

Public Comment for  
4201-47 Woodland Ave

April 10, 2024

Jonathan Farnham, PhD, Executive Director  
Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

RE: 4201-47 Woodland Avenue – Griffith Hall

Dear Dr. Farnham,

Griffith Hall is a significant part of the built environment in my West Philadelphia neighborhood, and its important history makes it an excellent candidate for protection under the Philadelphia ordinance.

In reading through the nomination, I did have a question about the suggested boundary. I understand the practice is to use the original boundary of the resource when one is designating one of several buildings on a parcel that has been enlarged over time. In reviewing the nomination, this limitation of the boundary was initially concerning, as it had the potential to destroy important views of the building. At the time Griffith Hall was built, Kingsessing Avenue was an active public street, and so this building sat prominently at an intersection. Approaching the building from either street of the intersection provided an unobstructed view of its angled main entrance. The quarter-circle entry drive, shown clearly in Figure 1 on Page 3 of the nomination, is evident in the March 27, 1927 sketch of the building, as published in the Philadelphia Inquirer (Figure 11), and in a 1933 photograph (Figure 12). This drive still exists; it would have had direct access to Kingsessing Avenue, and now exits into a parking area on the former street.

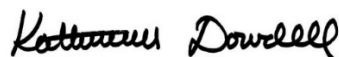
The old city registry maps (020S20 and 020S22) on Atlas show that this section of Kingsessing Avenue was ordered to be stricken and vacated on 12-3-68; this was confirmed on 2-17-69. Additional notes on Map 020S20 call for this to be a right-of-way for water main and gas main purposes, ordered and confirmed in 1982. This small section is now indicated on city maps as Kingsessing Mall. So it appears that this section of the former Kingsessing Avenue is a legal utility easement, and therefore the unobstructed views of the building will by default be preserved.

It's important to the setting of Griffith Hall that there be some "breathing space" retained around the building. Would it make sense to include the Kingsessing Mall area in the boundary of Griffith Hall? Since this area is an easement on which nothing can be built, it would not affect the remaining buildings on the parcel, nor would it limit a future property owner. The historic views of Griffith Hall would be preserved with no change to the adjacent property owner's ability to modify or develop the remainder of the parcel.

There may be other city rules or policies that would be unnecessarily complicated by expanding the boundary of the historic resource over a right-of-way; and if this easement is permanent, it may not be necessary. But it would be helpful to have absolute clarity on this issue – if not from the Historical Commission, then from another relevant city agency.

Attached are some annotated illustrations which may be helpful in explaining this issue. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,



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215-805-0370

Cc: Paul Steinke and Hanna Stark, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia  
Kevin McMahon, Architectural Historian  
Members of the Designation Committee, Philadelphia Historical Commission  
University City Historical Society



Figure 12 from the nomination – c. 1933 photograph from the Wellcome Collection



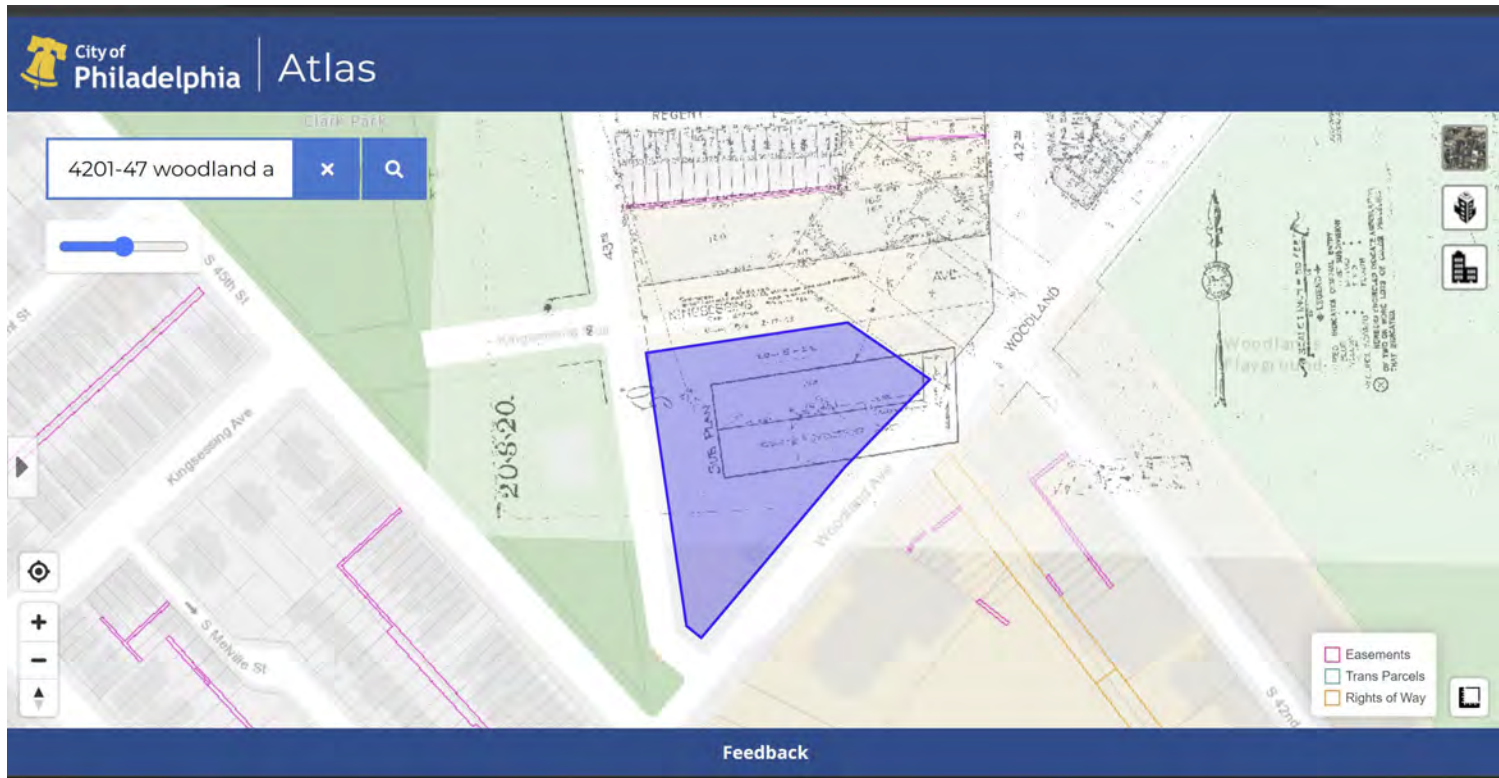
Current photograph – taken by the author in February 2024

## 5. Boundary Description

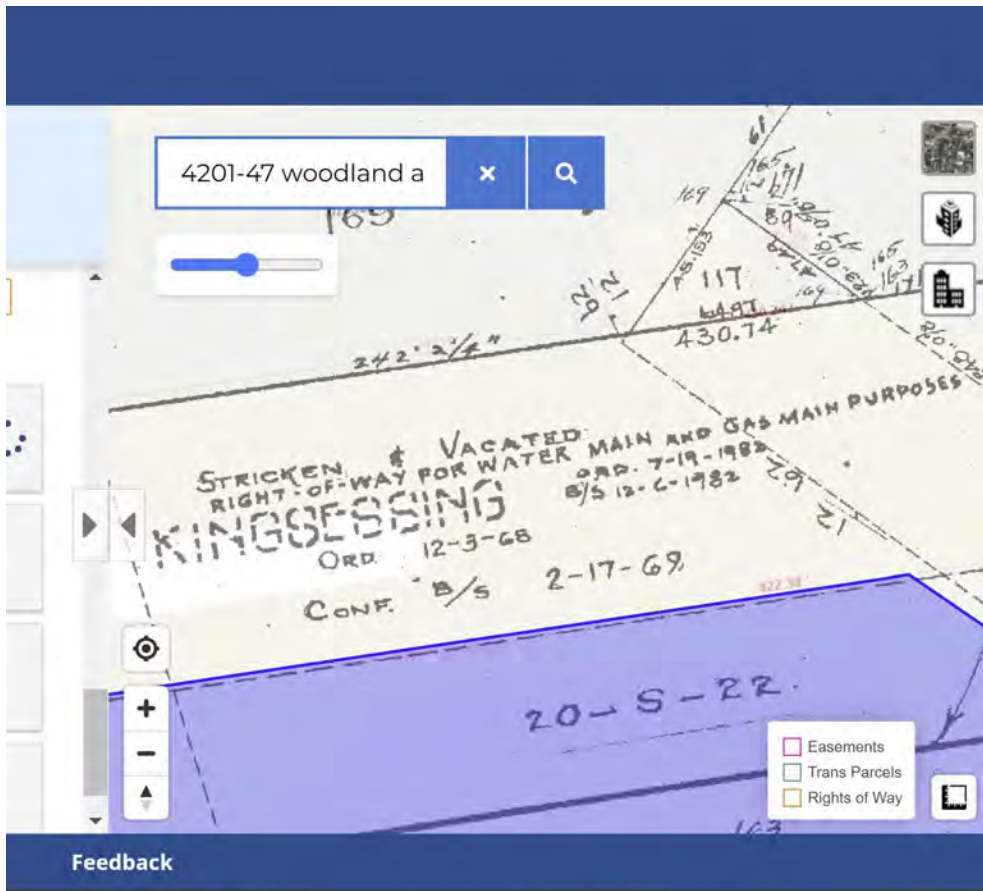


**Figure 1** - Boundary Map for the tax parcel of 4201-47 Woodland Avenue (imagery from Pictometry), shown in red. Although the property includes several buildings, only Griffith Hall (Building 1) and the buffer space around it within the dashed white line shown above, are part of the proposed designation. The other buildings, listed below, are not included in the nomination.

Proposed extension of boundary of historic designation shown by yellow dashed line.  
Note: Site photograph copied from nomination with permission of nominator.



Registry Map 20-S20 overlaid on the current parcel



Detail of Registry Map 20-S20 indicating creation of right of way



View looking south on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street



View looking south on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street. The entire parking area is on what was formerly Kingsessing Avenue.



View looking south on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street – area shown in yellow is potential future obstruction, if easement is not honored



View looking south on 43<sup>rd</sup> Street – area shown in yellow is potential future obstruction, if easement is not honored