

# 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  
sherrigastman@gmail.com

*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



March 28th, 2024

Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Members of the Historical Commission,

We are writing to support the Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant nomination. As representatives of the Steering Committee for the Young Friends of the Preservation Alliance (YFPA), we support the efforts of the Spruce Hill Community Association, the University City Historical Society, and their partners for documentation and responsible advocacy efforts. The nomination makes an overwhelmingly compelling case for the historical significance of this neighborhood in the period of significance between 1850-1930. The Spruce Hill neighborhood is by most counts the largest collection of Victorian architecture in the United States. Additionally:

YFPA rejects the caricature of preservation advocacy as only a cause for older people and property owners. Young people and renters care about historic neighborhoods. In most cases, we will live in these neighborhoods longer than the older people! Developers in the student housing market and landlords do not represent the best interests of young people, either college students or those who make Philadelphia a vibrant place today. Developers and landlords represent themselves and their investors.

YFPA rejects the false dichotomy between preservation and development, as well as the developer's misguided and self-interested rhetoric of "organic growth." Nobody is claiming that the neighborhood shouldn't change. A historic district can serve as an effective tool of preservation planning. In a neighborhood facing intense development pressures, it can help to coordinate the interests of different community stakeholders and ensure that future growth is sustainable and equitable. Current academic research suggests that the relationship between historic districting and the supply of affordable housing is site- and context-specific. Within a historic district, there is still opportunity to create affordable housing for all age groups in Spruce Hill. Hopefully, developers working in accordance with the district regulations that the Historical Commission helps to create will recognize the immense opportunity to supply housing that is both affordable and rich in historical character.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Bates, Patrick Bayer (Co-Chair), Kevin Block, Talcia Brown, Alison Eberhardt (Co-Chair), Alyssa Pizzi, Greg Prichard, Tyler Ray, Lee Riccetti, Ha Leem Ro and Tyler Schumacher

Steering Committee, Young Friends of the Preservation Alliance

## Kim Chantry

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**From:** Libby Rosof <libbyrosof@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 7, 2024 5:24 PM  
**To:** preservation  
**Cc:** Jenine Sanzari  
**Subject:** Spruce Hill Historic District (Southeast Quadrant)

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Gentlepeople:

I am writing in favor of the proposed Spruce Hill Historic District (Southeast Quadrant). I have lived in the district for more than 50 years and brought up my family here. The signature architecture of the neighborhood makes for an unusual amount of community interaction and togetherness, while providing housing for diversity of people and incomes. In the past few years, however, many of these houses have been destroyed by shameful developers with no respect for the current residents and the historic architecture, those developers sometimes forcing long-timers and families out of their homes and undermining the integrity of neighboring houses, while crowding the visual landscape with behemoth apartment blocks. The lack of protections for the livability of the neighborhood is discouraging. I believe the Historic District designation will help slow down this destruction.

Libby Rosof

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libby rososof

Board of Directors, and co-founder, [theartblog.org](http://theartblog.org)

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## Kim Chantry

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**From:** David Brubaker <david.brubaker@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 11, 2024 5:59 AM  
**To:** preservation  
**Subject:** Support for the Spruce Hill Historic District Nomination

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Dear Members of the Historical Commission,

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for the nomination of the Spruce Hill Historic District. As a proud homeowner on the 4200 block of Pine Street, I have firsthand experience of the vibrancy, uniqueness, and rich historical nature that defines our neighborhood. This area not only represents a significant chapter in Philadelphia's storied past but also continues to be a living, breathing community where history and modernity blend seamlessly.

The designation of Spruce Hill as a Historic District is crucial in ensuring that the architectural integrity and aesthetic charm of our neighborhood are preserved amidst rapid urban development. It will provide a necessary safeguard against changes that might compromise the unique character that we, as residents, cherish deeply.

Preserving Spruce Hill's historical essence will also enhance our community's quality of life, maintain property values, and promote a sense of pride and belonging among its residents. It is an investment in our collective identity and future generations.

I trust that the Philadelphia Historical Commission will recognize the importance of this nomination and act in favor of protecting the vibrant and historical nature of Spruce Hill. Thank you for considering my perspective as both a homeowner and a passionate advocate for the preservation of our neighborhood's heritage.

Sincerely,

David Brubaker  
4234 Pine St

## Kim Chantry

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**From:** Marta Bartholomew <marta.bartholomew@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 11, 2024 11:17 AM  
**To:** preservation  
**Subject:** Resident support of Spruce Hill historical preservation

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Dear Mr. Farnham,

As a young person in my 20s and working at Penn I would spend many of my lunch hours walking and wandering around the Spruce Hill neighborhood, enjoying its lovely architecture and natural beauty. I imagined that one day I might live there and raise a family. In 2016 I realized that dream and bought a fixer upper on Osage Avenue and have spent the last eight years slowly making improvements and repairs that complement the personality of the neighborhood.

Many of the aspects that I love about Spruce Hill will be protected by historical designation. Our community is strong and much of that is owed to its unique history and beauty that has stood the test of time. We need to preserve this for the future generations as the bedrock of a solid community. Neighbors will work together to support the needs of a historical designation.

I hope that we can all recognize what makes Philadelphia special – our neighborhoods and communities have real personality built through history – the neighborhoods are not generic and anonymous. We need to support and preserve that as a primary reason people choose to live in Philly.

I am an enthusiastic supporter of the historic designation. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter and all of your hard work.

Best,  
Marta

Marta Bartholomew, MBA (she/her)  
Director of Research Programs and Communications  
Office of the Vice Provost for Research (OVPR)

Director of Postdoctoral Affairs  
Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA)  
<https://postdocs.upenn.edu>

University of Pennsylvania  
1 College Hall, Suite G08  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
Mobile: (215) 834-4446  
<https://research.upenn.edu/>

## Kim Chantry

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**From:** Mary Berzinsky <mberzinsky@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 11, 2024 10:17 PM  
**To:** preservation  
**Subject:** Spruce Hill Historic District (Southeast Quadrant) nomination

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My husband and I have lived in University City Spruce Hill Community for 32 years in the same house. As an architect and interior designer we care about what our neighborhood and the buildings in our community are taken care of properly. Restoration and maintenance is very important. We are in support of the historic nomination.

Mary and Greg Berzinsky

**Mary Ryan Berzinsky**  
Interior Designer, NCIDQ

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215 704 4201  
[mberzinsky@gmail.com](mailto:mberzinsky@gmail.com)  
Connect on [LinkedIn](#)



## Kim Chantry

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**From:** preservation  
**Sent:** Friday, April 12, 2024 6:25 AM  
**To:** Kim Chantry  
**Subject:** Fwd: Spruce Hill Historic District (Southeast Quadrant) nomination

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

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**From:** Greg And Mary Berzinsky <berzinsky@aol.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 11, 2024 10:18 PM  
**To:** preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>  
**Subject:** Spruce Hill Historic District (Southeast Quadrant) nomination

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My wife and I have lived in University City Spruce Hill area for almost 32 years in the same house. We support the historic nomination.

Greg and Mary Berzinsky  
4205 Pine Street

## Kim Chantry

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**From:** Katherine Dowdell <kdowdell@farragutstreet.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 11, 2024 3:29 PM  
**To:** preservation  
**Cc:** Amy Lambert; Paul Steinke; Hanna Stark  
**Subject:** Spruce Hill Historic District

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I am writing to express my full support for the designation of the Spruce Hill Historic District. This neighborhood clearly meets many of the criteria for designation, and is long overdue for such recognition and protection.

Thank you - Kathy Dowdell

## Kim Chantry

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**From:** Email Verification <Waynesautoservice@outlook.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, April 12, 2024 10:40 AM  
**To:** preservation  
**Subject:** Re: Why it should be preserved

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Here is the information.  
University city

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**From:** preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, April 12, 2024 10:35 AM  
**To:** Email Verification <Waynesautoservice@outlook.com>  
**Subject:** Re: Why it should be preserved

Hi Wayne,  
Thank you for your email. Can you please let us know the neighborhood you are referencing?

Thanks,  
Laura

Laura DiPasquale  
**Historic Preservation Planner Supervisor**  
**Philadelphia Historical Commission**  
**preservation@phila.gov**

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**From:** Email Verification <Waynesautoservice@outlook.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, April 12, 2024 8:00 AM  
**To:** preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>  
**Subject:** Why it should be preserved

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This area is historical and should remain that way. There is too many new structures which is destroying the neighborhood.

Wayne Fleishman



Becca Geller-Puchalsky: President  
267-261-2030  
[rebeccagellerpuchalsky@gmail.com](mailto:rebeccagellerpuchalsky@gmail.com)

457 South 45th Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

April 14, 20

Re: Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant  
CDH Hearing: April 17, 2024  
PHC Hearing: May 10, 2024

Jon Farnham, Executive Director  
Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street, 13<sup>th</sup> floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Dr. Farnham,

The Board of the Spruce Hill Community Association (SHCA) is looking forward to the upcoming PHC public meetings where the Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant nomination will be reviewed for inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. We initiated community engagement on this topic during our monthly Board meeting in November 2022 (open to the public) with an educational panel discussion on what it means to be designated a historic district. The panel included Kim Chantry (PHC), Paul Steinke (Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia), Amy Lambert (University City Historical Society), and Thaddeus Squire (Member of Overbrook Farms HD). Over the past year, SHCA has provided monthly updates to the Spruce Hill community on the historic district nomination process, included extensive FAQ sheet on our website, set up table top displays and distributed flyers at the Clark Park Farmer's Market, Baltimore Avenue Dollar Stroll event, and 2023 MayFair event, conducted 3 public forums focused on the proposed Spruce Hill Historic District consisting of Q&A with panelists from UCHS, PHC, and neighboring historic districts, and continue to engage neighbors and local business owners on the topic.

As you can see, we are extremely passionate about educating and engaging the community on historic preservation in Spruce Hill, with the goal of adding a layer of protection of the historic homes and structures. We firmly believe that the preservation of our architectural heritage is essential for maintaining the character and identity of our community.

Spruce Hill is a unique and significant cultural landscape that embodies the rich history and heritage of Philadelphia. Its well-preserved buildings, streetscapes, and landmarks tell the story of West Philadelphia's development and evolution over time. From its architectural diversity to its association with important historical events or figures, the proposed Spruce Hill Historic District holds immense cultural and educational value for residents and visitors alike.

By designating Spruce Hill as a historic district, we can ensure its protection and stewardship for future generations. This recognition will not only celebrate our past but also provide benefits by advancing heritage curiosity, fostering community pride, and potentially enhancing property values.

If included in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, SHCA is committed to continuing to explore and access valuable resources and incentives for preservation efforts, such as grants, tax credits, and technical assistance. These resources are crucial for supporting rehabilitation projects and maintaining the integrity of our historic built environment.

Preserving our cultural heritage is a responsibility that we owe to future generations, and designation as a historic district is a meaningful step towards fulfilling that obligation.

We are aware that a letter on behalf of Campus Apartments LLC, UC Housing, and "numerous other owners of real property" suggests our nomination is "incomplete insofar as it does not include a full and complete inventory of the proposed district" (Phillips, 4/5/24). We have been clear about the inventories up for nomination since we began in November of 2022. The inventory is complete for the Southeast Quadrant of Spruce Hill neighborhood. The proposed district does not cover all of the Spruce Hill neighborhood because the inventory is extremely large. This strategy to divide the neighborhood into quadrants was negotiated with the PHC in 2022 to address SHCA capacity to engage neighbors and fundraise. With nearly 2,000 properties in the entire neighborhood, creating a more manageable designation strategy benefits the PHC, SHCA, and all affected residents. This intentional and advised strategy in no way suggests our current Southeast Quadrant application is "incomplete and unripe" (Phillips, 4/5/24). We guarantee that our application is complete, ripe, and backed by countless eager supporters.

Thank you for your consideration and review. If you require any additional information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the SHCA Board.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BGPuchalsky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Becca Geller-Puchalsky on behalf of the Spruce Hill Community Association Board

April 15, 2024

Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Members of the Historical Commission,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the nomination of the Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant, to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. As a resident of this vibrant neighborhood for nearly five years, I have developed a deep appreciation for its rich history, diverse architectural styles, and unique community character.

Arriving at Penn in 2017, I strayed from a required graduate admissions tour and explored Spruce Hill. I remember a distinct feeling of wonderment and awe at first seeing the vast array of historic homes, parks, and streetscapes. I also remember being shocked to learn that few of its buildings were historically protected. Having moved from the Midwest, where anything older than one hundred years was almost automatically appreciated and protected, this was, to me, unfathomable.

Indeed, the urgency of this designation effort cannot be overstated. Even in my somewhat shore tenure in Spruce Hill, I've witnessed an exponential increase in the number of demolitions and changes in the streets near my home. Undeniably, change is not inherently negative; rather, historic district designation is about *managing change thoughtfully*. It allows neighborhoods to evolve while safeguarding their unique character, architectural heritage, and cultural traditions.

Having studied and worked extensively in the fields of architecture and historic preservation, including my role as a Senior Research Associate at the Urban Heritage Project at the University of Pennsylvania, I have witnessed firsthand the value and significance of preserving our built environment holistically. The Spruce Hill neighborhood stands as a testament to the early development of streetcar suburbs and boasts one of the largest collections of Victorian-era housing in the nation.

Moreover, as a neighborhood near major universities, Spruce Hill experiences unique challenges and opportunities related to housing and development. Historic district designation can incentivize responsible development, promote human-scale density, and contribute to economic strength and environmental sustainability.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that designating Spruce Hill as a Historic District is a vital step in preserving our community's heritage, fostering economic resilience, and promoting a diverse and inclusive neighborhood. I urge you to support this nomination and help ensure a vibrant future for Spruce Hill and its residents.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Jacob W. Torkelson, MSHP, Affil. ASLA  
Senior Research Associate  
Department of Historic Preservation  
Stuart Weitzman School of Design



April 15, 2024

Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Members of the Historical Commission,

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the University City Historical Society, I would like to express our strongest support for the nomination of the Spruce Hill Historic District, Southeast Quadrant.

UCHS has been enthusiastically supporting the Spruce Hill Community Association (SHCA) in their efforts to designate the neighborhood historic since 1987, when the first of three nomination efforts was undertaken. The baton was picked up again in 2022 with the most robust consensus yet among community members.

Spruce Hill is one of the most intact and early Victorian streetcar suburbs in the nation; its significance is irrefutable. In recent years, however, the district has recently been in the crosshairs of an onslaught of development that has demolished large swaths of the neighborhood's edges. The resulting development has destroyed the human scale of the neighborhood. Designation seeks to better manage the inevitable change that will continue to arrive in Spruce Hill, prioritizing people over profit.

Spruce Hill contains historic resources that narrate a prior era's successful attempts at both speculative and transit-oriented development. The wide variety of housing types – from rowhouses to large twins to 1920s-era apartments – provide housing to a wide variety of residents, a huge part of what makes the neighborhood inclusive and vibrant. Porches, adaptively reused garages or banks, and verdant sidewalks facilitate community gathering and allow small businesses to flourish.

UCHS is proud to be a neighborhood resource on preservation matters in West Philadelphia. Thank you for supporting historic designation for Spruce Hill.

Yours Truly,

Amy Lambert  
President of the Board of Governors  
University City Historical Society

CC: Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, Philadelphia's 3<sup>rd</sup> District  
State Representative Rick Krajewski, Pennsylvania's 188<sup>th</sup> District

**From:** [Angela Kent](#)  
**To:** [preservation](#)  
**Subject:** Support for Spruce Hill Historic District  
**Date:** Monday, April 15, 2024 2:00:49 PM  
**Attachments:** [image.png](#)  
[image.png](#)

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Dear Members of the Historical Commission,

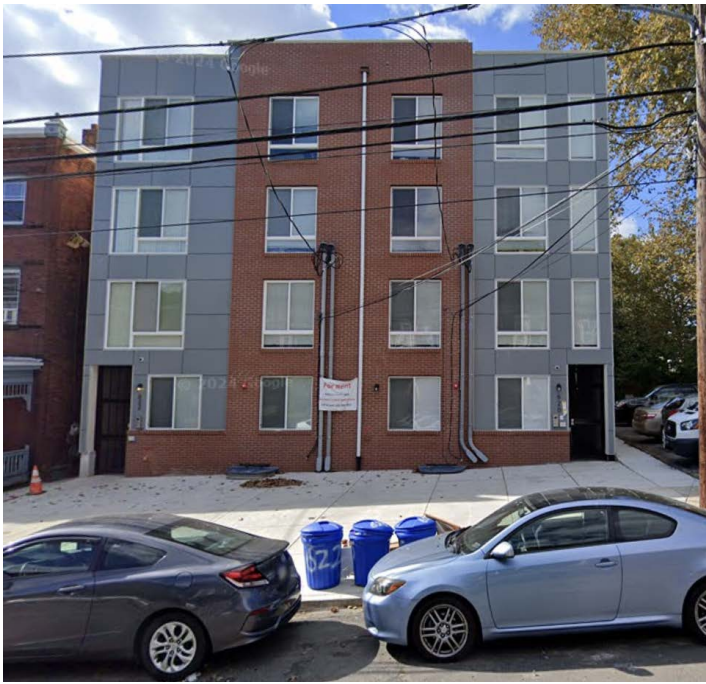
I am writing in support of the Spruce Hill Historic District. My husband and I purchased our first home in Spruce Hill ten years ago and then became a part of the Chester-Regent Historic District. We are very proud and honored to live in such a beautiful, historic place. It gives me great comfort and joy to know that our home and block will be appreciated by current and future generations. I hope the same for all of Spruce Hill.

When we were first looking to purchase a home in the neighborhood, there was another house we were very much interested in on S. 42nd street. It had the most lovely historic details, both inside and out, and I photographed it at the time. We ended up purchasing a different home, and since then, that house on 42nd street has been demolished. I remember the day it came down, I felt devastated knowing we would have been able to save it had we become the owners. Or that it might have been saved had the previous nomination for Spruce Hill not been stalled. That was when I knew I wanted to be involved in the preservation of this neighborhood and recognized the urgent pace at which developers are removing historic properties and changing what we love most about this special place.

A before and after of the house and green space. 622 S. 42nd St.







Sincerely,

Angela Kent, NCIDQ

(410) 279-1087

Pronouns: she/her

**From:** [Andrew Figueiredo](#)  
**To:** [preservation](#)  
**Subject:** (Nuanced) Constituent Opposition to Spruce Hill Historic District Designation  
**Date:** Monday, April 15, 2024 8:54:18 PM

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Good evening,

My name is Andrew Figueiredo and I reside at 4300 Spruce St., Apt. A402, Philadelphia, PA 19104. I write today in my personal capacity as a Spruce Hill resident to oppose the historic designation proposed for the Spruce Hill neighborhood. I do share some of the concerns proponents of this designation have about developers who lack respect for adjacent historic properties, an egregious example of which has unfolded on 45th Street across from Clark Park. Something needs to be done to protect and preserve the heritage and character of the neighborhood. In my mind, that's why we have individual historic designations for certain buildings. That could and should be expanded.

However, I worry that a historic designation for the entire neighborhood is inadvisable due to the neighborhood's renter-heavy population. Spruce Hill's vibrance comes not just from the gorgeous architecture, but from its eclectic mix of students, artsy individuals, young families, and small businesses. Many residents live on middle-class incomes and have been adversely impacted by skyrocketing rents. Our neighborhood is not a museum; it's a living, breathing community that should welcome more people.

Supply and demand teaches us that the way to keep rents lower in Spruce Hill is to build *more*, not less. Yet NIMBYs often weaponize historic designations are [often](#) as a veto point to prevent construction of new units. Sweeping historic designations give regressive NIMBYs ammunition to halt development entirely. Putting a stop to the expansion of the housing supply would price out the people who make this neighborhood what it is today, putting at risk its welcoming spirit and inclusivity. Please do not pit preservation and construction against each other--we need both. We can protect individual historic properties without stymying development across Spruce Hill.

Thank you,  
Andrew