

423 and 425 Vine St.

Public Comment

Lori Arnold, PhD LEED

woodconservator@gmail.com

215-667-4734

RE: 423-425 Vine Street

Honorable Commissioners of the Historic Commission:

I write to express support for the small addition the homeowners would like to add to their historic home. This house and adjacent courtyard (425 Vine Street) sat on the market for a significant amount of time before the Elisons purchased it. It is currently designated and in a historic district. Prior to this designation, it was restored and heavily altered. I disagree with the denial recommended by the Architecture Committee since there have been significant alterations with this property. To claim that this addition will compromise the integrity of the structure is simply false. Originally, this was a workman's home, a barbershop with German inhabitants for decades. This house was not considered historic until the 80s. As an architectural conservator and historic preservationist, with 30 years of experience, I submit my reasoning for the approval of this addition:

With the aid of a mason, an investigation was conducted to determine the thickness of the stucco on the wall to be demolished for the addition. There were several layers of stucco resulting in a thickness of more than 2 inches. This indicates that the wall – original or not – cannot be returned to or acknowledged as original. The bricks were of lower quality than the original on the front of the house. The mortar originally used was black. There is a large marble step at the door that originally was used as a doorstep but has been reseated during earlier restorations. We have no way of knowing its original location.

View-shed parameters, used in the past to allow alterations is *VERY* applicable in this situation. The portion of the house the homeowners wish to build an addition onto cannot be seen from the street - at all. The homeowners' architect is open to recommendations for fenestration and appropriate materials – including black mortar. No one will be able to see the construction of the addition, nor will it be visible from the street. The demolition to the wall with the addition will add space, light and value to the home.

The Architecture Committee's recommendation to deny the addition will put this house back on the market. Federal houses are beautiful but do not leave a lot of room for a growing family in the 21st century. Considering these factors, I would recommend approval of the proposed addition for this family.

Thank you,
Lori Arnold



Charles Elison <cmelison@gmail.com>

423-425 Vine Street

Scott Neifeld <scott.neifeld@compass.com>
To: "cmelison@gmail.com" <cmelison@gmail.com>

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To whom it may concern:

The following observations are based upon my 33 years as a licensed PA Real Estate Agent and Realtor in Philadelphia and the surrounding communities. Over this time, navigating the unique architecture of Center City, I have identified characteristics that directly impact marketing residential properties.

It is my professional opinion that homes with functionally obsolete staircases generally take longer to sell and seem to sell for less than homes with contemporary and standard width staircases. Many of these staircases were built at a time when occupants were smaller in stature, had simpler household needs and shorter lifespans. Today these narrow, tightly turned staircase proportions present significant challenges. In my experience these staircases are often perceived as:

A Safety Concern: They can be difficult to safely traverse, particularly for aging populations or families with young children.

A logistical Barrier: They frequently make moving modern furniture- which is significantly larger than 19th century pieces--difficult or impossible without professional hoisting.

A Lifestyle Constraint: Contemporary buyers prioritize flow and accessibility and a restrictive staircase is often viewed as a primary functional defect.

Best regards.

Scott

Scott Neifeld
Realtor
Compass RE
[1430 Walnut Street, 3rd Floor.](#)
[Philadelphia PA 19102](#)
[m: 215.275.3040](#)
[o: 267.435.8015](#)

"A house can have integrity, just like a person," Ayn Rand

