



Third Task Force Meeting – Summary 19 October 2017

The Historic Preservation Task Force held their third meeting on the evening of October 19th in East Falls at Jefferson University. Approximately 80 members of the public attended the meeting and for the first half hour of the meeting shared with Task Force members their thoughts about the current state of historic preservation in Philadelphia and suggestions to strengthen it.

After hearing from residents, the Task Force finalized its Vision Statement below.

Vision Statement for Task Force

Philadelphia in 2035 is an internationally recognized leader in historic preservation practices, celebrating the unique identity of the city's historic buildings, blocks and neighborhoods through continued stewardship, innovative development, restoration and reuse.

Philadelphians are active protectors of their neighborhood history and cultural identity. In a groundbreaking partnership, the City government, civic leaders, planners, and preservation professionals identify and protect historic resources so that they may best be leveraged as assets by businesses, developers and residents, preserving both heritage and sense of place for current and future generations.

The City uses a comprehensive set of tools that include incentives, protections, education and planning to preserve historic places in active use and contribute to the extraordinary layering of history that makes Philadelphia unique.

Will Cook, Associate General Counsel of the National Trust presented a legal analysis of Philadelphia's Historic Preservation ordinance and regulations. Cook discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Philadelphia's Historic Preservation law and how it compares to our peer cities across the country. That report can be found [here](#).

Cook found that Philadelphia has a fundamentally strong ordinance that could be further strengthened by adding features used by other cities. Cook said the strengths of Philadelphia's ordinance include a:

- **Clear, broad definition of historic sites, places or objects** that can be designated including familiar visual features of neighborhoods that

- exemplify the “cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of a community”
- **Strong financial hardship requirement and flexible unnecessary hardship provisions** that allows the Historical Commission to relax its preservation standards in cases of economic hardship. In fact, the Historical Commission consider finances of each individual low-income or moderate-income historic property owner and may permit the owner to preserve the “basic form and rhythm” of the historic building rather than authentically restore the structure if necessary
 - **Affirmative maintenance requirement** that requires owners to care for their historic property in order to prevent demolition by neglect
 - **Objective standards for historic buildings** provided by Secretary of Interior’s standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

The ordinance does present challenges that the Task Force should explore, including:

- One-size-fits all historic designation so a rowhouse in a low-income neighborhood must meet the same standards as a city-defining landmark church
- Unclear definition of when demolition of a historic building is in the “public interest” and inability to delay demolition of properties that are not designated
- Poor protection of archeological resources

The Task Force's next meeting will be held at 8:30am on November 16, 2017 at 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor, PCPC Conference Room. Please join us.