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January 5, 2021

Dr Jon Farnham
Executive Director
Philadelphia Historical Commission
1515 Arch Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

RE: 1706, 1708, 1710 Walnut Street

Dear Dr. Farnham;

We are writing in regard to the three above-named properties that were damaged by fire on May 31st, 2020. We understand that the Department of Licensing and Inspections intends to recommend the complete demolition of these buildings. Since these three properties are listed as contributing buildings in the Rittenhouse-Fitler Historic District on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, the Philadelphia Historic Commission has jurisdiction over them. Notably, all three buildings were architect-designed by prominent Philadelphia architects, including 1708 Walnut, a Furness and Hewitt design.

We urge the Philadelphia Historic Commission to require retaining the facades of each of the three properties in preference to demolishing and reconstructing them as has been suggested as a possibility (*see Inga Saffron's article in the October 30th issue of the Philadelphia Inquirer.*) These facades have remained standing, presumably safely, for the past 7 months and potentially could be structurally supported to allow future development behind as has been done in other development projects. In the event that it is not structurally possible to support the facades, we would urge the Commission to require that the present facades be carefully de-constructed and reconstructed, using the original materials, to the extent feasible, as part of any new development.

It is unfortunate that these three buildings were so badly damaged in the fire. However, at the time that oversight for these buildings becomes the responsibility of the Philadelphia Historic Commission, we strongly urge the Commission to support retention of the facades and maintenance of the present historic streetscape of this block.

Sincerely,

Maggie Mund,
President

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