

Public Comment for
4238-40 Chester Ave

FRIENDS OF
CLARK PARK



Philadelphia Historical Commission
Architectural Committee

Re: 4238–40 Chester Ave

Dear Chair Frankel and Committee members,

I'm writing on behalf of Friends of Clark Park (Registered Community Organization for Clark Park), and the 501(c)(3) that works alongside Parks & Rec to maintain and improve the park.

We share the concerns others have expressed about architectural style matching the historic character of the neighborhood. What I want to add is narrower and specific to the park: the curb cuts.

The proposal puts a garage on the ground floor of each duplex, which on this block means roughly four new driveways carved out of continuous on-street parking. That public parking is important for Clark Park. It's how families with strollers, older visitors, and folks coming from outside the neighborhood including throughout West and Southwest Philadelphia reach the park on Saturday Market mornings, during large events, and on most sunny days. Each curb cut also precludes the presence of nearby street trees on the sidewalks around the development, altering the character of the neighborhood's tree-lined streets.

We'd ask the Committee to recommend that the applicant consolidate access to a single shared entry point and to flag, for the record, that streetscape continuity matters.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Strolly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Benjamin Strolly
President
Friends of Clark Park



UCHS
UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May 22, 2026

Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Members of the Architectural Committee,

As board president of the University City Historical Society, I am writing in opposition to the current iteration of designs for 4 semidetached houses (8 units) at 4238-40 Chester Avenue.

Since 1987, UCHS has enthusiastically supported the Spruce Hill Community Association (SHCA) in their efforts to designate the neighborhood historic, culminating in the 2024 designation of the Southeast Spruce Hill Historic District. This preservation effort was sought to protect the up to 175+ year old resources within its boundaries, not to ban development within them. Designation seeks to better manage the inevitable change that will continue to arrive in Spruce Hill, prioritizing people over profit.

However, the designs as presented are not just aesthetically incongruous with the early streetcar suburb, but functionally tone deaf with the very nature of this transit-rich neighborhood. The inclusion of 8 garages and curb cuts just feet from three trolley lines is not pedestrian- or family-friendly, ignoring the historic origins of the district. The irony and disaster of a streetcar suburb accommodating greater vehicular activity across from Clark Park and its playground is clueless at best and irresponsible at worst. The safety from the human-scaled and -centric neighborhood would be lost at a key community gathering point.

Aesthetically, the designs act as billboards for the billionaire class, reminding residents that greed through minimal attention to materials and context seems more important than the City's own preservation ordinance. The Chester Avenue frontage does not incorporate acknowledgement or understanding of its placement at the end of a historic row of earlier semidetached houses. The visual heaviness of the mansard roofs is too much, especially considering how many properties are being inserted into this former community garden spot. The floor to floor heights and oversized windows do not align with the neighborhood's existing conditions.

For these reasons, UCHS asks that you deny approval for the designs as presented for this property.

Yours Truly,

Amy Lambert, AIA
President, University City Historical Society

CC: Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, 3rd District – Philadelphia

May 24, 2026

Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Subj: Designs for 4238-40 Chester Avenue

To the Members of the Architectural Committee,

I am writing to express concern regarding the proposed construction of several new homes currently under review. The renderings submitted for this proposal do not appear to reflect the historic character, architectural scale, or visual harmony of the Southeast Spruce Hill Historic District.

Our neighborhood's identity has been shaped over decades through consistent architectural elements, including traditional materials, rooflines, proportions, setbacks, and streetscape continuity. The proposed designs, as presented, appear incompatible with these established characteristics and risk diminishing the historic integrity and cohesive aesthetic that residents and visitors value.

Importantly, the inclusion of 8 garages and curb cuts just feet from three trolley lines and the playground at Clark Park is not pedestrian- or family-friendly, introducing serious concerns regarding both safety and preservation of historic character. Replacing a garden space with a concentration of garages in such close proximity to the playground prioritizes vehicular access over public safety, neighborhood walkability, and the historic intent of the streetscape.

I respectfully ask the Committee to require revisions that more thoughtfully incorporate the architectural language and proportions of the existing neighborhood. New construction can successfully balance modernization with contextual design, preserving the historic charm that makes this area unique while still allowing for appropriate development.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued stewardship of our community's architectural heritage.

Respectfully,

Jenine Sanzari
Historic Preservation Committee, Spruce Hill Community Association



May 25, 2026

Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: 4238-40 Chester Avenue

Dear Members of the Architectural Committee,

I am writing to express my concern over a specific aspect of the proposed designs for 8 townhouses at 4238-40 Chester Avenue. The 8 garages and driveways on the front facade are not consistent with the architectural character of the Southeast Spruce Hill Historic District. Garages are unusual in the District but in the few cases where they exist, they are on the back of the property. I understand that there is a grade change up Chester Avenue that makes locating these along 43rd Street more desirable, but in order to maintain the character of the neighborhood, I suggest moving these to the rear of the site, with one driveway entry on Chester Avenue.

In addition to being sympathetic with the architectural character, having so many driveways interrupting the sidewalk is unfriendly and dangerous to pedestrians, including many children going to the playground across the street. This is a highly walkable, transit friendly neighborhood and anything the developer can do to keep our sidewalks safe would be greatly appreciated.

I kindly ask that the Committee request revisions to the designs of the driveways and garages on the front of the buildings.

Sincerely,



Julie A. Bush

Spruce Hill Resident, Spruce Hill Community Association Volunteer, Landscape Architect