

ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY
CITY HISTORICAL
SOCIETY



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<http://www.uchs.net>

Mike Hardy, Editor

THE NOMINATION IS IN! COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Tim Wood, Interim Co President, UCHS

Architectural historian **George Thomas**, commissioned by UCHS to revise the nomination for the proposed local **Spruce Hill Historic District**, has delivered a completed draft of the nomination and district inventory to the **Philadelphia Historical Commission** for their review. Now the official process of review by the commission, the surveying and photographing of all the properties in the proposed district to establish the “base line” for evaluating future proposed changes to their street front facades and the official series of public notices and meetings sponsored by the commission can begin.

For months now, neighbors in the proposed district have been given the opportunity to learn about, raise questions and discuss what this designation could mean for protecting the historic fabric of the neighborhood. Working with the **Spruce Hill Community Association**, UCHS sponsored a series of small, informal block meetings hosted by volunteers in the area who opened their homes for the meetings. Led by UCHS and SHCA members and other volunteers, these meetings have been very successful, with residents of over 30 blocks attending 16 meetings. UCHS and SHCA thank those who volunteered for this process whether to host, speak, leaflet or distribute information. The process allowed for airing of legitimate questions about historic districts in Philadelphia along with the opportunity to correct many of the misstatements circulated by the opposition. We learned also of the broad and deep commitment that exists among property owners who support the nomination. Those attending these meetings were offered the opportunity to indicate their support for the nomination by returning a postcard to UCHS, a sample of which is enclosed for your own use.

In addition to these meetings, UCHS has worked with staff of the Historical Commission to prepare an information packet of frequently asked questions about historic districts; over 1000 have been distributed. A wide variety of information is also available at the Spruce Hill Historic District web site (<http://sprucehill.uchs.net>). A large-scale, well-attended public meeting in April, arranged by UCHS and SHCA in conjunction with the office of **Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell** and the Historical Commission, also provided neighborhood

residents with an opportunity to hear about the proposal and ask questions of George Thomas and Historical Commission staff member **Laura Spina**. Over 200 written questions were submitted that night—answers to all of them are available at <http://sprucehill.uchs.net/faqmeeting.htm>.

THE OPPOSITION

With the announcement last year that UCHS was renewing its 15 year old effort to secure local historic district status for the Spruce Hill area of University City, a small but vocal minority has defined the issue, not as an effort to protect and preserve the rich and special architectural heritage of the area, but as an assault on their property rights, as in “Nobody is going to tell **ME** what to do with my property.”!

With this battlecry, the group has been pursuing a campaign of misinformation, rumor, hyperbole, and scare-tactics to convince others that 1) historic preservation is unnecessary and 2) is an unconstitutional infringement of liberty and 3) will so advance rental costs as to create major displacement.

They began this effort by claiming that historical designation was a form of unconstitutional “taking” of private property, despite the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s ruling upholding the city’s historic preservation ordinance. When challenged, they next asserted that there was little of architectural value in the area worthy of designation and preservation, declaring that the buildings of Spruce Hill were undistinguished from other structures in the city and should be considered only as commercial real estate and treated accordingly. Therefore, any potential increase, however small, in maintaining the street front facades would trigger major rent increases and drive out less affluent renters from the district, despite recent studies that suggest otherwise. The assumption here is that maintenance costs (even those associated only with maintaining the street front of the building) were major determinants of rental rates, an assertion not supported by any but a handful of like-minded local landlords.

The group has also continued to insist that the Historical Commission would also regulate paint colors, despite repeated assurances to the contrary. Declaring that present conditions do not warrant historic protections (assuming no damaging changes will occur in the future!), they are unconcerned with preserving exterior historic features or arresting examples of “demolition by neglect,” since, such are seen as only as the owners’ rights to do anything they want to do with their own property, including abandonment or outright demolition. Classic instances of such, like **4001 Baltimore Avenue**,

4425 Spruce Street, 4320 Osage Avenue and the like are dismissed as the necessary and unavoidable by-products of the preservation of **ME**.

Nor would they have sympathy for residents of the historically certified block of 4600 Hazel Avenue in their efforts to prevent the continued destruction of **4643 Hazel Avenue**, where the recent mutilation of the street façade has prompted the Commission to issue a “cease and desist” order before the entire intact streetscape is permanently compromised and defaced. UCHS will continue to assist these neighbors to prevent such an outcome, as it will continue to advocate local historic designation as a critical tool for preventing other losses to the historic heritage of University City.



HOW CAN YOU HELP? First, by signing and returning the enclosed postcard indicating your support for historic district designation. By doing so, whether you live in or outside the proposed Spruce Hill District, you send a message to friend, foe and funders alike that the opposition does not represent the predominant view in University City and that we do care to maintain the historic character of our built environment. Second, consider adding your own statement of support to those represented among the “other voices” on our Spruce Hill Historic District web site, <http://sprucehill.uchs.net/voices.htm>. Those who wish to do so can briefly outline their reasons for supporting this particular district or historic districts in general and send a letter to UCHS at PO Box 31927, Philadelphia PA 19104 or by e-mail to district@uchs.net.

And, even though the ball is now in the Historical Commission’s court, expect to hear more of the same from the opposition. Given their commitment to bedrock selfishness whatever the consequences, they can do no other. The area deserves better.



WALNUT WEST RENEWED

Beth Ann Johnson, Friends of Walnut West
Kathy Dowdell, UCHS Interim Co President

You might have noticed the new, long-awaited activity around the Walnut West branch of the Free Library at 40th and Walnut Streets. The architects are well along with plans for the renovation of this building, the subject of a long, sustained and hopefully successful campaign lead by the Friends and

supported by UCHS to save and reuse this historic structure.

Demolition (of interior partitions; old ceilings; the existing first floor) is expected to take 60 to 90 days. At the end of the demolition phase, the architects will check measurements and review any surprises discovered; they will then complete their drawings and specifications, and the project will be sent out to bid. Everyone is working hard to hold to a tight schedule.

Plans call for the existing basement to be filled; the first floor will be lowered to be level with the exterior sidewalks; and a new interior second floor will be built. Because the original ceilings were quite high, and the first floor is being lowered several feet, the new second floor will closely resemble the volume of the original space. This will be the main space of the library, lit from above by skylights. The main entrance is being moved back to its original location on 40th Street, and a new two-story bay with full windows will be built on the Walnut Street side to replace the “picture window” entry installed in the 1950’s.

The library will retain many of the functional features of the old building, including a community meeting room, a children’s area, and computer spaces; the exterior will be largely restored. We look forward to the continued progress of this project and thank **Marty Cabry** and **Alisa Orduna-Sneed** of **Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell’s** office for arranging meetings with the architect and the city’s **Capital Programs Office** for updates on the progress of the planning for Walnut West Library.

Private monies raised by the Friends will be used to enhance the materials used in the lobby (i.e., hardwoods and stone instead of plastic laminate, new paneling, display cases, etc). The fund raised, \$31,200, is still short of the \$8000 needed to complete the lobby area with terrazzo tile instead of vinyl. If you would like to add to the voluntary contributions here, contact the Friends at 4025 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, a non-profit, 501.c 3 organization, and winner of last year’s **UCHS Preservation Initiative Award** for their campaign to save the library building, designed in 1904 by architect **Clarence Zantzinger (later Zantzinger, Borie & Medary)**, the first in Philadelphia established by **Andrew Carnegie** on land donated by local banker/resident **Clarence Clark** for this purpose.

ELECTIONS & INTRODUCTIONS

If you are a paid up member in good standing in UCHS, you should have a ballot enclosed for the election of additional Board Members to serve for the terms indicated. Some of these nominations will be new additions and some are interested in continuing their service to the Board. These latter are **Arlene Matzkin**, an architect from **Powelton Village**; **Nadine Landis**, a retired nurse/administra-

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tor and the Board's long-time Secretary and **Joan Wells**, a retired history teacher from **Cedar Park**, devoted to historic preservation throughout University City and **D-L Wormley**, **PRIMER** programs director for the **University City District/UCHS**.

The "new" faces introduce themselves as follows:

Joanne Aitken - I am an architect who has lived in University City - and been restoring a house - since 1983. I have been a member of UCHS since then, serving on the Board in the mid-1980's when I organized the "renovations-in-progress" house tours. I was active in the early efforts to help **Calvary Church** retain and restore their building and worked on the first University City Saturday promotions. Since then I have been active in the **Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects**, serving as President in 1999. I am interested in working on the UCHS Board to help preserve our historic architectural fabric and help protect the precious and endangered amenities of our urban life.

Carol Dubie - My main interest is the physical fabric of the neighborhood - the buildings, fencing, landscapes and streets. I would like to see the society support a couple of targeted preservation projects in the neighborhood that would improve certain key streetscapes, demonstrate best practices, and get some visibility for the organization. I have a master's degree in historic preservation, worked in preservation from 1975-88, and am now a lawyer at **First Union/Wachovia**. I have been a University City homeowner since 1988.

Melani Lamond - When I moved to University City thirty years ago, UCHS' annual house tour quickly became my favorite local annual event, and having the opportunity to tour the wonderful Victorian houses in our community inspired me to begin my career in real estate! I hoped then, and still hope, to find appreciative owners to be the caretakers/restorers of every one of our historic houses. I've been on the board of UCHS before, serving as president for four years, and I was also on the original committee in 1987 that began the local historic district nomination work. Now that this project is finally able to move forward, I'd like to rejoin the board to see the nomination through and to help to further raise awareness about our unique historic neighborhood.

Sharon Ravitch - I am a new resident of University City, and have lived here with my husband since August of 2001. I am committed to the overall aesthetic quality of the neighborhood, with respect to house facades, greenery and overall respect for the integrity of UC's beauty. I am particularly interested in being a spokesperson for the restoration of vacant and poorly maintained homes. Before moving to UC, I lived in historic **Society Hill** and have learned much by listening to their process of preserving homes and streets. I am currently a professor at **Arcadia University** and am a doctoral graduate of Penn and a native Philadelphian.

Stephen Wagner - As a small real estate developer, I am committed to reinvigorating the urban environment through reuse and revitalization of existing building stock. Projects in Philadelphia include 5 single-family renovations, and 2 commercial to condo conversions in Center City and University City, with a new commercial to condo conversion in the planning stages. Prior to working in Philadelphia, I was involved in multiple renovation projects in San Francisco in affordable housing, including the restoration of a building in Oakland, CA for 100 units of affordable housing that received a **California Preservation Award**. As a recent transplant to University City, I am committed to bringing my experience to the neighborhood in an effort to expand on an already wonderful environment. My specific interests include the revitalization of **Baltimore Avenue** and designation of the Spruce Hill neighborhood as a Historic District.

Please mark and return your ballot by August 1, 2002 to allow the full Board to reconvene in September to plan a new year of activities for UCHS.

VICTORIAN SPRUCE HILL TOURS



Continue this fall, presented by the **Center City District** as part of **Walk Philadelphia**, a series of 47 guided architecture tours of the city and region. The Spruce Hill walking tour lasts approximately 1 to 2 hours and will leave from the **University City Arts League**, 4226 Spruce Streets, on Thursday, August 15, at 6:00 pm. and Saturday, August 31 and October 19 at 2:00 pm. No reservations are required.

Tour fees are \$10/person (\$8/person for students, including college students with valid ID) with children age 10 and under free if accompanied by an adult.

A complete listing of the season's offerings can be found at www.centercityphila.org or by picking up a **Walk Philadelphia** brochure at area museums, hotels, visitor centers and the **AIA Bookstore**. Or call (215) 848-9141 or email: walkphiladelphia@juno.com.

HISTORIC TROLLEYS ON THE WALL

Join in the dedication of Philadelphia's latest mural, "**Historic Trolleys of Philadelphia**," in the midst of the **West Philadelphia Streetcar Suburb Historic District** at 45th and Baltimore Avenue, 5:30 p.m., Wednesday, August 7 with the **University City District**, the **Philadelphia Department of Mural Arts Program**, artist **Karl Yoder** and others as they unveil two trolley images of yesteryear to honor the role of the trolley in Philadelphia's development, then and now.

IMAGES OF WEST PHILADELPHIA: UNIVERSITY CITY TO 52ND STREET

the first photographic history of the area in the last 100 years, by **Robert Morris Skaler**, is being sold by UCHS for \$23, including handling and shipping. All proceeds will benefit **UCHS's Historic Districts Nomination Fund**. Please send checks, together with your name and address to: **UCHS, P.O. Box 31927, Philadelphia, PA 19104.**

Among those renewing their dues to UCHS since the last newsletter are new **Sustainers of UCHS - Roy Harker & Bob Randano; Nancy Roth & Sig Larson; Don Gordon, Drumcliff Foundation;** new **Friends of UCHS - The John Bartram Association; Debra Kimmelman & Pamela Seida; Michael & Sylvia Brown; Marilyn & John Taylor; John & Betsey McCoubrey; University City Arts League.** Thank you for your special support.

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