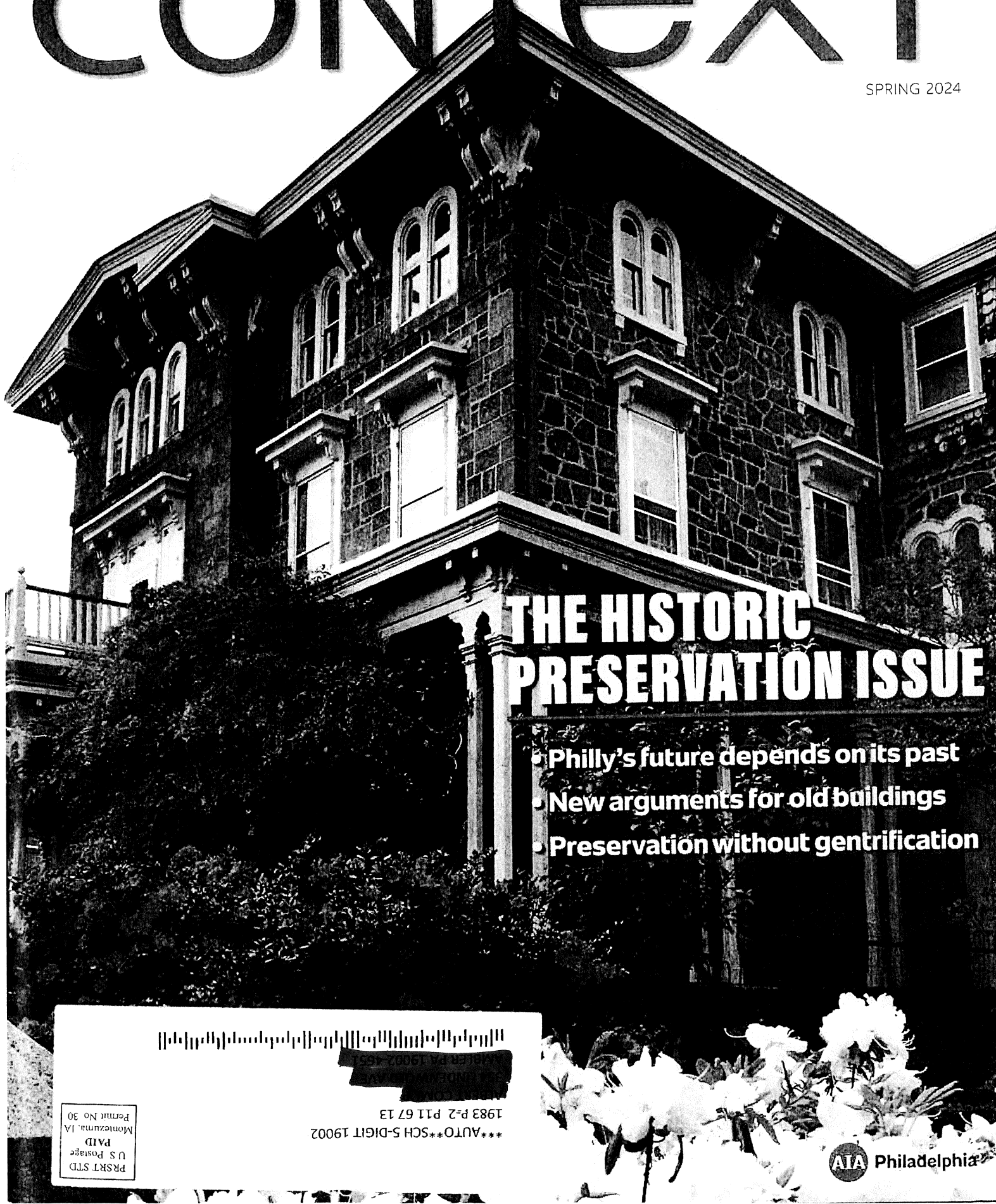


CONTEXT

SPRING 2024



THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION ISSUE

- Philly's future depends on its past
- New arguments for old buildings
- Preservation without gentrification



****AUTO**SCH 5-DIGIT 19002
1983 P-2 P11 67 13
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19102-4551

PRSRT STD
U S Postage
PAID
Monterey, IA
Permit No 30

AIA Philadelphia

Jewelers Row in 2024, after its 2017 demolition [below]. A clip from the Philadelphia Inquirer, April 20, 2017 [lower right]. A public task force meeting at Independence Visitors Center, October 3, 2017 [bottom].



THE PAST IS PROLOGUE

PHILADELPHIA'S HISTORIC PRESERVATION MOVEMENT CELEBRATES ITS SUCCESSES WHILE LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

BY HARRIS M. STEINBERG, FAIA, AND DOMINIQUE HAWKINS, FAIA

PHOTOS: DAVID SPOWILLE, TOP; CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, RIGHT



The Philadelphia preservation community was on high alert.

It was the fall of 2016. Toll Brothers had successfully pulled an as-of-right demolition permit for five buildings on the famed Jewelers Row on the 700 block of Samson Street. In its place, they planned a towering 29-story luxury residential building.

Jewelers Row, a singular planned residential strip dating from 1799, is a Philadelphia icon and the oldest diamond district in the U.S. But it was not historically protected by the adjoining Society Hill or Old Philadelphia historic districts. To further complicate things, existing site zoning encouraged density and height in this area of the city. A battle royale played out across the preservation community and within the press, but there was nothing that could be done to rectify the situation.

There was a silver lining to this dust-up: the creation of the Mayor's Task Force on Historic Preservation.

In April 2017, Philadelphia Mayor James Kenney convened 33 experts in law, development, architecture, and historic preservation, along with community leaders and others. We were honored to be among the membership of this diverse and engaged group. He charged us with developing a set of actionable recommendations that could strengthen preservation in Philadelphia while balancing the need for development. The Task Force was supported by a grant from the William Penn Foundation, with additional support from the National Trust on Historic Preservation.

The Task Force met regularly beginning in July 2017 and worked through late-2018, educating itself, learning about best practices, and analyzing how Philadelphia stacked up to

peer cities. Working in subcommittees focused on surveying historic resources, regulatory control, financial incentives, and education and outreach, the Task Force developed a series of overarching recommendations that incentivized the twin goals of preservation and development. The goal was for this work to be embraced by a wide range of stakeholders from die-hard preservationists to for-profit developers.

THE TASK FORCE SUBMITTED ITS FINAL REPORT TO THE KENNEY ADMINISTRATION IN APRIL 2019.

Almost seven years later, it's time to take stock and reflect on the next steps. To that end, we called upon Martha Cross, AICP, Philadelphia City Planning Commission interim deputy director for planning and zoning under the Kenney administration, to sum up the progress made on the Task Force's recommendation. Cross expertly staffed the Task Force, helping the group navigate the sometimes-conflicting concerns of the city government, preservation advocates, and the development community.

Cross' report on the accomplishments of the past four years is organized according to the eight central recommendations of the Task Force. Following each is our evaluation of those accomplishments and analysis of what remains to be done — our charge to the administration of the city's new mayor, Cherelle Parker.

1. PLAN FOR SUCCESS

The creation of an internal government Historic Preservation Policy Team

The Historic Preservation Policy Team, formed in 2019, has been actively collaborating across city departments to advance pres-

REAL ESTATE > COMMERCIAL

Kenney aiming to keep preservation pledges with task force on historic protections

The move comes amid a wave of development that has resulted in the loss of historically designated buildings such as the Boyd Theatre and that is imperiling properties in the path of planned construction, including a large swath of the storied Jewelers Row shopping street.

by Jacob Adelman, STAFF WRITER | Columnist
Published Apr. 20, 2017, 6:00 a.m. ET



ervation goals in internal city policies. Led by Laura Spina, the team has conducted a survey of city-owned facilities and meets regularly.

Collaboration with the City Planning Commission (PCPC)

Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) staff now work closely with PCPC staff on outreach efforts related to neighborhood zoning and preservation, ensuring coordination, and avoiding duplicative survey efforts.

NEXT STEPS:

USE ZONING AS A TOOL TO SUPPORT PRESERVATION

The Jewelers Row demolition demonstrated the threat to historic places when zoning incentivizes new construction rather than maintaining historic structures. When developers can profit from a 29-story luxury residential building, it is difficult to convince them to preserve five- and six-story 120-year-old buildings that are of far less potential value.

2. CREATE A HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY

Treasure Philly! (phlpreservation.org)

An ongoing citywide historic and cultural resources survey plan, known as Treasure Philly!, is being piloted in neighborhoods surrounding the Broad Street, Germantown Avenue, and Erie Avenue intersection. A write up is expected to run in *Planning Magazine* this winter.

Arches implementation

The Arches platform, a state-of-the-art open-source geospatial platform, designed by the Getty Conservation Institute and the World Monument's Fund, is being implemented with funding from the state and the citywide survey project. The database is positioned to be public facing, with additional work needed for maximum public utility.

Increased staffing within the Philadelphia Historical Commission

The PHC staff has grown to ten positions, including an additional historic preservation planner and a Community Initiatives Specialist (CIS), both set to enhance survey work and community outreach.

NEXT STEPS:

The city has implemented several recommendations to establish a framework for broadening Philadelphia's historic resource inventory. The survey process is labor intensive and costly but necessary for decision-making. The development of a comprehensive inventory will be a multi-year effort requiring dedicated leadership and commitments from the mayor and City Council, and assistance from the advocacy community as well as from public, private, and nonprofit organizations, and volunteers. Emphasis should be placed on those neighborhoods that have been overlooked in the past, in order to tell the broader story of our citizens.

3. MODIFY HISTORICAL COMMISSION PROCESSES

eCLIPSE

The launch of the eCLIPSE online permitting system in March 2020 has streamlined the review and approval of building permit applications, efficiently accommodating remote processes.

NEXT STEPS:

The Historical Commission review process remains opaque to many applicants. The eCLIPSE permitting system "flags" projects subject to commission review, and the implementation of online meetings during COVID has encouraged appli-

Buildings in the "Treasure Philly!" pilot project area: rowhouses on Fifteenth Street, left, and Broad Street, looking north from Erie Avenue, in 2023.



cant and public participation. But the city lacks a clear, user-friendly, illustrated guide to show applicants what is likely to be approved by the Philadelphia Historical Commission. Along with promoting public education and outreach, this will help applicants meet the permitting requirements for historic properties and understand the city's preservation goals.

It is important to modify city policies in order to regulate substantial alterations within city-designated historic districts, but this will be more challenging. Unlike most cities, PHC's regulatory control does not extend to vacant lots and non-contributing buildings within historic districts. New construction that is incongruous with its surroundings can erode the historic character of a neighborhood. We need to address this problem.

4. REDUCE HISTORIC BUILDING DEMOLITION & BROADEN NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION

Linked regulatory control of demolition in Neighborhood Conservation Overlay (NCO) Districts to the issuance of building permits

Legislation enacted in January 2020 requires applicants in NCO districts to obtain a building permit for new construction before obtaining a demolition permit for existing buildings.

Increased historic districts and designations related to Black history

Since 2017, the PHC has increased listings in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places by at least 26%, designated more historic districts than all previous mayoral administrations combined, and recognized more sites significant to Black and LGBTQ+ history.

New (tiered) historic districts

Over the past year, PCPC has convened meetings with an advisory committee to provide input on the new district recommendations, worked on legislation and new regulations, and is now identifying an area for piloting the new district type.

Spirit of place

As a part of a Philadelphia City Planning Commission joint workplan with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), staff created a robust report of how cities across the country recognize and preserve culture. Staff will work with the new administration and with the Commerce Department to identify the greatest opportunities to bring these ideas to Philadelphia.

NEXT STEPS:

Great strides have been made in the preservation of Philadelphia's neighborhoods. There has been a steady increase in the number of historic districts and growing recognition of sites associated with Black and LGBTQ+ history.

One of the Task Force's greatest challenges was to identify means of encouraging the preservation of neighborhoods by disincentivizing the demolition of buildings for new development while supporting property owners who, while dismayed by the erosion of their neighborhoods' character, lack the financial means or desire to meet the rigorous requirements of the PHC.

To address this, we need to enact the Task Force recommendations for the creation of a range of "tiered" districts with a streamlined nomination process and several levels of regulatory control. We should also adopt the recommendations for financial support for owners: basic financial incentives in districts with the least regulatory control and larger incentives in districts subject to the highest level of regulatory review. The city is in the process of identifying a pilot project to work the kinks out of the process. It would be encouraging if the pilot project were conducted in a non-traditional historic district, providing protection for an otherwise overlooked neighborhood.

5. CLARIFY THE DESIGNATION PROCESS

Additional staff resources have been added to review and author nominations.

NEXT STEPS:

Although the additional staff is relieving the nomination backlog, the historic designation process continues to be a frustration for many. There is a lack of clear guidance on the designation process and on the information that must be provided for a nomination to be deemed "complete" by the staff.

6. INCENTIVIZE HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

The creation of ADUs in locally registered historic properties has been allowed, providing potential revenue that homeowners may use for building maintenance.

Changes to parking requirements in the zoning code

Parking requirements for locally registered historic properties have been eliminated upon redevelopment. Parking requirements have been reduced by 50% for expansions of existing historic properties.

By-right uses for special purpose buildings

This zoning code change allows more land uses "by-right" for non-residential, locally registered historic properties.

Construction tax abatement preserved for older buildings

While the residential new construction tax abatement will be reduced by 10% each year, renovations of existing structures are still allowed the full abatement.

Tangled Title Fund

Funding from City Council's Neighborhood Preservation Initiative has supported the Tangled Title Fund, administered by the Philadelphia Volunteers for the Indigent Program (PhillyVIP).

NEXT STEPS

The city acted quickly to implement some of the Task Force's recommended incentives for the preservation of historic buildings, including allowing the construction of accessory dwelling units, reducing the parking requirements, and allowing by-right "special purpose" zoning for those buildings. Owners are taking advantage of these opportunities.

The city has also supported a reduction in the new construction tax abatement, which promoted demolition rather than rehabilitation, and it has made efforts to clear "tangled titles," which often impede the preservation of older buildings.

These efforts are a commendable beginning, but if preservation is going to be prioritized and the new tiered district process made effective, additional incentives will be required to balance development pressures.

7. SUPPORT ARCHAEOLOGY

Consulting support is planned for 2024 in accordance with the State Historic Preservation Office's request to facilitate complete Section 106 reviews in Philadelphia without state participation.

NEXT STEPS

Archaeological resources, by their nature, are unseen, and when encountered, they often dismay or confuse property owners. Providing clear information regarding likely archaeological deposits and what to do if they are encountered, and ensuring appropriate staff support remain high priorities.

8. ACTIVATE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Archive of minutes back to 1956

All minutes of Commission and its Committees' meetings have been digitized and added to an online archive.

Add an archivist

The Division of Planning and Zoning is now hiring an archivist to evaluate, scan, and archive decades of paper drawings and files, making them more readily available to the public.

NEXT STEPS

There is a general lack of understanding of the current Historical Commission designation and review process, and this will only get worse as new processes are implemented. The current PHC website is utilitarian, providing basic information to facilitate the processing of designation nominations and permit review applications. Clear, accessible information is needed to dispel confusion and myths about historic preservation and educate citizens on its benefits.

LOOKING FORWARD

The city's accomplishments fall short of addressing all of the Task Force's recommendations, but they should be viewed within the context of the last four years. Less than a year after the release of the Task Force report, COVID-19 shifted the city's focus to the health and well-being of its citizens. Through that lens, great strides have been made to protect the city's historic resources.

Now, with a new mayoral administration, we have the opportunity to move the remaining Task Force recommendations to the forefront. We must continue the vital work of restraining destruction, incentivizing preservation, and increasing public awareness. And we must encourage more Philadelphians to participate in preservation — democratizing the stories and places that are saved in order to represent the breadth of our history and the diversity of our city's citizens.

Harris M. Steinberg, FAIA, is the executive director of the Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation at Drexel University. Harris served as chair of the Mayor's Task Force on Historic Preservation.

Dominique Hawkins, FAIA, is a principal in the Philadelphia firm of Preservation Design Partnerships. Dominique served as vice chair of the Mayor's Task Force on Historic Preservation.

Martha Cross, AICP, is a Principal with MAKE Advisory Services. She was recently Interim Deputy Director of the City's Department of Planning and Development for the Division of Planning and Zoning and staffed the Mayor's Task Force on Historic Preservation.