

profitable uses.” The ruling also suggested that demolition should be permitted only when it serves the public interest, for example, when buildings are a threat to public safety.

Demolitions of historic properties are considered on a building-by-building basis,

Chestnut and Sansom Streets. Even more construction in place of demolished historic buildings on the 1900 block of Sansom Street will change the once-charming character of this entire block, leaving only a few historic buildings to compete with massive new construction projects.

“... as glass towers rise and new residents continue (we hope) to flock here, let’s not lose sight of what makes the city such a desirable place. The price of progress need not be the destruction of the old, but, rather, a sensible incorporation of the old with the new.”

Living History

Philadelphia Named First World Heritage City in U.S.—What Does It Mean?

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

In November, the XIII World Congress of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC), an international non-profit, non-governmental organization headquartered in Quebec, met in Arequipa, Peru, and voted in the City of Philadelphia as the **first World Heritage City in the United States**. Philadelphia joins more than 250 cities worldwide that have that prestigious title, including Paris, Florence, Jerusalem, Cairo, St. Petersburg and Prague (<http://www.ovpm.org/>). Mayors of World Heritage cities comprise the General Assembly of the OWHC, and eight of those mayors are elected to the Board of Directors.

Center City resident David Brownlee, an art history professor at the University of Pennsylvania, serves on the Working Team of Philadelphia’s World Heritage City Initiative, and has written much of the material the team used to describe Philadelphia’s history, its significant historical sites and architecture, and its contributions to art and culture.

In Brownlee’s view, “This title gives Philadelphia the opportunity to promote its rich historical and cultural heritage to a world audience and – for me this is the most important thing – promoting this new title to Philadelphians gives us an excellent starting point for increasing our understanding of our own rich and exciting history.”

Philadelphia expects financial benefits as well. A study commissioned by the Global Philadelphia Association estimated that the World Heritage City designation could help to increase foreign tourism in Philadelphia by

as much as 10 to 15 percent, generating about \$150 million per year.

The World Heritage City Initiative was co-sponsored by the City of Philadelphia, represented by Deputy Mayor Alan Greenberger, and the Global Philadelphia Association, headed by John Smith. In support of the project, then-Mayor Michael Nutter assembled the Philadelphia World Heritage Committee, comprised of 28 leaders of Philadelphia’s art, culture, education, and business communities.

Independence Hall was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, having met the criterion as a place or building of outstanding universal value. Global Philadelphia Association Executive Director Zabeth Teelucksingh first proposed the idea of Philadelphia’s joining the Organization of World Heritage Cities in 2011. Because the OWHC requires a World Heritage City to have at least one UNESCO World Heritage

Site, Philadelphia was eligible to join the OWHC as an Observer Member in 2013.

“Although membership in the OWHC is based on the fact that Independence Hall is designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site,” Brownlee says, “it’s essential that we draw attention to Philadelphia’s entire story, which includes every era in our long history, every neighborhood, and all parts of our diverse community.”

The Global Philadelphia Association, one of the project participants, has about 200 organizational members, and promotes international events throughout the year. In addition, it manages two membership organizations of individuals who support Philadelphia’s designation as a World Heritage City: The Philadelphia World Heritage Society and Friends of Philadelphia World Heritage. <https://globalphiladelphia.org/gpa-key-initiatives/world-heritage-city/friends-philadelphia-world-heritage>

Town Square

On February 11, CCRA held the second in its Town Hall series for residents to meet their locally elected officials. There was a fairly lively exchange between attendees and Brian Sims, PA State Representative of the 182nd District. However, Sims spent the brunt of the evening educating the audience on the state budget situation, including personalities, idiocies, and solutions. Definitely, it was an extremely worthwhile experience for all.

—Harvey Sacks, CCRA VP Government Relations



State Rep. Brian Sims