

**ADDRESS: 3615-35 CHESTNUT ST**

Name of Resource: Ralston House

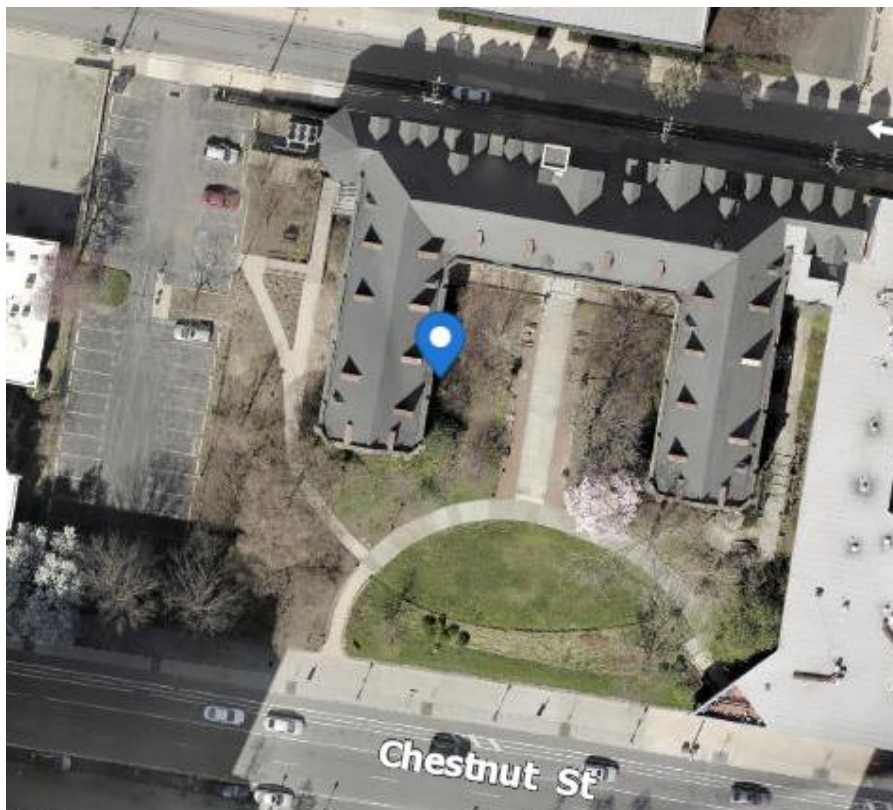
Proposed Action: Amend boundary

Property Owner: Ralston House

Applicant: Michael Phillips, Esq., Klehr Harrison

Staff Contact: Jon Farnham, [jon.farnham@phila.gov](mailto:jon.farnham@phila.gov)

**OVERVIEW:** This application proposes to amend the boundary of the designation of Ralston House at 3615-35 Chestnut Street, removing the area that includes the surface parking lot at the western edge of the site. The property includes a U-shaped historic building with frontages on Chestnut and Ludlow Streets, a lawn between the building and Chestnut Street, and a parking lot at the west accessed from Ludlow. The site plan submitted by the applicant proposes the removal of an 84 foot wide piece of land running from Chestnut Street to Ludlow Street. Most of the land proposed for removal was not historically associated with the designated property and some it is not currently designated.



Aerial view of the property, taken in 2020.

The Historical Commission designated the Ralston Center on 23 February 1971. The section of the meeting minutes showing the designation is included below; the minutes list the property as "3615 Chestnut Street, Indigent Widows and Singlewomen's Home."

Staff Recommendations for Certification of Buildings, Dr. Tinkcom, Historian

S. 41st Street, Hamilton Terrace between Woodland & Baltimore Avenues  
3615 Chestnut Street, Indigent Widows & Singlewomen's Home  
Horse watering troughs at 9th & Clinton; 3d & Bainbridge; and on the south  
side of Washington Square, opposite Hopkinson House  
15th & Walnut Street, the NE corner, formerly the Drexel Building

These recommendations were unanimously approved.

This is a detailed map of a city block, likely in New York City, showing streets and lot numbers. The map is oriented with Lexington Street at the top and Chestnut Street at the bottom. The lot numbers are arranged in a grid pattern. A large lot, labeled '150' and '155', is highlighted in blue. The map also shows various street names and lot numbers, including '139', '142', '143', '144', '145', '146', '147', '148', '149', '150', '151', '152', '153', '154', '155', '156', '157', '158', '159', '160', '161', '162', '163', '164', '165', '166', '167', '168', '169', '170', '171', '172', '173', '174', '175', '176', '177', '178', '179', '180', '181', '182', '183', '184', '185', '186', '187', '188', '189', '190', '191', '192', '193', '194', '195', '196', '197', '198', '199', '200'. The map includes a grid system with letters A through Z along the top and bottom edges. The lot numbers are arranged in a grid pattern, with '150' and '155' being the central focus. The map also shows various street names and lot numbers, including '139', '142', '143', '144', '145', '146', '147', '148', '149', '150', '151', '152', '153', '154', '155', '156', '157', '158', '159', '160', '161', '162', '163', '164', '165', '166', '167', '168', '169', '170', '171', '172', '173', '174', '175', '176', '177', '178', '179', '180', '181', '182', '183', '184', '185', '186', '187', '188', '189', '190', '191', '192', '193', '194', '195', '196', '197', '198', '199', '200'. The map includes a grid system with letters A through Z along the top and bottom edges.

A historical map of the Old Ladies Home area in Washington, D.C. The map shows the 'OLD LADIES HOME' in a large pink building. To its left is the 'FIRE DEPT.' building. To its right is a building labeled 'J. H. Harrington THE TRACY'. The map includes street names like '84.9' and '80', and a blue location pin is placed on the Old Ladies Home building.

In 1955, Ralston House purchased the property with the twin house at 3635 Chestnut Street, parcel 017S07-0020, and incorporated it into the larger lot. On 18 April 1990, the Historical Commission reviewed a demolition permit application for the house and determined that the house at 3635 Chestnut Street was not designated and it therefore had no jurisdiction over it. A section of the 18 April 1990 meeting minutes is included below. The house was subsequently demolished. It is clear from the 1990 decision that the Historical Commission determined that it did not have jurisdiction over what was 3635 Chestnut Street, parcel 017S07-0020, which corresponds to the southern three-fourths of the surface parking lot. Moreover, the northern section of the surface parking lot was historically unrelated to the Ralston House property. The northern section of the parking lot was the rears of three separate properties, where a fire station and other buildings stood facing 37th Street. It is unclear when Ralston House acquired the rears of the lots facing 37th Street, but it is clear that that northern section of the parking lot is not currently considered part of the 3615-35 Chestnut Street tax parcel and therefore is not considered designated at this time.

Tabled

**3635 Chestnut Street:** The Committee tabled an application to demolish the building situated at 3635 Chestnut Street. The Committee tabled this application because of uncertainty concerning the extent of the property included in the historic designation of the Ralston House. Subsequent to the meeting of the Architectural Committee, further staff review and new information provided by the applicants confirmed that this building was not included in the designation of the Ralston House. The Commission acknowledged that it had no jurisdiction over this property.

In addition to the lot line changes at the west, the lot lines at the east, at the opposite end of the property, were redrawn in 1986, removing most of 017S07-0014 and 0015 from the eastern edge of the Ralston House property. The new building that was constructed to the east was not reviewed by the Historical Commission.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Approval of the proposed amendment to the boundary of the designation of 3615-35 Chestnut Street, provided that an adequate buffer is maintained between the historic building and new property line at the west, because almost all of the land to be excluded from the designation was not historically associated with Ralston House, is currently used as a surface parking lot, and has no known historical significance.





Looking south from Ludlow Street toward the western end of the lot at 3615-35 Chestnut Street.



Looking north from Chestnut Street toward the western end of the lot at 3615-35 Chestnut Street.



**KLEHR HARRISON  
HARVEY BRANZBURG<sup>LLP</sup>**

Michael V. Phillips, Esquire  
Direct Dial: (215) 569-2499  
Email: mphilips@klehr.com

1835 Market Street, Suite 1400  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
www.klehr.com

July 13, 2021

**VIA EMAIL ONLY**

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Philadelphia Historical Commission  
Jon.Farnham@phila.gov

**Re: Ralston House – 3615-35 Chestnut Street  
REQUEST TO AMEND BOUNDARIES**

Dear Dr. Farnham:

This firm represents Ralston Center, the owner of real property located at 3615-35 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA (the “Property”). On behalf of Ralston Center, and in accordance with Section 14-1004(5) of the Philadelphia Code and Section 5.14 of the Philadelphia Historical Commission Rules and Regulations, I am writing to respectfully request to amend the boundary of the Property’s historic designation. The Property presently consists of a U-shaped historic building with frontages on Chestnut and Ludlow Streets (the “Building”), a lawn between the Building and Chestnut Street and a surface parking lot to the west of the Building with access via Ludlow Street. The Building was designated historic by the Historical Commission on February 23, 1971.<sup>1</sup>

Ralston Center hereby requests an amendment to the Property’s historic boundaries to remove the unimproved land to the west of the Building from the Property’s designation, as reflected in the enclosed Draft Subdivision Plan dated July 12, 2021. Specifically, the area to be excluded from the Property’s historic designation consists of an approximately eighty-four foot (84’) wide rectangular area to the west of the Building and extending along the full depth of the Property (the “Excluded Land”).<sup>2</sup> The proposed Excluded Land presently consists of unimproved land and a surface parking lot.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the City’s historic ordinance in effect at the time of the designation, the Historical Commission’s jurisdiction was limited to “historic buildings.”

<sup>2</sup> Prior to the scheduled hearing before the full Historical Commission, Ralston Center will submit an updated draft subdivision plan that more specifically sets forth the dimensions of the proposed amended boundary lines.

In the past, the Historic Commission has acknowledged that it lacks jurisdiction over at least a portion of the Excluded Land. Specifically, on April 18, 1990, the Commission determined that it lacked jurisdiction to review and consider a demolition permit application for a house located on the southern portion of the Excluded Land (known as 3635 Chestnut Street). Moreover, the northern portion of the Excluded Land was historically the rear portion of a separate property that fronted the former S. 37<sup>th</sup> Street. The proposed Excluded Land has no historical significance, is not associated with the Building and is currently used as a surface parking lot. An amendment of the boundary that removes the Excluded Land will have no effect on the existing historic resource or the protections afforded to the Building by virtue of its inclusion on the City's Register of Historic Places.

Lastly, be advised that this request to amend is being submitted without waiver of Ralston Center's position that the 1971 historic designation of the Ralston House applied only to the Building, as opposed to the entire Property.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of the foregoing. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or require additional information.

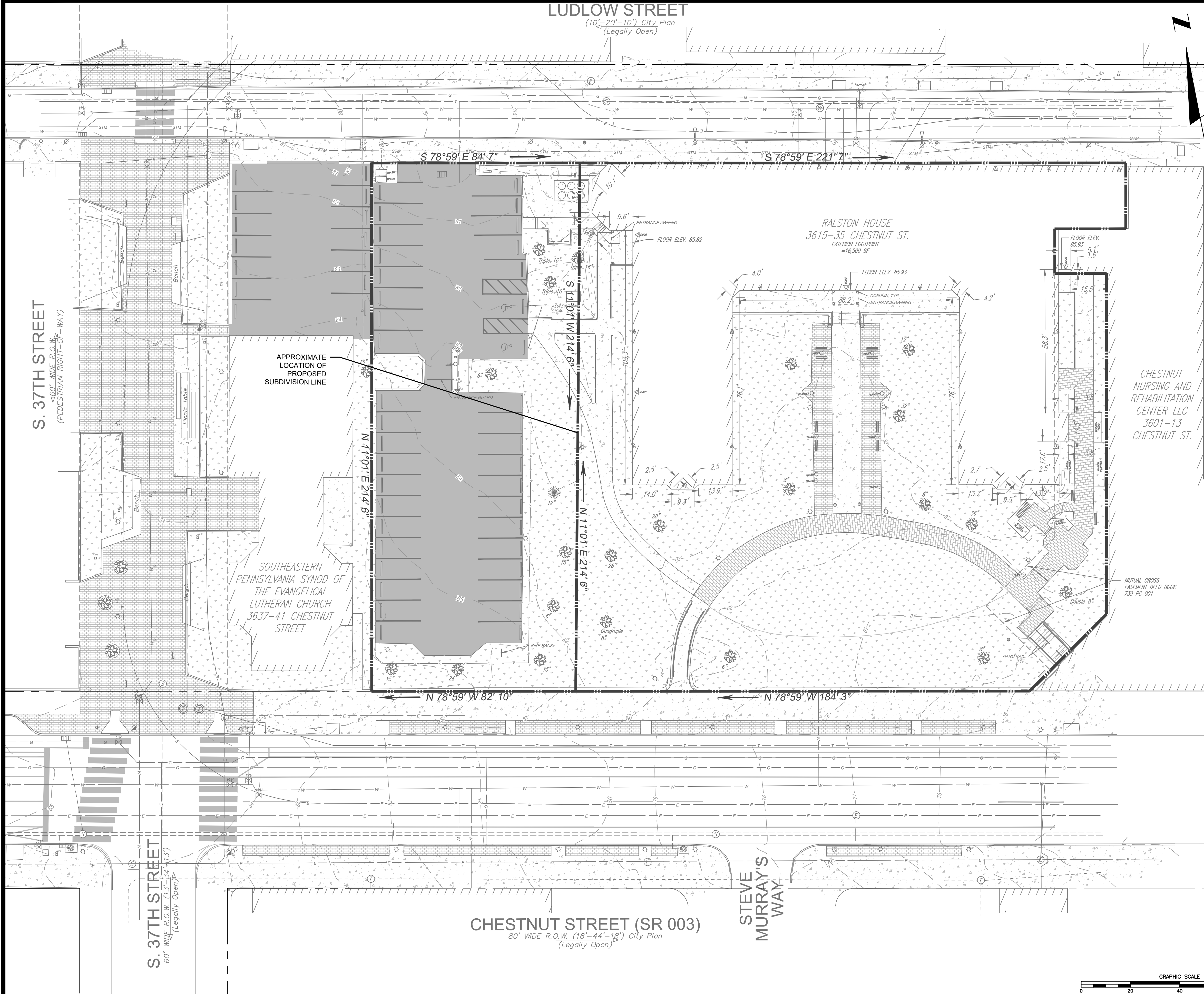
Respectfully yours,

*Michael V. Phillips*

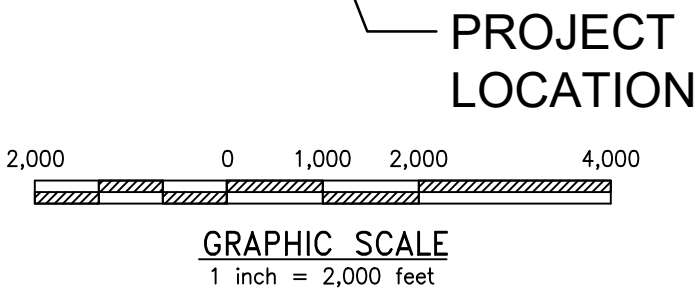
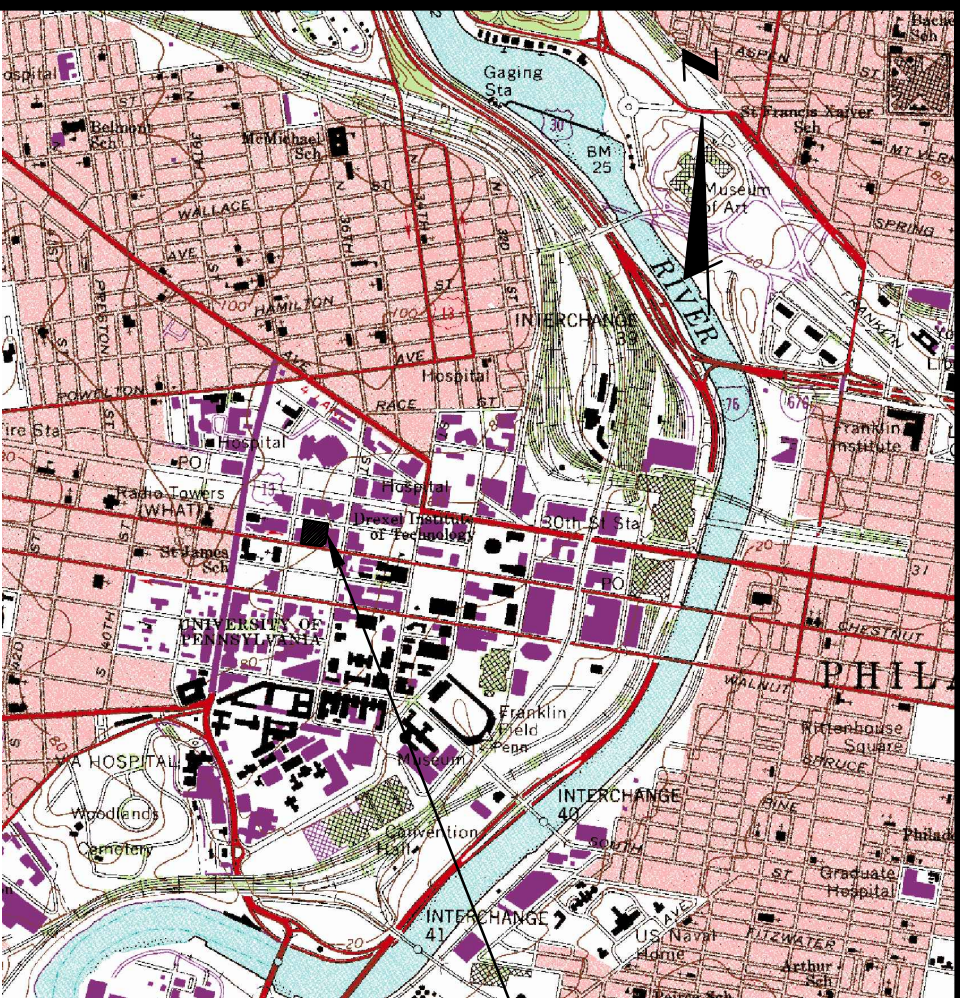
Michael V. Phillips

Enclosure





- EXISTING LEGEND**
- PROPERTY LINE
  - EASEMENT LINE
  - CURB LINE
  - CITY PLAN CURB LINE
  - BUILDING LINE
  - BUILDING OVERHANG
  - CONTOUR
  - SPOT ELEVATION
  - STORM INLET
  - TRENCH DRAIN
  - SEWER MANHOLE
  - WATER VALVE
  - FIRE HYDRANT
  - WATER MANHOLE
  - WATER METER
  - STREET LIGHT
  - UTILITY POLE
  - LAMP POST
  - ELECTRIC MANHOLE
  - ELECTRIC BOX
  - TELEPHONE MANHOLE
  - GAS VALVE
  - GAS MANHOLE
  - DOWN SPOUT
  - STORM SEWER
  - SANITARY SEWER
  - WATER LINE
  - GAS LINE
  - ELECTRIC LINE
  - TELEPHONE LINE
  - STEAM LINE
  - OVERHEAD LINE
  - FENCE
  - SIGN
  - BOLLARD
  - HANDICAPPED PARKING
  - BENCH
  - TABLE
  - TRASH RECEPTACLE
  - EXISTING TREE



- EXISTING LEGEND**
- ASPHALT
  - CONCRETE
  - GRASS
  - STONE
  - GRAVEL PATIO
  - WALL

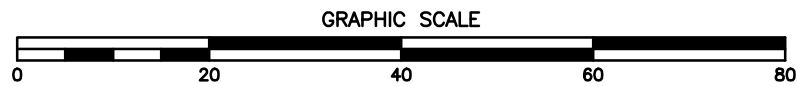
**EXISTING PROPERTY NOTES**

- EXISTING SITE INFORMATION:
    - SITE ADDRESS: 3615-35 CHESTNUT STREET  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19104-2612  
OPA# 773685500
    - OWNER: RALSTON HOUSE - A PENNSYLVANIA NON-PROFIT CORPORATION
    - ZONED: CMX-4-CENTER CITY COMMERCIAL MIXED-USE
    - WATERSHED: LOWER SCHUYLKILL RIVER
    - PARCEL AREA: 63,333± SQ. FT.
  - ACCORDING TO THE FLOOD INSURANCE MAPS FOR THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA PREPARED BY THE NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM, THE PROJECT FALLS WITHIN THE X-ZONE FLOOD ZONE AS SHOWN ON MAP NUMBER 4207570179G, REVISED DATE 01/17/2007.
  - THE EXISTING TOPOGRAPHY IS BASED ON A SURVEY CONDUCTED IN THE FIELD BY URBAN ENGINEERS, INC. ON DATE, 08/21/2019
  - VERTICAL DATUM: CITY OF PHILADELPHIA DATUM, TAKEN FROM THE TOP OF CURB ELEVATIONS BASED ON CITY PLAN NO. 43.
  - THE LOCATIONS OF UNDERGROUND UTILITIES ARE APPROXIMATE AND ARE BASED ON UTILITY PLANS OBTAINED THROUGH THE PA ONE CALL SERIAL NUMBER 20192331950, DATED 08/21/2019.
  - DEED REFERENCES:

PROPERTY LINES FOR RALSTON HOUSE PROPERTY DRAWN PER DEED F.H.S. 734, PAGE 350 DATED NOVEMBER 5TH, 1986.

EASEMENT ON RALSTON HOUSE PROPERTY DRAWN PER DEED F.H.S. 739, PAGE 001.
  - PARKING SPACE: 37 PARKING SPACES AND 2 ADA PARKING SPACES IN 3615-35 CHESTNUT ST.
  - ATTENTION IS CALLED TO THE ZONING REQUIREMENTS IN THE PHILADELPHIA CODE AS AMENDED (CURRENT THROUGH MAY 21, 2018)
- ZONE OF PROPERTY: CMX-4 (CENTER CITY COMMERCIAL MIXED-USE)
- DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS (TABLE 14-701-3):
- MINIMUM DISTRICT AREA: NONE
  - MINIMUM STREET FRONTAGE: NONE
  - MINIMUM LOT AREA: NONE
  - MAXIMUM OCCUPIED AREA: BUILDING LESS THAN OR EQUAL TO 5 STORIES WITH 1 OR MORE DWELLING UNITS: 90% OF LOT; OTHERS, 100% OF LOT.
  - MINIMUM FRONT YARD DEPTH: NONE
  - MINIMUM SIDE YARD WIDTH: IF USED: BUILDINGS LESS THAN OR EQUAL TO 4 STORIES WITH 3 OR FEWER DWELLING UNITS: 5 FEET; OTHERS, 8 FEET.
  - MINIMUM REAR YARD DEPTH/AREA: NONE
  - MAXIMUM HEIGHT: NONE
  - MINIMUM CORNICE HEIGHT: NONE
  - MAXIMUM FLOOR AREA: 500% OF LOT AREA.

- STREET WIDTHS, DEED DISTANCES AND PARCEL AREA ARE IN DISTRICT SURVEY UNITS, BUILDING DIMENSIONS AND AREA ARE IN U.S. SURVEY FEET.



REV	BY	DATE	DESCRIPTION

**URBAN ENGINEERS, INC.**  
530 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
(215) 922-8080 Fax (215) 922-8082

LOCATION PHILADELPHIA, PA.

TITLE  
RALSTON HOUSE AT UNIVERSITY CITY  
SUBDIVISION DRAFT

DWN LKJ/TNB PROJ # 2019280216.000  
CHK JAB DATE JULY 12, 2021

DRAWING NUMBER  
SD-01