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November 13, 2026

Dr. Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Re: Pending Nomination of 5000 McKean Avenue (the "Property")

Dear Dr. Farnham:

We represent Kevin Brooks and Kimberly Blockett, the longtime owners of 5000 McKean Avenue, Philadelphia, PA (the "Owners"). The Property is located in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia and contains an existing single-family house (the "House"), which has been the Owners' family home for more than 20 years. For the reasons discussed more fully below the Owners oppose the nomination of the Property to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

In short, the Property does not satisfy Criterion C because it is (i) no longer part of a "complete surviving suburban ensemble" given the demolition of the associated neighboring buildings at 419 W. Clapier Street earlier this year, and (ii) not a distinguished example of Italianate architecture due to the significant changes that have been made to the House. The Property further does not satisfy Criterion J because it does not exemplify the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.

Due to the financial impact a historic designation would have on the Owner's ongoing restoration efforts, and because the Nomination's grounds for designation lack any foundation, the Owners respectfully request that the Committee on Historic Designation and the Philadelphia Historical Commission decline to designate the Property at 5000 McKean Avenue.

Background

In September 2025, SoLo Germantown (the "Nominator") submitted a nomination of the Property to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places (the "September Nomination"). The September Nomination was submitted around the same time as a separate nomination for an

adjacent property located at 419 W. Clapier Street. In a letter to the Nominator dated October 28, 2025 and attached as Exhibit A (the "Rejection Letter"), staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission (the "PHC") rejected the September Nomination on the grounds that it was "nearly identical" to the 419 W. Clapier Street property nomination and "include[d] many typographical, grammatical, and other mistakes." The Rejection Letter further noted that the September Nomination was "essentially a repurposed version of the 419 W. Clapier Street nomination" and needed to be rewritten to "focus on the subject property."

In November 2025, the Nominator submitted the revised Nomination of the Property asserting that the Property satisfies Criteria C and J of the Secretary's Standards (the "Nomination"). While the Nomination resolved some of the issues identified in the staff's Rejection Letter, the Nomination continues to tie the significance of the Property to the buildings located at the adjacent 419 W. Clapier Street (the "Clapier Street Buildings"), even though the Clapier Street Buildings have since been demolished.

The Property Does Not Reflect a Distinctive Architectural Style under Criterion C

First, the Property fails to satisfy Criterion C. Section 14-1004(1)(c) of the Philadelphia Code provides that a building or site satisfies Criterion C if it "reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style." On this basis, the Nominator alleges that (i) the Property, along with the now-demolished outbuildings previously located at 419 W. Clapier Street, constitutes the "most complete surviving suburban ensemble in Germantown," and (ii) the Property "is a distinguished example of Germantown's domestic architecture from the last half of the 19th century, exemplifying the Italianate houses for the area with stylistic embellishments added in the later Victorian period [by Mantle Fielding]."

However, as explained in the PHC's staff recommendation (the "Staff Recommendation"), the Clapier Street Buildings, including those identified as the Carriage House, Coachman's Residence, Gardener's Cottage, Greenhouse, and Garage, previously located at 419 W. Clapier Street, no longer exist. The Clapier Street Buildings were demolished by the owner of 419 W. Clapier Street following the PHC's rejection of the nomination of those buildings. Accordingly, the Property cannot be part of a "complete surviving suburban ensemble," because the Clapier Street Buildings no longer exist.

Nor does the Property satisfy Criterion C as "exemplifying the Italianate houses for the area." Even if it once exemplified the Italianate style, the Property has been significantly altered, as shown in the photographs included in Exhibit B. The rear façade of the Property was reconstructed with beige stucco and non-historic, modern windows. The entire side porch has also been demolished. As the Staff Recommendation notes, the Property is "unremarkable" and "better examples of the Italianate and [Mantle] Fielding's work" exist throughout Germantown. In fact, while the Nomination notes that the Dodge family "moved into the House in 1891 after having commissioned architect Mantle Fielding to undertake

alterations," the Nomination also acknowledges that "these alterations [by Fielding] are not documented". The Nomination only guesses that Fielding "seemed to have added a Victorian sheen to the House" and "most likely changed several windows." Nomination at 26. Because the Nomination does not identify with any certainty how Fielding altered the Property, those alterations cannot support designation.

Given the recent demolition of the Clapier Street Buildings, the significant alterations that have been made to the House, and the lack of certainty around Fielding's alterations, the Property cannot satisfy Criterion C.

The Property Does Not Exemplify Cultural, Social, or Historical Heritage of the Community

Second, the Nomination incorrectly asserts that the Property exemplifies "the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community" under Criterion J. However, the only economic or social significance alleged by the Nomination is that the Property's occupants were "upper middle class and affluent Philadelphians." As explained in the Staff Recommendation, affluence alone is not a measure of historical significance.

The Nomination provides a detailed overview of the Carson, Strawbridge, and Dodge families who occupied the Property during the stated period of significance between 1855 and 1954, none of whom rise to a level that would merit historical designation under Criterion J. Members of the Carson family, who occupied the Property until 1882, were dry goods merchants who "met the profile of Philadelphia's business elite." George Stockton Strawbridge then occupied the Property for only nine years between 1882 and 1891. While he shared a notable surname, George was just the brother of the Strawbridge & Clothier co-founder, Justus Strawbridge, who lived nearby at 5008 McKean (an estate which has since been demolished). Likewise, the Dodge family, which occupied the Property from 1891 until 1954 were similarly representative only of a "prosperous" upper class. In short, while the Nomination describes a house that was occupied by well-to-do Philadelphians, it fails to establish any basis for its assertion that the Property satisfies Criterion J.

The Owners Remain Faithful Stewards of the Property

Most importantly, while the Owners oppose the nomination to the Philadelphia Historic Register, they have invested considerable time, care, and resources into the Property since purchasing it in 2005. In 1999, and prior to the Owners' purchase of the Property, the home suffered a catastrophic fire which severely compromised the structural integrity and appearance of the House. During an attempted rehabilitation of the home in 2002 by prior owners, the rear stone façade, as well as portions of the roof, collapsed, after which the

House remained vacant and on the brink of demolition due to its imminently dangerous condition (photos of 2002 condition and prior L&I violations are attached in Exhibit C)[1].

Fortunately, the Owners purchased the Property three years later in 2005 and began the long road of rehabilitation. At the time of the Owners' purchase, the Home had no kitchen, no heating system, and only one working bathroom. Since 2005, the Owners have incurred significant financial expense totaling more than $339,000 dollars, as well as emotional strain, in connection with the restoration of the Property. These expenses have included $21,000 for the repair of the sewer system and water lines, $242,000 to rebuild and repair exterior walls and porches, $14,300 for repair and replacement of windows and doors, $22,500 to install a kitchen and bathroom, and $40,000 for roof restoration.

If the Owners had been required to comply with the restoration standards for a historically designated structure at the time they purchased the Property, the reconstruction costs would have been significantly higher (perhaps prohibitively so) and the Property may have continued to deteriorate.

Today, the work to repair the Home remains ongoing. While the Owners oppose the historic designation of the Property due to the increased expense that would result, they are committed to the continued restoration of their family home. Planned, outstanding improvements include:

- Repointing the exterior stone facade, with estimates currently ranging from $15,000 to $42,000.

- Installation of stone veneer on the rear façade to better match the Wissahickon schist of the other three facades. A $9,000 estimate for this work was received in 2007; costs have likely increased significantly.

- Reconstruction of the side porch, currently estimated to be roughly $15,000 to $20,000.

This scope of improvements already carries a significant price tag, and that cost will increase further if the Property is designated historic, jeopardizing the Owners' ability to complete these (and other) projects and remain in their family home.

[1] Prior to Owner's purchase of the Property, L&I had issued multiple building code violations in January 2003, February 2003, and April 2004, all relating to the House's partial collapse and the imminent danger of further collapse.

Very truly yours,



Meredith S. Trego

MST/mpg
Enclosure

Exhibit A

Rejection Letter

[attached]

Exhibit B

5000 McKean Avenue – Current, Altered Condition





Exhibit C

Condition of 5000 McKean Avenue Circa 2002



The back section of the roof and floor of the enclose porch has also collapsed.





CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

DEPARTMENT OF LICENSES AND INSPECTIONS

Property: 5000 MC KEAN AVE NO: 213364

WILL BE BILLED FOR ALL COSTS INCURRED INCLUDING AN ADMINISTRATIVE FEE. FAILURE TO PAY SUCH BILL WILL RESULT IN A LIEN BEING PLACED AGAINST THE PROPERTY (SEE PM-307.6). THIS DESIGNATION WILL REMAIN UNTIL THE STRUCTURE IS MADE SAFE AND SECURE OR TAKEN DOWN AND REMOVED. IF YOU INTEND TO APPEAL THIS VIOLATION, YOU MUST APPLY AT BOARDS ADMINISTRATION, PUBLIC SERVICE CONCOURSE, MUNICIPAL SERVICES BUILDING, 1401 JOHN F. KENNEDY BLVD. PHILADELPHIA, PA 19102, WITHIN 5 DAYS OF THE DATE OF THIS NOTICE. YOU WILL NEED TO REFER TO THE ACCOUNT NUMBER ON THIS NOTICE TO FILE AN APPEAL. (SEE A-801.2)
FIRST FLOOR PORCH

PM-307.1/1:

THE DEPARTMENT HAS INSPECTED THE SUBJECT STRUCTURE AND DESIGNATED IT AS UNSAFE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 307 OF THE PHILADELPHIA PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODE. (SEE PM-307.1) IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: IF YOU FAIL TO COMPLY WITH THIS ORDER THE CITY MAY ELIMINATE THE UNSAFE CONDITION BY REPAIR OR DEMOLITION USING ITS OWN FORCES OR BY CONTRACT AND THE OWNER WILL BE BILLED FOR ALL COSTS INCURRED INCLUDING AN ADMINISTRATIVE FEE. FAILURE TO PAY SUCH BILL WILL RESULT IN A LIEN BEING PLACED AGAINST THE PROPERTY (SEE PM-307.6). THIS DESIGNATION WILL REMAIN UNTIL THE STRUCTURE IS MADE SAFE AND SECURE OR TAKEN DOWN AND REMOVED. IF YOU INTEND TO APPEAL THIS VIOLATION, YOU MUST APPLY AT BOARDS ADMINISTRATION, PUBLIC SERVICE CONCOURSE, MUNICIPAL SERVICES BUILDING, 1401 JOHN F. KENNEDY BLVD. PHILADELPHIA, PA 19102, WITHIN 5 DAYS OF THE DATE OF THIS NOTICE. YOU WILL NEED TO REFER TO THE ACCOUNT NUMBER ON THIS NOTICE TO FILE AN APPEAL. (SEE A-801.2)
FIRST FLOOR PORCH

PM-306.0/1:

THE DEPARTMENT HAS INSPECTED THE SUBJECT VACANT PREMISES AND DESIGNATED IT AS UNSAFE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 306 OF THE PHILADELPHIA PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODE. DURING THE PERIOD OF THE VACANCY OR REHABILITATION YOU MUST MAINTAIN THE PREMISES IN A CLEAN, SAFE, AND SECURE CONDITION. ALL BUILDING DOORS, WINDOWS AND OPENINGS FROM THE ROOF, OR OTHER AREAS MUST BE KEPT IN GOOD REPAIR. WHERE SUCH DOORS OR WINDOWS OR ENTRANCE TO OPENINGS ARE READILY ACCESSIBLE TO TRESPASSERS, THEY MUST BE KEPT SECURELY LOCKED, FASTENED OR OTHERWISE SECURED. THE PREMISES MUST BE KEPT FREE OF DEBRIS. THE ROOF AND DRAINAGE SYSTEM MUST BE MAINTAINED SO AS TO PREVENT DAMAGE TO THIS OR ADJOINING PREMISES. (SEE PM-306.0 ET AL) IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: IF YOU FAIL TO COMPLY WITH THIS ORDER THE CITY MAY CLEAN OR SEAL THE BUILDING, REPAIR THE ROOF AND DRAINAGE, OR DEMOLISH THE BUILDING, AS IT DEEMS NECESSARY. THE CITY MAY DO SO WITH ITS OWN FORCES OR BY

AN:

TO CONTACT THE INSPECTOR NAMED ABOVE, PLEASE CALL 685-3749, SEND THEM A FAX AT 685-3734 OR CALL 685-3746 TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR INSPECTION. (AN)

PM-102.4/2:

THE OWNER OF EVERY VACANT BUILDING MUST OBTAIN A LICENSE FROM THE DEPARTMENT. FOR LICENSE INFORMATION CALL 215 686-2490. (SEE PM-102.4)

AN:

TO CONTACT THE INSPECTOR NAMED ABOVE, PLEASE CALL 685-3749, SEND THEM A FAX AT 685-3734 OR CALL 685-3746 TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR INSPECTION.

Continued on..... 3

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA
DEPARTMENT OF LICENSES AND INSPECTIONS

Contractual Services Unit
Municipal Services Building
1401 J.F. Kennedy Blvd.
Rm. 1140
Philadelphia, PA 19102

CASE DATA INFORMATION

5000 MC KEAN AVE UNIT: 0000

Case No: 4968

Date of Notice: 03/03/05

Owner's Information

DOMINGO NEGRO & MARIE P H/W
05000 MC KEAN AVE
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19144-4125

Violations

Violation Code	Description	Date
PM-308.1/5	The floor/ceiling assembly between the indicated and the floor below of the subject structure is partially collapsed and in imminent danger of further collapse. The structure has therefc been designated as imminently dangerous in accordance with Section 308 of the Philadelphia Property Maintenance Code. You must immediately repair the floor/ceiling assembly or demolish the structure in whole or in part. Please see addition important information below. [See PM-308.1] **Location: ALL INTERIOR**	01/03/03
PM-308.1/7	The indicated wall of the subject structure is bulged and in imminent danger of collapse. The structure has therefore beer designated as imminently dangerous in accordance with Section 308 of the Philadelphia Property Maintenance Code. You must immediately repair the wall or demolish the structure whole or in part. Please see additional important information below. [See PM-308.1] **Location: SOUTH**	04/05/04
PM-308.1/11	The indicated wall of the subject structure is partially collapsed and in imminent danger of further collapse. The structure has therefore been designated as imminently dangerous in accordance with Section 308 of the Philadelphia Property Maintenance Code. You must immediately repair the wall or demolish the structure in whole or in part. Please see addition important information below. [See PM-308.1] **Location: NORTH & WEST**	04/05/04

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DEPARTMENT OF LICENSES AND INSPECTIONS

Contractual Services Unit
Municipal Services Building
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PM-308.1/1	The roof of the subject structure is deteriorated and in imminer danger of collapse. The structure has therefore been designated as imminently dangerous in accordance with Section 308 of the Philadelphia Property Maintenance Code. You must immediately repair the roof or demolish the structure whole or in part. Please see additional important information below. [See PM-308.1] **Location: MAIN,PORCH & REAR PORCH**	01/03/03
PM-308.1/2	The roof of the subject structure is partially collapsed and in imminent danger of further collapse. The structure has therefc been designated as imminently dangerous in accordance with Section 308 of the Philadelphia Property Maintenance Code. You must immediately repair the roof or demolish the structure whole or in part. Please see additional important information below. [See PM-308.1] **Location: MAIN & REAR PORCH**	02/03/03

Inspection History

Insp #	Insp Type	Insp Type	Status	Started	Completed	Insp By
6176	L_INITIAL	L_INITIAL	2	**********	20-DEC-02	
45586	L_INITIAL	L_INITIAL	5	05-APR-04	14-APR-04	169582
76709	L_LATERAL	L_LATERAL	0			