



February 18, 2004

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL: bfranco@state.pa.us

Barbara Franco
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
300 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Ms. Franco:

The Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh protests the decision by the PHMC to withdraw the historic designation for the National Register Historic District in the Borough of Braddock. This sets a dangerous precedent for historic districts and structures across the Commonwealth.

The PHMC's action goes against its very mission: "The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission preserves the Commonwealth's past through leadership, stewardship, and service. The Commission believes that future generations will be strengthened and inspired by the ideals and traditions of Pennsylvania's Heritage." As an organization that represents the next generation of preservation leaders, we believe that demolition is not preservation.

The timing of the decision is bad, too, with Pennsylvania Heritage Week just a month away, during March 12-17. What will left to celebrate Braddock's heritage?

Preservation of historic districts have breathed life back into small towns and main streets across Pennsylvania, including Beaver, Bradford, Carlisle, Coudersport, Ebensburg, Oil City, Pottstown, and Pittsburgh's South Side among others. In fact, Braddock takes pride in its history, by claiming on its website that "The Borough of Braddock, established in the 1700's, has a rich history . . ." But the PHMC's unilateral decision to undo the designation of the Braddock Historic District without public input or comment reduces Braddock's chances for revitalization. It sends the chilling message that no historic district or site in the Commonwealth is worth protecting.

Western Pennsylvania's history is at a critical stage. Longwall mining has been detrimental to historic properties in Greene County. The Plaza Theater in Brownsville's NR Historic District was recently demolished. African American historic landmarks throughout the region are being demolished at a rapid rate. We can add to this list the PHMC's decision to de-list Braddock's NR District.

Last year, Bruce Katz authored a report by the Brookings Institution called "Back to Prosperity: A Competitive Agenda for Pennsylvania." The report recommends that the Commonwealth restore its historic towns and urban areas in order to remain competitive. But by undoing historic districts, the PHMC does not give these towns a chance.

The case for the economic benefits of historic preservation are strong. From the Preservation Alliance of Philadelphia's groundbreaking study, "The Economic Benefits of Preserving Philadelphia's Past" (1998), to the National Trust's series, "Dollars and Sense" to the PHMC's own analysis, "Pennsylvania Heritage Tourism Study" (1999), it has been proven that historic preservation makes economic sense.

There are numerous federal and state tools available to help revitalize historic districts. At the federal level, there are historic tax credits available to developers, TEA-21 funds, and New Markets Tax Credits. The state has several tools too, including the Keystone Opportunity Zone program. In addition, passage of proposed Historic Rehabilitation and Economic Revitalization Tax Credit Act (PA Senate Bill 820 and House bills 951 and 952) would assist developers with assembling a financial package to restore historic Braddock.

Finally, Braddock would benefit greatly by hiring a Main Street Manager to assist in the Borough's revitalization. The Main Street Program has shown to be a huge benefit to America's communities. Since its inception, the total amount of public and private reinvestment in physical improvements in Main Street communities totals \$17 billion. That is \$9.5 million of reinvestment per community and has resulted in more than 57,000 new businesses and more than 231,000 jobs. Braddock could certainly benefit from this program.

But by stripping Braddock of its much-deserved historic status, the tools for revitalization are diminished. We hope that the PHMC will not follow the Braddock decision again and instead consult with the state's preservation community before taking such drastic action. We hope the PHMC pursues more reasoned approaches in the future to help preserve historic resources of southwestern Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

Dan Holland
Chair
Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh

C: Wayne S. Spilove, Chairman, PHMC
Pauline Abdullah, Mayor of Braddock
Jesse Brown, Braddock Borough President
Jean Cutler, Director, Bureau for Historic Preservation
Richard Moe, President, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Stanley Lowe, Director, Community Revitalization, National Trust for Historic
Preservation
Kennedy Smith, Director, National Trust Main Street Center
Adrian Fine, Mid-Atlantic Director, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Susan Shearer, Executive Director, Preservation Pennsylvania
Janet Milkman, 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania
Arthur Ziegler, President, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation
John Gallery, President, Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia
SW PA Preservation Organizations
YPA Board, Advisory Board, and Members

Pauline Abdullah
Mayor of Braddock
415 Sixth Street
Braddock, PA 15104

Jesse Brown
Braddock Borough President
415 sixth Street
Braddock, PA 15104

Wayne S. Spilove
Chairman
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
300 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Richard Moe
President
National Trust for Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20035