

## **ACTIVITIES OF THE PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION STAFF APRIL 2025**

### **DESIGN REVIEW**

Design review continues to be the staff's primary task, with all Historical Commission staff members collaborating on the processing of building permit applications. The permit reporting utility in eCLIPSE shows that 195 permit applications were approved, 63 with conditions, for historically designated properties in April 2025. An additional 8 permit applications were returned to applicants in eCLIPSE with requests for revisions and/or additional information. The staff conducted 9 adjacent property reviews in eCLIPSE. The staff conducted an additional 53 detail reviews outside of eCLIPSE.

### **DESIGNATION**

Designation tasks occupy much of the staff's time. Nearly all staff time not devoted to design review is dedicated to designation-related tasks.

As of 1 May 2025, no nomination reviews were being continued by the staff.

The Historical Commission took no action on designation matters at its meeting on 11 April 2025.

The staff administered the Committee on Historic Designation's meeting on 16 April 2025. At that meeting, the Committee offered recommendations on the following designation matters:

- Individual nominations for nine properties: 756 N. 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, Laura Wheeler Waring House; 10151 Academy Road, Maple Grove School; 1631, 1633, and 1635 Francis Street, Peerless Pressed Brick Row; 601 S. Broad Street, Southwestern National Bank; 1505-07 Orthodox Street, The Historical Society of Frankford; 1839-45 Lombard Street, Philadelphia School of Occupational Therapy; and 700-02 N. Broad Street, Northwestern National Bank.

Kim Chantry and Alex Till are discussing a potential Tulpehocken Historic District with the West Central Germantown Neighbors community association and the Preservation Alliance.

Alex Till is working with community members on a potential Wissahickon Historic District.

Heather Hendrickson is working with community members on potential historic districts in Yorktown and the Pelham section of W. Mount Airy.

Allyson Mehley is working on an addition to the Ridge Avenue Roxborough Thematic Historic District.

The staff is working on several individual nominations.

### **FINANCIAL HARDSHIP**

The Committee on Financial Hardship did not meet in April 2025.

### **SURVEY**

The staff continues to add documents, photographs, data, and metadata to the City's Arches installation. The department of Planning and Development recently hired an archivist, and the staff is working with the archivist to develop a plan to digitize the Historical Commission's

archives and store the documents in Arches. Philadelphia's installation of Arches has been named PlatForm for the first map of the City of Philadelphia, which William Penn called a "Plat-Form." Arches is an open source, web- and geospatially based, customizable information system that was purpose-built by the Getty Conservation Institute and World Monuments Fund to inventory and manage immovable cultural heritage.

#### **HISTORICAL COMMISSION – TREASURE PHILLY!**

Shannon Garrison, Kristin Hankins, and Izzy Korostoff are working on the Historical Commission's Treasure Philly! project. The Department of Planning & Development received a grant of \$250,000 from the William Penn Foundation to develop and pilot a historic resource survey program. Since 2022, the survey plan and pilot project has been exploring ways to engage with populations and histories not currently reflected in the properties listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Through the project, the Department of Planning and Development is expanding the traditional understanding of preservation to include a wider range of tools and more comprehensive understanding of cultural heritage. The goal is the development of a survey methodology that will ensure a more inclusive accounting of the city's diverse historic and cultural resources and set forth a sustainable plan for staff to conduct ongoing survey work.

The Treasure Philly! team continues to expand its survey efforts in the areas around Broad, Germantown, and Erie. It is currently focusing on the neighborhoods around Hunting Park, and further documenting Germantown Avenue. It plans to announce a second Treasure Philly! location in early spring once neighborhood partners have been confirmed. The Treasure Philly! report on the work done under the William Penn Foundation grant is finalized and public, although Treasure Philly! has not issued a press release promoting it. Treasure Philly! plans to highlight the report this spring in connection to the announcement of the new Treasure Philly! work, as well as planned completion of several Broad, Germantown, and Erie improvements. Treasure Philly! is also undertaking some adjacent survey and documentation work on South Street as part of the City Planning Commission's remapping. The timeline for that is spring through summer.

#### **HISTORIC PRESERVATION INCENTIVES**

The Historical Commission's staff issued no zoning incentive letters in April 2025.

#### **APPEALS**

The following permit decisions are or were under appeal at the Board of License & Inspection Review (BLIR):

- 1435-41 Walnut Street
  - At its September 2021 meeting, the Historical Commission denied an application to enlarge window openings at 1435-41 Walnut Street. The property owner appealed the decision to the BLIR. The Historical Commission submitted its official record to the BLIR on 3 December 2021. The appellant and the Law Department have agreed to remand the matter to the Historical Commission for a second review, which will be conducted at the June 2025 meeting of the Historical Commission.

The following permit decisions are or were under appeal at or from the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA):

- None.

The following appeals to the Court of Common Pleas and Commonwealth Court are in process:

- 4501 Poplar Street
  - The property owner of the recently designated infirmary building at the former Stephen Smith Home appealed the designation. The Court of Common Pleas issued a scheduling order for Case No. 221201025. The Historical Commission submitted its record on 14 April 2023. The appellant's brief was due on 7 August 2023. The appellee's brief was due on 6 September 2023. Oral arguments were scheduled for after 19 October 2023. On 30 November 2023, the Court of Common Pleas denied the appeal. On 28 December 2023, the appellant appealed the lower court's decision to the Commonwealth Court.
- 7200-04 Cresheim Road
  - An attorney representing the owner of the recently designated property at 7200-04 Cresheim Road appealed the designation to the Court of Common Pleas, Case No. 230401333. The Historical Commission submitted its record on 12 July 2023. Oral arguments took place on 9 January 2024. The Court denied the appeal and affirmed the Historical Commission's designation on 16 January 2024. The appellant is in the process of appealing the lower court's decision to the Commonwealth Court.
- 5920 Greene Street
  - An attorney representing the owner of the property at 5920 Greene Street appealed the Historical Commission's designation of the property, Court of Common Pleas, Case No. 230702782. The court denied the appeal on 26 April 2024. The appellant appealed the denial to the Commonwealth Court on 24 May 2024.
- 4641 E. Roosevelt Boulevard
  - At its July 2023 meeting, the Historical Commission approved an application to demolish a building and approved in concept an application to construct a City health center on the campus of Friends Hospital, 4641 E. Roosevelt Boulevard. The Preservation Alliance and some neighborhood partners appealed the approval of the demolition. The BLIR held the hearing on 12 and 19 October 2023 and voted unanimously to deny the appeal. Leonard Reuter argued the case and Jon Farnham testified on behalf of the Historical Commission. One of the neighborhood appellants appealed the BLIR decision to the Court of Common Pleas, Case No. 231200824. On 22 January 2024, the Court of Common Pleas quashed the appeal with prejudice. On 20 February 2024, attorney Samuel Stretton appealed the Court of Common Pleas decision on behalf of the neighborhood appellant to the Commonwealth Court, Case No. 152 CD 2024. Since that time, Mr. Stretton has asked the court to grant him extensions to deadlines.
- 26-34 and 36 Church Lane
  - At its February 2024 meeting, the Historical Commission designated the Germantown Urban Village Historic District. The owner of the properties at 26-34 Church Lane and 36 Church Lane appealed the decisions to include the properties as contributing to the district, owing to the likelihood of archaeological resources, to the Court of Common Pleas, Cases No. 240400193 and 240400194. A scheduling order was issued on 24 May 2024. The Historical Commission submitted its records on 5 August 2024. The appellant's brief was due by 3 September 2024. The appellee's brief was due by 7 October 2024. Oral argument took place on 3 December 2024. On 9 December 2024, the court granted both appeals, meaning that the properties are not considered

contributing to the historic district under Criterion I for archaeology. The properties remain within the historic district but will be considered non-contributing and undeveloped sites. The court's decision seems to indicate that the Historical Commission should not designate sites under Criterion I without clear evidence on the record that the site is likely to yield *important* information. The nomination for the Germantown Urban Village Historic District apparently failed to provide that evidence.

- Washington Square West Historic District
  - At its September 2024 meeting, the Historical Commission designated the Washington Square West Historic District. Attorneys at Ballard Spahr filed an appeal to the Court of Common Pleas on behalf of three property owners, Joshua Zugerman, Jonathan Hessney, and Colin Murphy, and a heretofore unknown organization, Philadelphians for Rational Preservation. Other individuals have since joined the appeal. Attorneys at Bochetto & Lentz filed a second appeal of the designation on behalf of the SandyCo Group LLC and Esbert LLC and two associated individuals. The first appeal is Case Nos. 241001831 and 241202813. The second appeals are Case Nos. 250101010 and 250101011. An updated scheduling order has moved the deadlines out. The record is now due on 7 August 2025, appellant's brief on 8 September 2025, appellee's brief on 6 October 2025, and oral arguments after 6 October 2025.
- Southeast Spruce Hill Historic District
  - At its August 2024 meeting, the Historical Commission designated the Southeast Spruce Hill Historic District. Attorney Michael Phillips of Klehr Harrison filed an appeal of the designation to the Court of Common Pleas on behalf of several property owners. The appeal is Case No. 241101777. An updated scheduling order has moved the deadlines out. The appellant's brief is now due on 6 June 2025, appellee's brief on 7 July 2025, and oral arguments after 1 August 2025.
- Northwest Philadelphia Apartment Thematic Historic District
  - At its January 2025 meeting, the Historical Commission designated the Northwest Philadelphia Apartment Thematic Historic District. Attorney Michael Phillips of Klehr Harrison filed an appeal of the designation to the Court of Common Pleas on behalf of Sedgwick Gardens, a property owner. The appeal is Case No. 2503002330. The scheduling order indicates that the record is due to the court on 7 July 2025, the appellant's brief is due on 4 August, the appellee's brief is due on 2 September 2025, and oral arguments will occur after 6 October 2025.
- 1330 -36 Chestnut Street
  - At its December 2024 meeting, the Historical Commission designated the property at 1330-36 Chestnut Street, the former F.W. Woolworth Co. Store. Attorney Michael Phillips of Klehr Harrison filed an appeal to the Court of Common Pleas on behalf of the property owner. The appeal is Case No. 250100684. The scheduling order has not yet been issued.
- 156 W. School House Lane
  - The Historical Commission designated 156 W. School House Lane on 12 March 2021. The property owner, the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, appealed the designation to the Court of Common Pleas. The Historical Commission's staff submitted the record of the designation to the Court on 19 January 2022. The court continued the case to give the appellant an opportunity to have the Historical Commission consider a financial hardship and necessary in the public interest application. The appellant submitted the application to the Historical

Commission and the Architectural Committee reviewed it in August 2022. The Committee on Financial Hardship reviewed it on 16 October and 28 November 2023. The Historical Commission considered the matter on 8 December 2023 and approved the application. A neighbor who opposed the application appealed the approval to the BLIR. The Historical Commission produced its record of the review on 22 February 2024. The BLIR held a hearing on 30 July 2024. Leonard Reuter argued the case and Jon Farnham testified on behalf of the Historical Commission. The BLIR announced its decision in the case, affirming the Historical Commission and denying the appeal on 27 August 2024. The Penn Knox Neighborhood Association appealed the BLIR's decision to the Court of Common Pleas, Case No. 240920417.

- 424 E. Woodlawn Street
  - On 28 May 2024, the Historical Commission issued a letter to the Department of Licenses and Inspections confirming that the property at 424 E. Woodlawn Street satisfies the conditions set forth in Sections 14-602(7) of the Philadelphia Code regarding exceptions to use tables for certain historic structures. The zoning incentive provides for some CMX-3 uses by right for some residential and mixed-use properties. A neighbor appealed the issuance of a by-right zoning permit for the property to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA). The ZBA held a hearing on 20 August 2024. Leonard Reuter argued the case and Jon Farnham testified on behalf of the Historical Commission. The ZBA affirmed the Historical Commission and denied the appeal. A neighbor appealed the ZBA's decision to the Court of Common Pleas, Case No. 241102643. The ZBA filed its record with the court on 15 April 2025.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

With the Law Department and Department of Licenses & Inspections, the staff is pursuing numerous enforcement cases for unpermitted work, non-compliant work, and failure to maintain in good repair.

## **UNSAFE AND IMMINENTLY DANGEROUS CASES**

The Historical Commission is not actively working on any Unsafe or Imminently Dangerous cases.

## **SECTION 106**

Shannon Garrison and Kristin Hankins are conducting federally mandated Section 106 reviews for the DHCD undertakings assisted by HUD. Among other tasks, they are surveying Pulaskitown to determine whether it is eligible as a National Register historic district. The Historical Commission has assumed all Section 106 reviews for the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) as part of a larger Department of Planning & Development effort to assume all responsibility for PHA's federal environmental reviews.

**OFFICE**

The City of Philadelphia closed all non-essential City offices in March 2020, owing to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Historical Commission's staff was assigned to work remotely from home. The Historical Commission's offices reopened on 1 February 2022, with staff members working two days per week in the office. The Historical Commission's staff transitioned to five days per week in the office on 15 July 2024. The Historical Commission will transition from remote meetings to in-person meetings with a hybrid component on 14 March 2025. The Commissioners and staff attend the meetings in person at 1515 Arch Street. Applicants, owners, and the public have the option of attending in person or remotely.

**STAFFING**

The Historical Commission offered the Historic Preservation Planner 1 position to Joshua Schroeder, a military veteran with a Ph.D. in history from State University of New York at Buffalo, who most recently worked for the Marine Corps as a historian. He is scheduled to start on 9 June 2025.

**OTHER**

Mr. Farnham is still managing the responses to numerous right-to-know requests seeking information on the designation of the Washington Square West Historic District.