

THE MINUTES OF THE 336TH STATED MEETING
OF THE

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

8 November 1989

Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman

Present: Edward A. Montgomery, Jr., Chairman
Christine Washington, Vice Chairman
David Brownlee
Caroline Golab
David Hollenberg
Jason Nathan
Reverend William B. Thompson
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director,
City Planning Commission
Don Kligerman, Commissioner,
Department of Licenses & Inspections
Scott Wilds,
Office of Housing and Community Development

Maria Petrillo, Esq., Chief Assistant City Solicitor
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Patricia Siemiontkowski,
Assistant Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

Also: M.J. Tackett, Partridge, Tackett Architects
S. Shannon, Parkway Corporation
D. Guseman, Partridge, Tackett Architects
Bob Brown, Geddes Brecher Qualls Cunningham
David Dobbins, Thomas Jefferson University
Debora Kratzok, Rittenhouse Plaza
Deborah Kelly,
Greater Philadelphia Preservation Coalition
Gary Sachau, National Trust for Historic Preservation

THE MINUTES of the 335th Stated Meeting of the Philadelphia
Historical Commission held on 11 October 1989, Edward A.
Montgomery, Jr., Chairman. Ms. Siemiontkowski noted that
the Minutes should be amended to indicate that Reverend
William B. Thompson was in attendance of the Meeting.
Subject to this amendment, the Minutes of the 335th Stated
Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 11
October 1989 were approved.

THE REPORT of the Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission held on 26 October, 1989, David Hollenberg, Chairman. In the absence of Mr. Hollenberg, Ms. Siemiontkowski presented the Committee's recommendations to the Commission.

On 26 October 1989, the Architectural Committee met and reviewed a total of nine proposals, six for alterations to historically designated buildings, and three for alterations to properties in the proposed Rittenhouse Square/Fitler Square Historic District. The Committee voted to recommend final approval on three of these nine applications. These included substantial rehabilitation to the property at 105 Fitzwater St., the removal of an existing revolving door and its replacement with large double doors at the Rittenhouse Plaza, and the installation of a flat wall sign at 339 South Street.

The Commission voted to accept the recommendation of its Architectural Committee and grant final approval of the three applications noted in the preceding paragraph.

The Committee voted to recommend conditional approval of five applications. The proposals, and the conditions of the Committee's approval, follow:

At 248 Market Street, the applicant proposed repair of the existing bracketed wood cornice and the placement of several condenser units atop the roof. The Committee voted to recommend approval, contingent upon the preparation of an accurate measured drawing of the cornice.

At 1011 E. Washington Lane, applicant proposed the construction of a new garage for the Founder's Residence of the New Covenant Church within the Awbury Arboretum. The Committee voted to recommend approval, contingent upon the removal of the kick in the roof of the proposed garage.

One Mellon Bank Center, the Committee voted to recommend approval, contingent upon the re-design of the proposed new entrance on Chestnut Street to follow the horizontal elements of the existing fenestration. Sight line studies are also requested for the fire tower.

At 301 S. 17th Street, the applicant proposed to remove a segment of an existing brick wall to provide a parking space at the rear of the property. The Committee voted to recommend approval, contingent upon the submission of a drawing, within three months, of a

gate enclosing the parking space.

At 2027 Pine Street, the applicant proposed the installation of a new door. The Committee voted to recommend approval, subject to modification of the door design.

The Committee agreed that these revisions could be reviewed by the staff, and would not require re-submission to the Committee.

The Commission voted to accept the recommendations of its Architectural Committee and grant approval, subject to the respective conditions, of the five applications noted in the preceding paragraph.

The Committee voted to recommend disapproval of one application, for the installation of a new iron security gate at the existing entrance of 427 Chestnut Street, the American Philosophical Society.

Ms. Siemiontkowski informed the Commission that the applicant requested tabling of this action until the December meeting of the Commission. The Commission agreed to honor this request.

THE REPORT on the Philadelphia Historical Commission Staff Activities for October 1989, Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer. The October Report of Staff Activities was accepted and approved.

OLD BUSINESS

900 Block of Chestnut St. Presentation by M.J. Tackett, and D. Guseman, Partridge, Tackett Architects; S. Shannon, Parkway Corporation; Bob Brown, Geddes Brecher Qualls Cunningham; and David Dobbins, Thomas Jefferson University.

Mr. Tyler reviewed for the Commission members the proposed development scheme for the 900 block of Chestnut Street and the Historical Commission's proposed historic designation of 920-922, 926 and 930 Chestnut Street. At the request of the applicants the Historical Commission agreed to defer designation on these three Chestnut Street buildings while the architects undertook a study of their preservation potential within the larger block development.

The development team, having studied the problem, requested an appearance before the Commission to present a model depicting the proposed development. Mr. Tyler advised the Commission that this presentation was preliminary and for the Commission's information only. A vote would not be required on this matter. Conceived in two phases, the proposed complex would be developed for office, medical, health-care, and retail uses. Phase I development would occur in the center of the block, presently owned by the development team. Phase II would involve the construction of one or two additional buildings at the corners. Though construction of Phase II might not occur soon, the development team stressed the importance of planning for shared foundations and utilities at this time.

Following considerable discussion of the proposal, Mr. Nathan requested that the Commission focus on the three buildings nominated for designation. He inquired whether the designation would protect these buildings either in whole or in part. Ms. Golab informed the other members of the Commission that the proposed designation would be for the entire building. Mr. Tyler affirmed that the designation would apply to the entire building.

Mr. Tackett alluded to an earlier meeting with the Architectural Committee, at which the importance of the three buildings was stressed. Specifically, he recalled that the Committee members expressed concern for the preservation of a sense of building mass and not just facades.

Ms. Golab discussed the importance of designation, and cited the Designation Committee's decision to recommend the designation of three buildings on this block.

Mr. Brownlee stressed the fact that designation entailed the entire building. He also noted that once a building was designated, all proposals for alterations are reviewed by the Architectural Committee and acted upon by the Commission.

Mr. Nathan asked if it was necessary to designate the whole building or if the Commission could designate a facade alone.

Mr. Tyler stated that the Ordinance conceivably allowed designation of only facades as objects; however, he noted that in this case the Committee recommended designation of the entire building.

Mr. Brownlee expressed concern about the idea of designating only parts of buildings, and stated that this practice would

complicate the designation process enormously. The designation process involved a determination of the significance of the structure, not its parts. The designation of parts might engender misguided conceptions that only certain parts of a building were significant. Given his concern over the ramifications of partial designations, he stressed his preference for designating the entire building, and leaving any negotiations for alterations to the Architectural Committee and the Commission itself. In concluding he suggested the Commission proceed to designation at its December meeting.

Mr. Tackett noted that these buildings proposed for designation would be occupied by modern offices, whose use might demand different dimensions than those of the present interiors. In addition, some question exists concerning the structural integrity of the three nominated buildings.

Ms. Petrillo requested that the applicant provide the Committee with a structural report.

Mr. Dobbins, representing Thomas Jefferson University, requested that the Commission allow the development team to continue its work during the six-month planning period originally agreed upon by the Commission, so that they could consider a range of options before reaching an ultimate decision. He stated that the Hospital was aware of the problems of the block and was assessing whether the 900 block of Chestnut Street would be the most desirable location for any proposed future expansion. They were examining issues important to the design and use of clinical facilities. He requested that the Commission not end this planning period prematurely. Mr. Dobbins noted that Jefferson University opposed the designation of the buildings, but that the development team wanted to retain the historic character of the block while adapting it.

Mr. Wilds asked if the Designation Committee intended to consider other buildings on the block, including the neo-Georgian building in the middle and the Bundy Building at the corner. Mrs. Golab affirmed that the Committee had discussed several of the other buildings on the block.

Chairman Montgomery closed the discussion, expressed his appreciation on behalf of the Commission for the presentation, and reminded all that the discussion was for information only. He advised the development team to submit its proposed development plan to the Architectural Committee. Ms. Golab informed the applicant that the designation of the buildings would not alter the procedure for proposed alterations to these buildings.

Mr. Brownlee expressed interest in commencing the designation process for the Chestnut Street buildings. Given that the development team was planning in good faith on the premise that the buildings may be designated, and given that the Commission was protecting the buildings as though they were designated, he suggested a vote, at next meeting, on the issue of designation.

Chairman Montgomery closed the discussion at this time.

Rules and Regulations

Mr. Tyler presented the proposed Rules and Regulations to the Historical Commission. This final draft resulted from meetings with the Ad Hoc Committee on the Rules and Regulations and reflected the changes suggested by that Committee. He requested the Commission's approval to allow distribution of the document for comment by interested parties. The draft will be scheduled for discussion at the December meeting. Formal adoption of the proposed Rules and Regulations would be preceded by review by the Law Department, deposit of the document at the Department of Records for a period of thirty days, and a public hearing.

Chairman Montgomery requested that Mr. Tyler allow the Commission one week for comments before distribution to the group of interested parties.

Ms. Petrillo reinforced the importance of the procedure for adoption. She informed the Commission that 5 January 1990 was an attainable date for adoption, only if all the prerequisites were met.

Mr. Wilds made inquiry into the feasibility of expediting the processing of designated local Historic Districts. He expressed concern that several properties in the proposed Spruce Hill District had been lost. Discussion ensued regarding the problems arising in the gap between notification of property owners and actual designation of local historic districts.

Mr. Hollenberg suggested that this period offered a modicum of protection to those neighborhoods interested in designation. Given extant neighborhood support of the pending districts, the designation process for these districts has been considered a high priority. Mr. Hollenberg further intimated that the process of listing the districts might proceed concurrently.

The importance of expedient adoption of the Rules and Regulations having been reinforced, Chairman Montgomery requested that the staff prepare a calendar for the adoption of the Rules and Regulations, and the processing of the Historic District nominations.

Chairman Montgomery reminded the Commission that they would have a week to comment on the Rules and Regulations before distribution to interested parties.

NEW BUSINESS

Pennsylvania State Senate Bill #1129

Mr. Tyler proposed a Resolution addressing Pennsylvania State Senate Bill #1129. He informed the Commission that the bill seemed to contradict existing Commonwealth and federal law for historic preservation. By exempting religious properties, adoption of the bill would endanger National Register districts by leaving considerable gaps in them. Further, the adoption of the bill seemed to contradict requirements of the Section 106 Environmental Review process for Federal projects. He stressed that the bill proposed to exempt all religious properties, not just those properties used for religious purposes. As such, hypothetically, if a particular congregation were to obtain ownership of the PSFS Building, it could not be designated, classified, or treated as historic.

A MOTION to adopt the resolution was seconded and carried unanimously.

Discussion of Fairmount Park Mansions

Mr. Nathan requested an update on efforts to preserve the historic mansions of Fairmount Park.

Mr. Tyler reviewed a meeting that he and Ms. Kaplan had with William Mifflin, Executive Director of the Fairmount Park Commission. The Park Commission is preparing an assessment of properties, including the cost to stabilize them, and the cost to restore each to useful condition. Ms. Kaplan stated that the Fairmount Park Commission was prepared to follow the recommendations of the consultant on the houses. They have pursued funding from several foundations for this study. The Fairmount Park Commission also has decided not to pursue its earlier demolition request for the Hall-Wiley House at 900 Susquehanna Road.

Mr. Nathan requested that the Commission exercise its influence on other City agencies to assure the preservation of these civic treasures. He also suggested that the Historical Commission actively and aggressively pursue this matter.

Mr. Tyler noted that Mr. Mifflin has been receptive to suggestions for the care and maintenance of these buildings. Ms. Kaplan noted that in previous years the buildings were occupied. However, questions regarding the terms of occupancy, and selection of occupants caused many of the houses to be left abandoned and neglected. At present, the Park Commission is establishing new policies for the stewardship of several of the mansions.

A MOTION was made to adjourn. There being no further business, the motion was seconded and carried.

Respectfully submitted,



Daniel W. Simcox
Executive Secretary