

106 SUCCESS STORY

Creative Solution Preserves Integrity of Historic Development Project

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



“The new design is compatible with the existing building in that it is a relatively simple shape and is located on the axis that is the organizing element of the plan of the building, and it is sufficiently differentiated from the original design so as to make clear that it is a later addition.”

— PRESERVATION ALLIANCE OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA



THE STORY

Casa Farnese, located in the Washington Square West neighborhood of downtown Philadelphia, is a 19-story International Style concrete and glass apartment building designed by Oscar Stonorov and J. Frank Haws. Stonorov, one of the most important designers in Philadelphia after World War II, was active in the city’s urban development campaign. His reputation for group housing, redevelopment projects—and his work on the early 1960s urban renewal campaign in the Washington Square West neighborhood—made him a logical choice for local attorney and banker Andrew Farnese when he decided in the early 1960s to create the city’s first Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 202 housing project for seniors.

Its significance as the first local Section 202 project—as well as its architectural design, having had no major renovations since its completion in 1966—led to the determination in 2011 that Casa Farnese was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

THE PROJECT

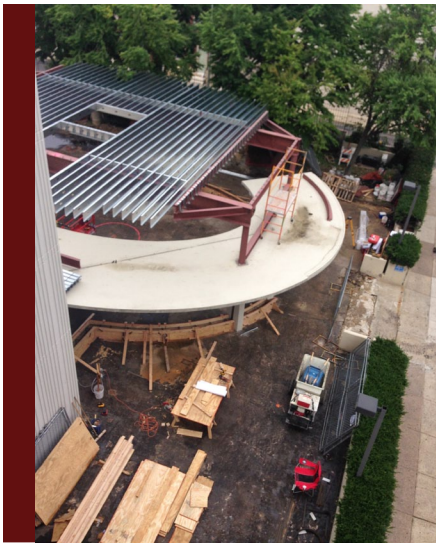
In 2012, original owner Casa Farnese Inc. began a major renovation project for the building. A key part of the renovation was to create a new lobby to replace the original one, which did not provide adequate space for security and a reception area. The proposed two-story enclosed lobby addition would be placed on the western side of the building and would entail demolition of the original U-plan breezeway canopy.

THE 106 PROCESS

HUD was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects on those properties of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic properties when adverse effects may occur.

Photos: Above, post construction, courtyard from benches looking at addition where courtyard and entry doors used to be; Right, before and after construction of the courtyard. The original stairs lead into the new addition. (photos courtesy PRD Management)

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Photos: From left, during construction, overhead view of the addition; during construction, a resident waits for the elevator; post-construction 50th anniversary celebration with Marco Farnese, original and ongoing board member; Bottom, before construction, courtyard from benches looking at entry doors; after construction, security lobby view out of new addition into garden (photos courtesy PRD Management)



Consulting Parties:

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer
- Philadelphia Historical Commission
- Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia
- Casa Farnese Inc.
- ARCH Preservation Consulting
- Compass Architectural Design

Casa Farnese was awarded a pair of HUD loans to complete the renovation project, triggering the Section 106 consultation process. The property owner initially consulted the Philadelphia Historical Commission, which had concerns the project would have a visual effect on the surrounding Washington Square West National Historic District. The Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) said removal of the breezeway canopy could have an adverse effect on the historic integrity of Casa Farnese.

After the adverse effect determination was made, HUD resumed its consultation work on the project. At one of the consultation meetings, a consulting party suggested incorporating the breezeway into an oval-shaped entrance. Discussions on this proposal continued among the parties for several days, and ultimately they decided this alternative was feasible and within budget. HUD subsequently determined the project would have no adverse effect on Casa Farnese, and the SHPO concurred with this finding.

THE SUCCESS

The Section 106 process created an opportunity for all interested parties to come together and develop an alternative to demolishing the breezeway and building a large new addition. Using the consultation process allowed others to participate in developing a creative preservation solution to a tricky problem. The final design led to a solution that not only preserved the building's historic integrity, but also modernized it in a way that will allow the building to continue to house senior residents for years to come.

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov

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