

Minutes to Meeting August 7, 2008

Attendees: 45

General Discussion: General discussion centered around the current public debate over the Unisys sign, which would not be permitted under current zoning. To construct the sign, Unisys would need a variance, and would therefore need to demonstrate a hardship before the zoning board.

The case is a test case for a new zoning board (ZBA), as the consistency of ZBA rulings has suffered under an aging zoning code. Unisys wants to place a sign at the middle levels of a high rise, when precedents and zoning suggest otherwise. DAG' s position has been that identity-giving features such as lighting and signage are more appropriate at the top or bottom of a building or through association with a building' s image, i.e. Comcast Tower.

It was noted that the Inquirer said voting against the sign was "anti business and old fashioned." Others noted that the actual anti-business and "old fashioned" solution would be to approve the sign despite current regulations protecting the public.

Many other ideas were bandied about during discussion: Penn Praxis will release new Penn' s Landing Plan and Artists from China are here to restore the Chinatown Gate

Presentation: Johnathan Farnham, PHD; Head of the Philadelphia Historic Commission (PHC), presented an overview of proposed legislation that would protect historic interiors of buildings in Philadelphia. Currently Philadelphia' s historic preservation ordinance only covers building exteriors, however a number of other US cities have had such authority for a long time. Councilman Bill Green

introduced the proposed legislation last year bill based on NYC interiors law. The bill is currently making its way through the legislative process with City Council hearing on Sept 18th, 2008.

Mr. Farnham indicated that probably only a few hundred spaces would be of the caliber to be designated under the legislation, including such spaces as City Hall, 30th Street Station, Wanamaker' s Grand Court and the Crystal Tearoom.

A few interesting features of the legislation include the following:

- A building need not have historic status on the outside to be designated on the inside.
- Spaces eligible for designation include must be open to the public.
- Existing spaces that were formerly open to the public but have already been converted would not be eligible, however if a public space that was designated was converted, it would have to comply.
- If a formerly privately owned space became public it would be subject to designation.

During discussion the audience asked if the banners in 30th Street would be subject to review and the answer is "Yes." There was a concern regarding the resources available at the Historic Commission to handle the new workload. Mr. Farnham indicated expressed optimism that the demands on his agency can now be documented under the new process put in place by the MDO to measure government performance. Regarding the Boyd Theatre, John Gallery praised D. Brownlee, H. Steinberg and H. Myers on their excellent testimony before the Commission that not only demonstrates the future value of the new interiors legislation, but resulted in protecting the historic character of the Boyd Theatre in the meantime.