

# Public comment on the Spruce Hill Historic District

7/26/23

5021 Upland Street  
Philadelphia PA 19143

Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street  
Philadelphia PA 19102

Dear Ms Fadullon or the appropriate person,

I am writing to support your Commission on behalf of the Spruce Hill neighborhood and its request for historical designation. My interest is that I live near there and want to continue benefiting from its beauty and uniqueness.

I have several points that I would appreciate your response to.

1 History includes narratives of local residents, cultural connections, architecture, parks, and physical character. Giving Spruce Hill a historic designation would help preserve all of this.

2 Giving Spruce Hill a historic designation also has several environmental benefits. There are currently mature shade trees that keep the air cooler and cleaner than it would be if these trees were destroyed to put up apartment buildings. In addition, the neighborhood already has a healthy level of density. One negative consequence of increasing that density would be additional stress on the sewers. Construction projects also cause pollution and contribute to global warming. A historic designation would keep the neighborhood cooler and less toxic.

3 Spruce Hill has been an ethnically and economically diverse neighborhood, made up of long-term homeowners and renters. Some of the homes provide generational wealth, especially for Black families. Giving the Spruce Hill neighborhood a historical designation would promote affordability by stabilizing property values. On the other hand, new apartments that have already gone up in the neighborhood have not brought the costs of rent down, so they do not benefit lower-income people. Finally, some people have argued that home maintenance costs are prohibitive for lower-income homeowners when their neighborhoods receive a historic designation. However, there is financial support from various resources that help keep them in their homes so that they can continue to enjoy living in a beautiful neighborhood. Therefore, I don't think a historical designation will lead to displacement of long-term residents.

I hope you will grant Spruce Hill the historical designation it deserves and I eagerly await your response.

Sherri Michalovic  
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*Sherri Michalovic*



# PRESERVATION ALLIANCE

*for greater philadelphia*

February 16, 2024

Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Members of the Historical Commission,

I am writing to support the Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant nomination. The nomination is the first of four that will, after many years, recognize the significance of the West Philadelphia neighborhood. The nomination clearly demonstrates that the district meets criteria A, C, D, E, and J.

These efforts began in 1987 when the Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, a predecessor to the Alliance, developed a nomination to designate a Spruce Hill historic district to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. An updated nomination was completed in 2002, but it, too, stalled.

Fortunately, the significance of the proposed Spruce Hill Historic District was recognized in 1997 when the West Philadelphia Streetcar Suburb Historic District, which encompasses the proposed district boundaries, was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Almost three decades later, however, Spruce Hill remains worryingly unprotected in an environment of unrelenting real estate development pressure.

Spruce Hill is said to have the largest collection of Victorian-era residential architecture of any American city. Yet most of it is not regulated and is therefore subject to demolition or inappropriate alteration. Since the preceding Spruce Hill historic district nomination was written in 2002, a handful of historic districts were enacted nearby, such as Drexel-Govett, 420 Row (420-434 S. 42nd Street), 4208-30 Chester Avenue, Chester Regent, Satterlee Heights, and Powelton Village. But the vast majority of Spruce Hill remains largely unregulated and unprotected.

The Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant, is a fitting addition to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. We applaud the Spruce Hill Community Association, University City Historical Society, and their partners for moving this nomination forward.

Sincerely,

Paul Steinke, Executive Director