

TOWNSHIP OF LOWER MERION

Building & Planning Committee

Issue Briefing

Topic: Historic Resource Inventory Amendments

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Date: June 7, 2018

I. Action To Be Considered By The Board:

Authorize staff to prepare an amendment to the Historic Resource Inventory (HRI) to upgrade the Class II historic resource at 1860 West Montgomery Avenue, Villanova, to a Class I historic resource.

II. Why This Issue Requires Board Consideration:

Historic Resource Inventory amendments must be reviewed and approved by the Board of Commissioners.

III. Current Policy Or Practice (If Applicable):

N/A

IV. Other Relevant Background Information:

The Historical Commission has been working to identify and recommend designation of significant un-protected or under-protected historic resources since 2015. A committee formed a list of over 30 potential candidates for enhanced protection, representing a variety of building types, uses, and locations. In 2015-16, the Township received a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant from the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) to hire a consultant to survey the selected properties and make recommendations as to their eligibility for the Historic Resource Inventory. Upon completion of these surveys, the Historical Commission reviewed them and reduced the list of properties to 13, at which time the Building & Planning Committee and Board of Commissioners removed one property from the list and instructed Township staff to investigate whether the properties recommended for Class I designation would qualify under the current criteria. Staff submitted the surveys to PHMC to obtain Determinations of Eligibility (DOE) for the National Register of Historic Places, which is one of the criteria for Class I designation.

On April 30, 2018, the Historical Commission held a special public meeting to review and recommend the inventory amendments. The Commission voted unanimously to

recommend the designation or upgrade of all ten resources, with contributing outbuildings as outlined in the consultant's surveys and listed below. The Commission also outlined which of the ten designation criteria (as described in § 88-18-A of the Township Code) applied to each of the properties they considered.

On May 16, 2018, the Board of Commissioners voted to delay a Class I upgrade for Clairemont (the Clothier Estate), 1860 West Montgomery Avenue, until June 13. The resource is described as follows:

Clairemont (Clothier Estate)

1860 West Montgomery Avenue, Villanova, Ward 6

Built 1917-18

Current Designation: Class II

Recommended Designation: Class I

Reason for Class I Eligibility: DOE

Matching HRI Designation Criteria: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10

Contributing Resources: Mansion, Carriage House

Attached are the following relevant Code sections:

§ 88-18-A: Historic Resource Inventory

§ 88-18-A: Procedure for Designation or Removal

§ 155-4-B: Definitions of Class I and Class II Historic Resources

Also attached is a description of the property's historic significance in terms of architectural, landscape, and individual significance.

V. Impact on Township Finances:

There is no significant impact on Township finances.

VI. Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Board of Commissioners authorize staff to prepare an ordinance to amend the HRI and designate the 1860 West Montgomery Avenue property as a Class I resource as recommended by the Historical Commission.

Designation Criteria and Definitions

§ 88-18 Historic Resource Inventory.

A. Criteria for designation. A building, structure or site, or a complex of the same, may be placed on the Historic Resource Inventory if it meets any three or more of the following criteria:

- (1) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the Township, county, region, commonwealth or nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past;
- (2) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the Township, county, region, commonwealth or nation;
- (3) Embodies an icon associated with an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (4) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;
- (5) Is the noteworthy work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social or cultural development of the Township, county, region, commonwealth or nation;
- (6) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation;
- (7) Is part of or related to a commercial center, park, community or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif;
- (8) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or Township;
- (9) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history;
or
- (10) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

B. Procedure for designation or removal. Any property proposed for designation on or removal from the Historic Resource Inventory shall be proposed by or shall first be referred to the Historical Commission, which shall hold a public meeting thereon.

- (1) Unless a property is proposed by the owner(s), such owner(s) shall be notified upon receipt of a proposal that their property be placed on or removed from the Historic Resource Inventory and asked to respond to such proposal within 15 days.

(2) At least 30 days before holding a public meeting to consider the proposed designation or removal of a building, structure or site as historic, the Historical Commission shall send notice to the owner of the property proposed for designation. Such notice shall indicate the date, time and place of the public meeting at which the Historical Commission will consider the proposed designation or removal. Notice shall be sent to the registered owner's last known address as the same appears in the real estate tax records of the Township Treasurer and sent to the "owner" at the street address of the property in question.

(3) Any interested party may present testimony or documentary evidence regarding the proposed designation or removal at the public meeting.

(4) The Historical Commission shall present its written report to the Board of Commissioners, the applicant and the owner within 60 days following the public meeting, basing its recommendation upon those criteria for designation established in this section. A property shall be recommended for removal from the Historic Resource Inventory if it does not currently meet the criteria for designation. The report shall include a summary of the information and copies of all documents presented at the meeting and used by the Historical Commission in making its recommendation.

(5) Based upon the criteria set forth in this section and after receiving the recommendations of the Historical Commission, the Board of Commissioners shall from time to time, by ordinance, add or delete buildings, structures and sites to or from the Historic Resource Inventory. Written notice of the action of the Board of Commissioners shall be given to the property owner and to any person appearing at the public meeting of the Historical Commission who requests notification.

§ 155-4 Definitions.

CLASS I HISTORIC RESOURCE

Any of the following:

- (1) All historic sites designated by the Secretary of the Interior as National Historic Landmarks;
- (2) All historic buildings, structures, objects, and sites listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places;
- (3) All historic buildings, objects, and structures classified as "certified historic structures" by the Secretary of the Interior;
- (4) All historic buildings, structures, objects, and sites documented as "contributing resources" in any National Register Historic District;
- (5) All historic buildings, structures, objects, and sites documented as "contributing resources" in any local historic district certified by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) in accordance with Pennsylvania Act 167; and
- (6) Any resources which have received a determination of eligibility (DOE) from the PHMC.

CLASS II HISTORIC RESOURCE

Any of the following:

- (1) All historic resources individually listed in the Lower Merion Township Historic Resource Inventory, not otherwise designated a Class I Historic Resource, and approved as such by the Board of Commissioners pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 88; and
- (2) All historic buildings, objects, structures and sites documented as "contributing resources" in an historic neighborhood, having received a determination of eligibility (DOE) from the PHMC.

Historical Significance of Clairemont

The property at 1860 West Montgomery Avenue retains significance for a multitude of reasons, including the importance of its owner, Morris Clothier, and the documented contributions of three significant designers. The mansion is one of only four locally designated buildings designed by architect Horace Trumbauer listed on the Historic Resource Inventory.

Architectural Significance: Mansion

The name “Clairemont” comes from the estate’s original owner, Joseph E. Gillingham, a Philadelphia businessman. Addison Hutton was hired to design Gillingham’s home in the 1870s. The property was purchased by Morris L. Clothier in the mid-1910s and Horace Trumbauer was retained to design a new mansion in the English Regency style to replace Gillingham’s residence. The mansion took three years to build due to a labor shortage during World War I.

Horace Trumbauer is held in esteem as one of the greatest Philadelphia-area architects in history. His professional development can be traced through his work on the Main Line, where he began designing stately homes for speculative developments as a young man in his twenties. His earliest work is found in Wayne, Overbrook Farms, and Ardmore. As the size of his creations grew, so did his appeal to wealthier clients. Trumbauer was the go-to architect for the biggest, grandest mansions by the time he was 30. His largest commissions came from Elkins Park (the Widener and Elkins estates), Newport R.I., and the Main Line. Notable Main Line works include the Green Hill Farms Apartments (now The Palmer), Radnor Township’s Ardrossan, and the National Register-listed Woodcrest, now the centerpiece of Cabrini College. Unusually for the time, Trumbauer hired an African-American architect named Julian Abele to serve on his staff. Abele’s contributions are not fully known (all designers’ work was generally credited to the firm rather than the individual), but given the years of his tenure, Abele may have been involved with the design of Clairemont. Among hundreds of other notable projects, Trumbauer and Abele designed the Parkway Central Library in Philadelphia and were on the team of architects who designed the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In Lower Merion, four Trumbauer works (including Clairemont) are listed on the Historic Resource Inventory.

Trumbauer would have been the top choice if a wealthy Main Line resident desired a large new home in the 1910s. By that decade his work in the area was well established and the grandiosity of a site like Clairemont would have begged for the kind of mansion that Trumbauer was known for. His firm continued creating works like this until the Great Depression.

The property was reduced in acreage substantially and sold in 1957 to the Churches of Christ, which turned the estate into the Northeastern Christian Junior College. The mansion was then renamed “Boone Hall” after college patron and singer Pat Boone. It has been owned by the Foundation for Islamic Education since the late 20th century.

Clairemont was featured in two recent books: “The Main Line Country Houses 1870-1930” by William Morrison and “American Splendor: The Residential Architecture of Horace Trumbauer” by Michael C. Kathrens.

Architectural Significance: Carriage House

The carriage house is believed to be the last remnant of the Gillingham-era Clairemont, and as such was likely the work of architect Addison Hutton. The carriage house's architecture suggests that this is true, making it at least 30 years older than the present Clairemont mansion. Addison Hutton is among the Philadelphia area's most significant architects of the late 19th century. His work is prevalent in Lower Merion, where early in his career he was involved with the design of the first building at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary. Hutton's work was mostly residential; he was the primary architect used by buyers of home sites of the Pennsylvania Railroad's experimental "Bryn Mawr" development in the late 1860s and 1870s. His works in the Township include Beechwood House (now owned by the Shipley School) and Taylor Hall at Bryn Mawr College. A total of 12 (known) works of Addison Hutton are designated Historic Resources on the Township's Historic Resource Inventory.

Architectural Significance: Landscape and Landscape Elements

When he purchased Clairemont, Morris L. Clothier hired the preeminent landscape architecture office of the time, Olmsted Brothers of Brookline, Massachusetts, to design the grounds and landscape features. The brothers inherited the business (and talent) from their father Frederick Law Olmsted, who essentially created the landscape architecture profession in the United States. The elder Olmsted's accomplishments include the layout of Central Park in New York City and the 1895 campus plan of Bryn Mawr College. His sons continued the legacy with other notable projects including in the Philadelphia area. Among their Main Line residential projects were the Bloomfield estate in Villanova (another Trumbauer residence) and the landscape plan of Stoneleigh, which remains largely intact thanks to Natural Lands' recent acquisition of the property.

It should be noted that unlike buildings, landscapes change more drastically over time due to divisions of large estates and the growth and death of plantings. However, landscape architecture includes more permanent elements than plantings. In the case of Clairemont, the design and layout of the approach to the mansion, including the stone wall lining the driveway leading up to its front elevation, is an Olmsted-designed feature. The gateposts that flank the entrance from West Montgomery Avenue may also be. It is not believed that relics of other notable features, including the formal gardens, are extant. Although substantial acreage of the original estate has not been consumed by buildings, traces of the Olmsted influence are likely not visible.

Individual Significance: Original Owner

Morris L. Clothier was the son of Strawbridge & Clothier founder Isaac H. Clothier, whose estate was "Ballytore" (now St. Sahag & Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church) in Wynnewood. Morris L. Clothier was senior partner and manager of the department store from 1903 to 1947, overseeing the massive expansion of its flagship Market Street store as well as suburban expansion. Among the projects he led was the opening of the branch store in Ardmore, now LifeTime Athletic.