

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

**TUESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2011, 9:00 A.M.  
ROOM 578, CITY HALL  
RICHARD DILWORTH, PH.D., CHAIR**

**PRESENT**

Richardson Dilworth III, Ph.D., chair  
Jeffrey Cohen, Ph.D.  
Bruce Laverty  
David Schaaf, R.A., Philadelphia City Planning Commission  
Douglas Mooney

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director  
Erin Coté, Historic Preservation Planner II

**ALSO PRESENT**

John Gallery, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia  
Ben Leech, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia  
Robert Gordon, resident  
Myrna Miller, resident  
Herbert Jeschke, Overbrook Farms East Residents Association  
Atif Ahmad, resident  
Chaya Hobesmen, resident  
Deborah Cianfrani, resident  
Wilhelmina Henry, Overbrook Farms East Residents Association  
H. Otterbein, *Daily News*  
Salvatore Sardeve, resident  
Kevin Maurer, Overbrook Farms Club  
Stephanie Kindt, Overbrook Farms Club  
Anthony Cianfrani, 6381 Church Road  
Jeffrey Wright, 6422 Overbrook Avenue  
Dennis T. Kelly, 6450 Sherwood Road  
Elizabeth J Bracken, 6426 Drexel Road  
David Brigham, 6345 Sherwood Road  
Ramble Krohn, 6401 Sherwood Road  
Louis (Ed) Fischer, 6419 Drexel Road  
Melanie Roach, 6305 Sherwood Road  
Judith A. Gasieuski, 6345 Woodbine Avenue  
Joseph Gasieuski, 6345 Woodbine Avenue  
Donald Selkow, 6441 Woodbine Avenue  
Mary Allen, Overbrook Farms  
V. Chapman-Smith, 6399 Woodbine Avenue  
M. Gregory James, President, Overbrook Farms East Residents Association  
Jacqueline H. Cruse, 2051 N. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Barbara Carey, 2053 N. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Leon Fields, 2080 N. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Belinda Fields, 2080 N. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street

Diane M. Calkins, 5831 Drexel Road  
Albert Philip Handel, 6381 Drexel Road  
David Carroll, 2058 N. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Kimya Johnson, Overbrook Farms  
Bill Finegan, 6358 Woodbine Avenue  
Pinchas Lando, 6080 Drexel Road  
Tzui Rudin, 6030 Drexel Road  
S. Kelemer, 6028 Overbrook Avenue  
M. Doughel, resident  
Frank Weer, Overbrook Farms  
Adjoa Love-Dorsey, 5900 Overbrook Avenue  
Sara Dominian, 5965 Overbrook Avenue  
Shocom Kamenetsky, resident  
Khummit Hatshepsitu, 5917 Drexel Road  
John Summerset, resident  
William Boyer, resident  
Robert Smith, resident  
Olade Olayimka, resident  
Alfred Outlaw, 6373 Woodbine Avenue  
Councilman Curtis Jones Jr., Fourth District  
Al Spivey Jr., Office of Councilman Curtis Jones Jr.

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Dilworth called the meeting to order at 9:20 a.m. Messrs. Cohen, Laverty, and Schaaf joined him on the Committee. Mr. Mooney joined the meeting at a later point.

#### **OVERBROOK FARMS HISTORIC DISTRICT**

Owner: Various

Nominator: The Overbrook Farms Club

Proposal: Nomination district designation

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes the designation of the Overbrook Farms Historic District. Overbrook Farms is a suburban residential development of 497 properties located on the western edge of the City of Philadelphia and centered on the Main Line of the former Pennsylvania Railroad. The proposed boundaries are predicated on the residential development that was laid out in the early 1890s.

The period of significance of the Overbrook Farms Historic District spans from 1850, when the trains first stopped at the Overbrook Station, to 1929, when the last of the original buildings of the development was constructed and the first of the original buildings demolished.

The nomination contends that the Overbrook Farms Historic District satisfies seven Criteria for Designation (a, c, d, e, f, h, and j) and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that Overbrook Farms Historic District satisfies seven Criteria for Designation (a, c, d, e, f, h, and j) and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

**DISCUSSION:** Ms. Coté presented the nomination to the Committee on Historic Designation.

Mr. Farnham provided a brief overview of the purview and function of the Committee on Historic Designation. He explained that the Committee is advisory to the Commission and that its purpose is to review the correctness and completeness of the nomination and determine whether the cited Criteria for Designation, boundaries, period of significance, and classifications are appropriate.

An unidentified man in the audience asked if the Committee would prepare findings of fact based on its deliberations today. Mr. Farnham explained that the Committee holds public meetings, not adversarial hearings. He stated that the Committee would not prepare findings of fact and conclusions of law, but would document the meeting with a set of minutes. The same man asked if he could bring a stenographer to the Commission meeting. Mr. Farnham stated that he was welcome to record the meeting, whether with a stenographer or with an audio or video recorder. Mr. Farnham noted that the Commission complies fully with the Commonwealth's Sunshine Act, which guarantees the public's right to witness the deliberations of governmental bodies.

Bill Finegan, a resident, stated that he was concerned about his property rights. He opined that the Commission would be taking his property without compensation. He stated that it would be causing a burden without benefit, which is a taking. He stated that this process it is pitting members of the community against one another. Mr. Farnham explained that the courts have routinely ruled that government regulation to preserve historic resources is a valid exercise of police power and that an economic burden caused by a preservation law is constitutional as long as the property retains reasonable economic value.

Khummit Hatshepsitu, a resident, stated that there are elderly people in the community who will be hurt by the designation. She stated a small group of "Nazis," the Overbrook Farms Club board, submitted the nomination. She stated that she wished she was approached by the nominators and the Historical Commission before this process began.

An unidentified audience member stated that the Commission should not designate the district, owing to the extent of the opposition.

V. Chapman-Smith, who owns a property in the proposed district, displayed a drawing and photograph of her house. She stated that her house has an extraordinary legacy. She provided a history of her house and stated that it was designed by architect Westray Ladd. She stated that changes have been made to her house over time to modernize it. She stated that sustainability, continuing to make the house livable and financially feasible, not historic preservation, is important. She claimed that the Historical Commission would prevent her from making needed repairs and upgrades to her house. For example, it would require her to install obsolete and expensive roofing. She opined that historic designation would provide an undue burden on the property owners. Mr. Farnham responded that the Historical Commission routinely approves replacement materials. For example, the staff recently approved an asphalt shingle roof for an Overbrook house. He contended that the Commission does not seek to freeze houses in their original states, but instead to monitor changes to ensure that the historic character is maintained.

Carol Hammerberg, a resident, stated that her house is beautiful and that she supports designation. She noted that she lives on the east side of the railroad tracks and asserted that not all residents on the east side are against historic designation, as has been claimed.

Kimya Johnson, a resident, asked about the differences between the classifications of contributing and significant. Mr. Farnham explained that most of the properties in the proposed historic district would be classified as contributing; a few, the most important architecturally and historically, would be classified as significant. He stated that, in general, the review processes for contributing and significant buildings are the same. However, the Commission may apply the review standards more strictly for significant properties. For example, one of the buildings proposed for a significant classification has a terra cotta roof, which is character defining. The Commission might require the owner to repair the terra cotta if possible on the significant building, but might allow the original roofing material on a contributing building to be replaced with asphalt shingles on a contributing building.

Mr. Mooney joined the Committee.

John Gallery of the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia commended the nomination. He stated that the Statement of Significance was one of the best he has read. He stated that it documented the history and people of the proposed district well. He stated that there was no question that the proposed district meets the seven Criteria for Designation cited in the nomination. He also commended the staff for proposing revised boundaries that eliminate some non-historic properties. He stated that the proposed boundaries are justified by the historical development. He asked the Committee to send a positive recommendation to the Commission. He explained to the audience that he has significant experience with the Commission and has found it reasonable and willing to allow for modern changes to historic properties. He stated that the Commission is authorized to review any project that required a building permit.

David Carroll, a resident, suggested that the Commission only designate the significant properties, not the entire area. He also suggested that the Commission amend its process to determine whether the community in question wants designation before it embarks down the designation path. He stated that the nomination was produced by the Overbrook Farms Club, not the entire community. Mr. Farnham stated that the Commission has followed the designation process set forth in the City's historic preservation ordinance. He explained that anyone may submit a nomination and that the Commission can designate properties with or without owner consent.

Stephanie Kindt, a resident, stated that designation would protect exactly what Ms. Chapman-Smith said was special about her house. She stated that designation would not stifle creativity, but instead encourage it. She noted that she recently renovated her kitchen. She said that she worked very hard to create a kitchen that met her contemporary needs, but also respected the historic character of her house. She contended that the creation of the historic district would likewise ensure that property owners respected the historic character while they updated their houses. She stated that the property owners should not have such a short term view of their neighborhood. They should instead think about 50 years in the future. The designation would help protect the neighborhood for coming generations.

Kevin Maurer, a resident and the president of the Overbrook Farms Club, stated that he moved to Overbrook Farms from the suburbs about 10 years ago. He stated that his house was also designed by architect Westray Ladd. He stated that designation is needed to protect the neighborhood because it is at a tipping point. Developers are coming into the neighborhood from outside, purchasing large properties, subdividing the lots, and building new houses that do not respect the historic character of the neighborhood. He stated that he has been approached by a developer who wanted to purchase his property for redevelopment. He stated that the

Commission would protect the neighborhood from inappropriate development and could also help improve properties that have been neglected. He noted that the Commission provides consultation free of charge for property owners who need assistance making decisions about how to maintain their homes. He stated that the district designation would be positive and bring added value to the neighborhood.

Pinchas Lando, a resident who is associated with the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia, which is located on the 6000-block of Drexel Road, stated that the school has been a stabilizing influence in the neighborhood for 56 years. He stated that the school has contributed to the safety of the neighborhood. He acknowledged that the school has constructed new buildings, but contended that the new buildings have added to, not detracted from, the neighborhood. He objected to the designation, stating that it would impede the work of the school.

Deborah Cianfrani, a resident, stated that there are 13 properties in the proposed district that are classified as significant. She opined that the geographic boundaries are too large and suggested that designation should only apply to those 13 properties.

Judy Gasieuski, a resident, stated that the neighborhood had been very excited about becoming a National Register Historic District, but they are not excited about becoming a locally designated district. She stated that the National Register designation was enough. She stated that the home owners work hard to maintain their homes. This designation would force them to do more maintenance, which would be a burden. Mr. Farnham explained the difference between the National Register of Historic Places and the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. He noted that in a residential neighborhood such as this one, the National Register designation is largely ceremonial because the regulatory authority is invoked only when there is a federal involvement and the federal government has little, if anything, involvement with market-rate, single-family housing.

Ed Fischer, a resident, stated that he had concerns that there would be an increase in cost to maintain the properties, which would encourage neglect, and that designation would push those with lower incomes out. Mr. Farnham disagreed that historic designation would necessarily increase maintenance costs to property owners. He explained the Commission has often saved owners money in the past through its consultations. He noted that there is no evidence in the literature that designation is a gentrifying force. He stated that a recent study of property values in historic districts indicated that property values in districts increase by 1% more per year than those of comparable properties outside districts. The study also showed that historic district designation stabilizes property values. Mr. Farnham stated that other studies have shown that people moving into Philadelphia from outside the region prefer to move into historic areas over other areas by about five to one. He also noted that studies have shown that historic areas in Philadelphia are more diverse. He stated that the designation would help this the property owners and the City protect this important asset.

Mary Allen, a resident, stated that Overbrook Farms is diverse and neighborly. She contended that the neighbors trust one another to treat their properties appropriately.

R.J. Krohn, a resident, stated that he submitted a petition with 113 signatures opposing designation. Mr. Farnham stated that the Commission certainly considers the opinions of property owners when reviewing nominations for designation, but he observed that the City's historic preservation ordinance directs the Commission to preserve historic resources for the benefit of all Philadelphians. He contended that the Commission must consider the best interest of Philadelphia as a whole and cannot simply poll the property owners to determine whether or

not a district should be created. He noted that the City regulates private property for myriad reasons to protect the public interest. He observed that individual property owners did not determine the zoning classifications of their properties. Mr. Krohn questioned whether the best interest of the city as a whole should trump the wishes of those impacted directly by the designation. He asked if the issue of new development in the neighborhood could be targeted with zoning. Mr. Schaaf explained that the historic preservation ordinance is part of the zoning code.

David Brigham, a resident, stated that he has a doctoral degree in Material Culture from the University of Pennsylvania and currently manages an historic building in Center City. He conceded that the Commission's jurisdiction over that property is appropriate. However, he contended that the Commission's assumption of jurisdiction over his house in Overbrook Farms would not be appropriate. He explained that his house in Overbrook Farms was designed by William Price for a middle class family. He contended that it is not historically significant. He asked the Committee to recommend that the designation be restricted to the significant properties only. He also questioned whether the Commission had the staff capacity to handle the increased work load of 497 properties. He stated that part of the reason why the nomination sat dormant for so long was due to the Commission's self-imposed moratorium on district designation owing to budget and staff restrictions. Mr. Farnham explained that the Commission is confident that it has the staff capacity to process the applications that Overbrook Farms would produce. He stated that the preservation ordinance dictates specific time limits for the Commission's reviews. The Commission must act on every application within 60 days or the application is automatically approved. Mr. Farnham noted however, that the Commission approves the vast majority of applications very quickly. The Rules & Regulations requires the Commission's staff to conclude staff-level reviews within five business days, but the staff usually concludes them within minutes of the submission. He explained that statistics show that the staff approves about 90% of all applications to the Commission, usually within minutes but always within 5 business days. The other 10% are reviewed by the Commission itself at its monthly meetings. The time from application submission to decision is about 30 days. Mr. Farnham contended that the average Overbrook Farms homeowner would have little interaction with the Commission. He stated that the Commission processes 1300 to 1500 applications a year, or about one application for every 10 buildings, if condominium units are factored out of the equation. He stated that commercial, office, and very large residential buildings produce many more applications than single-family residences. Estimating very conservatively, the average Overbrook Farms homeowner would need to submit one application every 10 years and there would be a 90% chance that that application would be approved by the staff upon submission or within five business days. He concluded that the impact to the average homeowner would be very small.

Atif Ahmad, a resident, asked about the review process. He stated, for example, that he might like to install central air conditioning. Mr. Farnham explained the review process. He reported that the Commission routinely approves air conditioning units. He stated that, typically, the Commission's staff works with the applicant to find an exterior location for the condensing unit that is inconspicuous from the public right-of-way. The Commission might not approve a condenser to be located on the front lawn, but would certainly approve one for the side or rear. He also noted that all enforcement is handled through the Department of Licenses & Inspections.

Melanie Roach, a resident, stated that she supported the designation as it will protect the neighborhood from demolition and inappropriate uses. Mr. Farnham clarified that the Commission does not regulate use, but is charged with protecting the historic streetscape. He

explained that the Commission cannot require an owner to undertake work, but reviews within the scope of work defined by the owner. He stated that the Commission can file a suit in court asking a judge to compel a property owner to repair his property if it has been severely neglected.

Ms. Johnson, who spoke earlier, stated that every property owner needs to educate herself on her rights and obligations under the preservation ordinance. She stated that there appears to be a significant amount of misinformation flowing in the neighborhood. She observed that people do not want their houses to be regulated yet they also do not want the neighborhood to decay. She stated the each home is not an island, but is dependent on its neighbors.

Robert Gordon, a resident, suggested that the decision has already been made regarding designation. He asked what the Commission would do if 70% of the property owners oppose designation. Mr. Dilworth stated that the Commission will consider the impacts of designation on both the public and private property owners before making a decision. He stated that Commission has an obligation to weigh both. Mr. Schaaf added that the Committee and Commission have different purviews. The Committee is charged with reviewing the technical merits of the nomination. The Commission is charged with enacting sound preservation policy for the city.

A woman in the audience asked why properties owned by St. Joseph's University had not been included in the nomination. Mr. Farnham explained that nomination proposes the designation of the suburban development created by Wendell & Smith and the follow-on company, Wendell & Wright. He stated that none of the St. Joseph's property referred to by the woman are located within that historic development.

Phil Handel stated that the nomination was instigated by the board of the Overbrook Farms Club and not the community as a whole. He stated that the community chose not to pursue local designation when the district was placed on the National Register. He stated that this process is beginning to break up the community.

A member of the audience asked about the circumstances in which a designated building could be demolished. Mr. Farnham explained that the Commission may approve the demolition of a designated by only if it finds that the demolition is necessary in the public interest, for example to allow for the construction of a school, or if it finds that the building cannot be reasonably or feasibly reused. He added that the Department of Licenses & Inspections may demolish a building without the Commission's review if that building poses an imminent danger to the public.

A member of the audience asked about financial assistance for owners of historically designated properties. Mr. Farnham stated that the City has a program, called the Historic Home Repair Program and administered by the Preservation Alliance, to provide assistance to low and moderate-income owners of historically designated buildings. He stated that the Historic Home Repair Program funds are currently committed, but that he hopes that the City will put new funds into this program. He noted that at least one house in Overbrook Farms was restored under this program.

Donald Selkow, a resident, stated that he owned and resided in a historically-designated house in Center City before moving to Overbrook Farms. He reported that he always had very positive experiences with the Historical Commission. He stated that it added value to his property. He informed the audience that the Commission could not require property owners to restore their

homes unilaterally, but only reviews proposals submitted by property owners. He stated that Overbrook Farms is a significant neighborhood worth preserving.

Alfred Outlaw, a resident, stated that he was against designation and that it would add another level of bureaucracy to the running of her household. He stated that the community is able to police itself.

Adjoa Love-Dorsey, a resident, stated that she loves the diversity of the neighborhood and wants it preserved. She stated that the community is unique and different and should be protected. She stated that she loves Overbrook Farms and supports the historic designation.

Councilman Curtis Jones Jr., the district councilperson for the area, stated that he would ask the Historical Commission to postpone its vote on the nomination to allow him to work with the Commission to better educate his constituents about the implications of designation. He stated that the residents need more time to understand the proposed designation and how it would impact them. He stated that he would send a formal request in writing to the Commission for its consideration at its meeting next Friday. He stated the Overbrook Farms is considered one of the best small towns in the country. Mr. Farnham thanked the Councilman for attending the meeting and offered to assist him in any way he could. Mr. Dilworth explained that the Committee does not have the power postpone the review of the nomination but stated that the staff would forward the Councilman's request to the Commission. Mr. Gallery stated that the Preservation Alliance supports the Councilman's request.

Mr. Dilworth polled the audience to determine whether anyone else wanted to speak. No one expressed an interest in offering additional comments at this time. He directed the staff to move on to the presentation regarding the technical merits of the nomination. Mr. Farnham presented the boundaries of the proposed district to the Committee using a Powerpoint presentation with numerous aerial photographs of the boundary conditions. After reviewing the boundaries, the Committee concluded that it support the boundaries as defined in the nomination.

Mr. Farnham displayed a series of Powerpoint slides related to the proposed classifications of properties in the proposed historic district and asked the Committee to opine on the appropriateness of the proposals. He stated that there are nine apartment buildings in the proposed district, all with proposed classifications of contributing. He stated that the first one was constructed in 1910 and the last in 1929. He stated that only the 1910 apartment building is mentioned in the Statement of Significance. Mr. Cohen suggested that the staff add a paragraph or section on apartment buildings to the Statement of Significance. He contended that they contribute to the history of the proposed district and were constructed within the proposed district owing to its proximity to the commuter train station. The Committee members agreed that the apartment buildings warranted classifications of contributing owing to the roles in the history of the neighborhood within the period of significance. Mr. Maurer stated that the apartment buildings were a part of Wendell and Smith original plans for the area.

Mr. Gallery asked the Committee to comment on three properties with a proposed classification of non-contributing at the corner of 58<sup>th</sup> Street and Woodbine Avenue. He stated that they are at the edge of the boundary and could easily be cut out of the district. Mr. Cohen observed that those properties do respect the building set back line and have front lawns like their neighbors. He contended that the three buildings should remain within the district. The Commission would not protect historic fabric at the buildings, but could ensure that any new construction at the sites respected the character of the historic district.

Mr. Farnham presented other proposed classifications to the Committee. He noted that, owing to data entry errors, two properties, 6000 Overbrook Avenue and 5898 Woodbine Avenue, had been misclassified as non-contributing. He asked the Committee to recommend that the Commission classify these properties as contributing. The Committee members agreed that these two properties should be classified as contributing.

Mr. Farnham presented two other properties whose proposed classification had been questioned. He stated that the proposed classification for 2095-97 N. 63<sup>rd</sup> street is contributing. He noted that the building, which is commercial, not residential, has been greatly altered. The Committee agreed that this property should be classified as non-contributing. Mr. Farnham stated that the property at 6300 Woodbine Avenue is proposed to be classified as non-contributing. He described the property as triangular park that has been open space since the creation of the development. Mr. Schaaf pointed out that there is a historic schist wall on the property. The Committee agreed that the property should be classified as contributing.

Mr. Farnham stated that the nomination contends that the Overbrook Farms Historic District satisfies seven Criteria for Designation (a, c, d, e, f, h, and j). Mr. Mooney suggested that criterion i should be added because the district has the potential to yield archaeological resources. Mr. Farnham asked if i should be included for prehistoric and/or historic resources. He noted that the period of significance is proposed as 1850 to 1929. He observed that it would not include earlier or later resources. Mr. Mooney stated that he believes that prehistoric and historic archaeological resources are extant in the proposed district. He stated that the grading of the development essentially sealed in the prehistoric resources along the stream valleys. He stated that there is also potential for resources from the 1890s that relate to the steam plant, steam and water conduits, and other early infrastructure. Mr. Farnham clarified for the audience that, should criterion i be added to the nomination, it is very unlikely that the Commission would require archaeological investigation at residential properties. Mr. Mooney agreed. Mr. Mooney stated that he was concerned that future large developments could disturb the resources. Mr. Dilworth opined that criterion i should only be included in a nomination where there is a significant likelihood of important archaeological resources. Mooney stated that the steam plant and electric plant are unique to this particular development. Mr. Schaaf stated that criterion i could be checked on all nominations. He stated that he thought the archaeological resources are important but less important than the other criteria already cited. Mr. Cohen felt that there was no need to include criterion i. Mr. Laverty added that the site of the steam plant is not within the boundaries of the proposed district.

Mr. Laverty lauded the Statement of Significance, exclaiming that the proposed district is very thoroughly documented. He stated that he was also impressed with the inventory and the documentation provided in it. He commended the staff. He suggested that the captions for the illustrations should provide source information.

Mr. Cohen stated that was stunned by the national prominence of many of the original residents. He asserted that the Statement of Significance tells us precisely why this district must be designated and preserved.

**COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION:** Mr. Dilworth moved to recommend that the Overbrook Farms Historic District satisfies Criteria for Designation (a, c, d, e, f, h, and j) and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places with the following revisions to the nomination: a section on the history of the apartment buildings and the sources of the illustrations should be added the Statement of Significance; and 6300 Woodbine Avenue, 6000 Overbrook Avenue, and 5898 Woodbine Avenue are classified as

contributing and 2095-97 N. 63<sup>rd</sup> street is classified as non-contributing. Mr. Schaaf seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Dilworth moved to adjourn at 12:30 p.m. Mr. Cohen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

DRAFT