour
Suzanne Binswanger
Catharine Toso
Morton Lieberman
Ada Lieberman
Trudy Peasky
Matthew DeJulio, SHCA
Irene Schrank
Ira Kauderer, Esq.
Louis Hill
Gail Bower
Nancy Barton

Judith Cills, WSWCA
 Ruthanne Madway, Executive Director, East of Broad Improvement Association
 Catharine Franklin, Penn-Knox Neighborhood Association
 Katherine Murphy
 Joshua Grimes, Esq.
 Joel Chernoch

Mr. Brownlee called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. After introductions, Mr. Brownlee explained that the Historic Designation Committee acts as an advisory committee to the Commission, the body that actually votes on nominations. Mr. Tyler stated that the Historic Designation Committee must review the nomination for accuracy and completeness, and determine if the nomination meets one or more of the criteria for designation as set forth in the Historic Preservation Ordinance at § 14-2007(5) of the Philadelphia Code.

Mr. Brownlee explained that the Committee on Historic Designation will meet twice regarding several different aspects of the proposed district. He stated that this meeting will focus on the proposed boundaries for the Society Hill Historic District as well as the nomination itself.

Mr. Tyler introduced Elizabeth Harvey and Laura Spina of the Historical Commission staff. He stated that Ms. Harvey and Ms. Spina worked on the nomination and updated the inventory for the district together. Ms. Spina presented slides of Society Hill while Ms. Harvey summarized the statement of significance.

Ms. Harvey stated that The Society Hill Historic District occupies an extraordinary place in the history of urban planning, architecture, society, culture, commerce, medicine, and religion. It not only contains one of the largest concentrations of eighteenth and early nineteenth century buildings in the country, but illustrates the course of urban design well into the second half of the twentieth century. The streets and blocks of Society Hill reveal the perseverance and practicality of Thomas Holme's 1682 plan of a grid for the city that's still adaptable to mid-twentieth century planning concepts and goals. Within this context stands a broad spectrum of architectural styles ranging from modest Colonial dwellings through elegant Georgian, Federal and Greek Revival houses to contemporary high-rise towers. These buildings also reflect the history of diverse social and economic classes, ethnic groups, religions and institutions. As demonstrated by archeological and construction excavations, features survive under the streets, houses, gardens, and yards of this district.

Above and below ground, Society Hill meets all of the criteria for designation as an historic district prescribed by the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance, §14-2007(5)(a-j) of the Philadelphia Code.

Ms. Harvey described the community's historical, social, architectural, redevelopment and preservation significance. In discussing the diverse phases of the community's evolution, she explained that changes in physical development, reliance on the Delaware River, ethnic and cultural diversity, and economic health shaped Society Hill as we know it today. In this, we see evidence of a neighborhood that exemplifies, with its churches, William Penn's tolerance for religious freedom; the remnants of a thriving commercial entity; a community of diverse peoples, and an integrated building

fabric of old and new, academic and vernacular. The relationship between these elements allows us to understand the vibrant neighborhood that we see today. The preservation of Society Hill offers the opportunity to recognize the social and architectural fabric of an important and diverse area of Philadelphia that demonstrates changes made in each century since the City's founding.

Ms. Harvey stated that the staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission recommends considering the Society Hill Historic District for designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. She remarked on the proposed district's singular value in its ability to fulfill all of the ten criteria listed in §14-2007(5)(a-j) of the Philadelphia Code.

Ira Kauderer asked for clarification regarding the nomination's reference on page three of the statement of significance to Jewish "missionary work" in Society Hill, noting the absence of that practice in the Jewish faith. Committee members agreed to reword the nomination to read "social work" instead of "missionary work."

Several members of the community voiced their support for the proposed Society Hill Historic District. Catharine Apothacker, a resident of Society Hill, thanked the staff of the Historical Commission for their hard work in preparing the nomination and inventory. She also asked the Committee to recommend designating the district to honor a very important part of our nation's heritage. Norman Tissian, President of the Society Hill Civic Association, stated that his organization's board voted unanimously to in favor of the proposed district. Patricia Aden spoke on behalf of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia in support of the nomination. Ms. Aden described an economic study completed by the Preservation Alliance on the benefits of historic designation, districts and preservation.

Stanhope Browne, also a resident of Society Hill, read a statement from a citizen's group known as "Historic District Designation Now!" (HDDN) in support of the nomination. Mr. Browne explained that HDDN serves as an ad hoc coalition of individuals living in or with property in Society Hill or institutions with an interest in the district. He stated that the members of HDDN subscribe to the following mission statement:

Society Hill, one of the most historic residential neighborhoods in the United States, was protected for thirty years by redevelopment controls from the possible desecration of its fabric of historic facades. Those controls expired in 1988, and protection can again be obtained only by Society Hill's designation as a historic district by the Philadelphia

historical

Commission under §14-2007 (4)(b) of the Philadelphia Code. Efforts over the past ten years to obtain that designation have for various reasons not come to fruition. The time for designation - - supported by Society Hill property owners and residents - - is now.

Mr. Browne also asked the Committee to consider the importance the preservation and conservation of Society Hill plays in bringing tourists to Philadelphia. He commented on uniqueness of the district's historic resources, contrasting them with reconstructed colonial cities such as Williamsburg, Virginia, as well as to theme park "historic" towns.

Mr. Myers made a motion to recommend approving the statement of significance, with the phrase “missionary work” changed to “social work” regarding the Jewish community in Society Hill. Mr. Leonardo seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Mr. Brownlee directed the discussion to the issue of the proposed boundaries of the Society Hill Historic District.

In response to questions from members of the community and Committee members, the Committee discussed the inclusion of streets, curbs and sidewalks in the district. Mr. Myers raised the question of jurisdiction over streets forming outside boundaries of the district. Committee members agreed that jurisdiction should encompass the sidewalks, streets and curbs within the district, and the full cartway of the streets, from curb to curb, of those streets forming outside boundaries of the district.

Mr. Myers made a motion to extend jurisdiction to encompass the sidewalks, streets and curbs within the district, and the full cartway of the streets, from curb to curb, of those streets forming outside boundaries of the district. Ms. Klein seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Leon Chudzinski, President of the Washington Square West Civic Association, asked why Pennsylvania Hospital falls within the boundaries of the Society Hill Historic District when it lies on the Washington Square West side of South 8th Street, the traditionally acknowledged border between the two neighborhoods. Mr. Chudzinski and other members of the Washington Square West community asked the Committee to reconsider incorporating Pennsylvania Hospital, regarded by many as the focal point and most important building of Washington Square West, into the Society Hill Historic District.

Ms. Wolf explained that Pennsylvania Hospital dates from the mid-eighteenth century, a period strongly associated with Society Hill, and, at the time of its original construction, was deliberately placed outside the limits of the heavily populated sections for hygienic purposes. Mr. Myers also added that the historic brick wall surrounding the hospital serves as a physical demarcation of the primarily Colonial- and Federal- era Society Hill district. Mr. Brownlee explained the Historical Commission’s purview and the desirability of including contiguous resources in Historic districts. Mr. Chudzinski asked why the district does not include Mikva Israel Cemetery, a Jewish cemetery dating from the eighteenth century, which abuts the north side of Pennsylvania Hospital. The Committee agreed not to include the cemetery within the boundaries of the proposed district. Committee members explained that Pennsylvania Hospital warrants inclusion in the Society Hill Historic District for more reasons than proximity and age: it originally served the Society Hill Community and constitutes a recognizable and important gateway into that neighborhood.

Mr. Myers asked the representatives from Washington Square West if changing the wording of district’s name to reflect that Pennsylvania Hospital lies within the traditional boundaries of Washington Square West would satisfy their concerns. Mr. Chudzinski and other members of that neighborhood expressed their willingness to assent to that possibility. Committee members agreed to recommend changing the

name of the proposed district to “Society Hill and Pennsylvania Hospital of Washington Square West Historic District.”

Ms. Klein made a motion to recommend changing the name of the proposed district to “Society Hill and Pennsylvania Hospital of Washington Square West Historic District.” Ms. Wolf seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Mr. Brownlee asked the Committee to consider the buildings that form the northwestern boundaries of the proposed district. He stated that some of these buildings date from the mid-twentieth century, but merit inclusion in the district because they conform with the historic buildings in (1.) rhythm of elements such as fenestration, cornice and situation on the lot, (2.) scale, and (3.) material. Mr. Brownlee explained that a building must meet two of these three criteria to be classified as “contributing” to the historic district. If a building only conforms with one criterion or none at all, it is classified as “non-contributing.”

Mr. Brownlee expressed concern about ending the district with non-contributing buildings. He explained that the buildings at 737 and 739 Walnut Street form the northwest corner boundary of the district. He asked the Committee to remove these two building from the inventory. Mr. Myers noted that the scope of the nomination spans twentieth century structures too.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to remove 737 and 739 Walnut Street from the inventory and Mr. Myers seconded.

Patricia Aden of the Preservation Alliance objected to removing 737 and 739 Walnut Street from the inventory, citing possible threats to the proposed district such as adverse treatment or new construction in the future. Other members of the community echoed Ms. Aden’s distress over the future of the historic building near the two addresses in question as well as the street scape. Joel Chernoch notified the Committee that a developer plans to erect a high rise building near this location.

After considerable deliberations, the Committee withdrew the original motion regarding 737 and 739 Walnut Street.

Mr. Leonardo made a motion to retain 737 and 739 Walnut Street in the inventory. Ms. Klein seconded the motion which carried with three votes. Mr. Brownlee dissented and Mr. Myers abstained.

Members of the community asked about the building at the southwest corner of 2nd and Walnut Streets. This building sits on an “island,” bordered on the south and west sides by Dock Street. The Committee agreed that the building does conform with the district in scale and location, but not fenestration. Its layout follows the shape of Dock Street. In response to Mr. Myers questions, Ms. Spina stated that the “island” building, 201-205 Dock Street, was built after the redevelopment period, but was constructed under Redevelopment Authority controls. Norman Tissian asked the Committee to consider keeping the building in the district to ensure that a more inappropriate structure does not replace it in the future.

Mr. Leonardo made a motion to retain the building at 201-205 Dock Street in the proposed Society Hill Historic District. Ms. Klein seconded the motion which carried

unanimously.

Ms. Wolf made motions to retain all the other building on the north side of the 700 block of Walnut Street and the buildings on the east side of 8th Street from Manning to Spruce Street in the district. Mr. Myers seconded the motions which carried unanimously.

Mr. Brownlee announced that the Committee on Historic Designation will meet again on 22 January 1999, to discuss the inventory of the proposed Society Hill and Pennsylvania Hospital of Washington Square West Historic District.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Myers seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

R. Scott Jacob
Executive Secretary