

3627 Spring Garden Street
Application for Legalization of Facade
Alterations

Public Comment



PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

for greater philadelphia

November 16, 2023

Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: 3627 Spring Garden Street

Dear Members of the Historical Commission,

I am writing to recommend that the Historical Commission deny the legalization of exterior work at 3627 Spring Garden Street based on the "Supplement for the November meeting of the Architectural Committee" submitted by the applicant to the Commission on November 7, 2023. We agree with the staff recommendation that the alterations and replacements do not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines. While we appreciate the property owner's willingness to correct the work, we believe the revised plans remain seriously insufficient.

This property is located in the Gardiner-Poth Historic District in the Mantua section of West Philadelphia. The Gardiner-Poth Historic District is a row of ten (formerly eleven) attached Victorian Eclectic houses, built in late 1894 by the speculative developer Benjamin D. Gardiner and subsequently sold to the beer baron Frederick Poth. The row is a prominent example of Flemish Renaissance Revival architecture, designed by H.E. Flower, a prolific and understudied figure in Philadelphia architectural history.

The changes to the mansard roof and front shed dormer, including the removal of ornamental tin and terra cotta shingles and replacement with new asphalt shingles, significantly alter the façade. The rebuilding of the roof with a different shape and different materials neither preserves the material nor style of the historic structure. The removal of molding below the replaced windows and the replacement of the Dutch front door remove distinctive features of the façade.

We respectfully recommend the Commission deny the legalization of façade alterations at 3627 Spring Garden Street made without permits or the Historical Commission's approval.

Sincerely,

Paul Steinke
Executive Director

Theodore Maust

From: Helma Weeks <helmaweeks@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 16, 2023 3:43 PM
To: preservation
Subject: 3627 Spring Garden Street

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November 16, 2023

Via email to: preservation@phila.gov

To: The Architectural Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission
From: Helma Weeks, Historic Preservation Committee, Powelton Village Civic Association

Re: 3627 Spring Garden Street

Our committee feels very strongly that the request to legalize the alterations made to 3627 Spring Garden Street should be denied and that the owner be made to remediate the alterations to create close semblance of the original appearance.

The cornice on the bay should be restored and the top of the roof should be extended to recreate the original height. The molding below the windows should be put back to restore the character of the facade. Cornice and molding provide definition and character as the sun moves and creates distinct shadows. The front door opening should be restored to the original dimensions and the transom should be put back. A door closely resembling the original door should be created and installed. There is precedent in Powelton for requiring that doors be replaced with doors resembling the original ones: 3433-3439 Lancaster Avenue, doors were removed and then stolen; the developer had to have replacement doors made that reflected the period - he did.

It seems that developers/investors frequently disregard the Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and the Guidelines and that it then is very hard to enforce these. Is there a way to create a hefty fine structure for these violations? Something has to be done to enforce the standards, otherwise people will keep ignoring them and your committee will have to try to undo the damage.

Theodore Maust

From: rabanth@aol.com
Sent: Friday, November 17, 2023 6:05 AM
To: preservation
Subject: 3627 Spring Garden Street

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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I am writing to support the staff recommendation of denial for the illegal alterations at 3627 Spring Garden Street.

The applicant should hire a competent window company such as Emerald windows that can do proper shop drawings of the correct windows and doors. The windows need to follow the original 1/3 and 2/3 cottage style at the 2nd floor.

The cornice elements that have been removed should be correctly drawn and reconstructed. Wood is probably the cheapest material for this. In the past the Commission has worked with many other owners in this district to get accurate replacement parts including custom doors.

There should be no gift of cheaper repairs because someone did not monitor their contractors. The owner is ultimately responsible for getting the permits.

Randal Baron

Dear Dr. Farnham, Staff and Members of the Historical Commission,

As a near neighbor of the Gardiner-Poth Historic District, I was delighted to see the University City Historical Society nominate this spectacular and nearly-intact row in early 2020. At the time of its nomination, save for the loss of 3611 Spring Garden Street, the row was remarkably intact, both inside and out and served as a wonderful example of the rich ornamental detailing available to middle-class Philadelphians at the turn of the 20th Century.

I was, alongside with several of our neighbors in Mantua, grateful for the work of the University City Historical Society and relieved to see the row formally designated. We thought that designation would provide some reassurance against the wholesale obliteration of historic fabric that has occurred elsewhere in our neighborhood. That is why, over the past several years, it has been so distressing to see the houses in the Gardiner-Poth Historic District stripped of their historic character. This, despite the Commission's subsequent recognition of these same houses as *Significant* in the subsequent Powelton Village Historic District in 2022.

I would strongly urge the Applicant to withdraw the present application and, if they do not, that it be rejected by the Architectural Committee and Historical Commission. The application does not provide enough information, either in the form of architectural plans, material samples, or even basic sketches to confirm whether the proposed changes would properly restore 3627 Spring Garden Street. What they have chosen to include is seriously deficient. The Applicant's examples only serve to highlight both the inappropriateness of the effort and the wider flouting of the Historical Commission's regulatory power.

The Applicant's choice of models for restoration are poorly chosen. Both 3625 and 3621 Spring Garden Street had already been altered at the time of notice. 3625 Spring Garden Street had already had its terra cotta shingles, decorative cornice, and front door removed when notice was sent. Until they were removed by the Applicant, 3627 Spring Garden Street retained each of those character defining features. As for 3615 Spring Garden Street, its present condition is the result of similar unpermitted alterations.¹

The Historical Commission has recognized the significance of 3627 Spring Garden Street in two separate historic districts. Given the property's importance, I hope that the Applicant will take the opportunity to reconsider its application and properly restore the property's historic character. If they do not, I would ask the Architectural Committee and Historical Commission to reject the present application.

Sincerely,
Noah Yoder

¹ At the time of notice, seven of the ten houses in the Gardiner-Poth Historic retained those doors: 3613, 3615, 3617, 3619, 3627, 3629, 3631 Spring Garden. Since notice was first sent, the doors at 3613, 3615, 3625 (the subject property) and 3631 Spring Garden have all been replaced, without the appropriate permits, as part of renovations or conversions into student housing. These doors are (and were) "Dutch" style doors of solid and repairable American Chestnut with their original hardware including ornate metalwork strap-hinges.