

Policy Statement on the Functioning of Heritage Conservation Committee

Society of Architectural Historians
Heritage Conservation Committee

Background

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), as the principal professional body of architectural historians worldwide, has long involved itself in significant issues of historic preservation. The organization is itself the steward of the Charnley-Persky House, a National Historic Landmark located in the City of Chicago. Equally important, our work depends upon the ability to experience and understand the architecture of the past.

Although circumstances often prompt us to use textual and graphic surrogates to study buildings that have been destroyed, we acknowledge that our research is only enriched when we are able to engage with extant buildings and landscapes. For this reason, many of our members specialize in historic preservation, while our scholarship often has an impact on what sites are considered historically significant and why.

Committee Membership

Because of this close connection between architectural history and historic preservation, the SAH is often asked to speak out on preservation issues in the United States and abroad. For most of its institutional history, SAH appointed a preservation officer to coordinate its involvement in historic preservation issues. In more recent years, the position has been reorganized as the Heritage Conservation Committee, with an appointed chair who is an *ex officio* member of the SAH Board.

Some members of the committee are members of the SAH Board and serve as a Board committee assignment, while others are members of SAH, appointed because of their professional accomplishments and commitment to historic preservation. The SAH President and Executive Director both serve as *ex officio* members of the committee, and all appointments are made by the SAH President. The Heritage Conservation Committee meets monthly and coordinates SAH's preservation advocacy, evaluating emerging preservation issues and selecting those on which the committee decides to comment.

Policy

As a general rule, the SAH provides letters advocating for the preservation of buildings, sites, and districts, as well as on larger issues of governmental policy. For United States-based matters, the building or issue must be of national significance. For international matters, the building or issue must be of international significance.

The committee asks two questions:

1. Does the resource or issue rise to the level of national or international significance? and
2. Does the threat warrant a statement from SAH?

For example, for buildings, sites, or districts in the United States the committee examines the resource and determines if it is potentially eligible for listing as a National Historic Landmark, or potentially eligible for listing the National Register of Historic Places at the national level of significance. In some instances, although the individual resource itself may not rise to the national level of significance, the overall resource type, or threat type, does. In those instances, the committee may elect to take a position.

In all cases, the determination of eligibility is up to the discretion of the committee.

Procedures

Requests for letters of support are sent to the Chair. The Chair may solicit the assistance of one or more members of the Heritage Conservation Committee, depending on the volume and nature of the requests. The Heritage Conservation Committee will hold monthly meetings (to include participation by conference call) at which these issues may be discussed. For urgent matters, additional meetings may be held between scheduled monthly meetings, or vote may be taken (as described below) by email, if there is not sufficient time to hold a meeting.

If the Chair (or member of the Heritage Conservation Committee) believes the issue meets the two tests of significance and threat, the Chair (or a member of the committee) will research the issue, and draft a brief report summarizing the site's significance, the nature of the threat to the site, and the recommendation for action. The report may take the form of a draft letter or position statement.

If the Chair (or the Heritage Conservation Committee) recommends in favor of an SAH letter or position statement, the Chair drafts a letter over his/her signature on behalf of the Heritage Conservation Committee and the SAH. The Committee will discuss the letter or position statement at their next regularly scheduled meeting, or at a special meeting, as the case may be.

After the letter or position statement has been approved by the Heritage Conservation Committee, it will be forwarded to the SAH Executive Committee by the Executive Director, with the request that the letter or position statement be reviewed by the following day. When a majority of Executive Committee members has approved the letter or position statement (by email or phone call), it will be considered approved, and will be distributed. In the event of issues with exceptionally brief windows of action, the Executive Director will discuss with the Executive Committee in advance the issue, and will send a draft of the letter or statement while it is in development.

Two board members, or the Executive Director, or the SAH President (who are *ex officio* members of the committee), may request that the full SAH Board review this policy at any time.

Upon approval, the letter or position statement will be distributed, including informing the SAH Board of the final position, and posting to the SAH website.

Approved by Heritage Conservation Committee 15 November 2019.

Mr. Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., Chair, Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Ms. Phyllis Ellin; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Mr. Sandy Isenstadt, Ph.D.; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Members SAH Heritage Conservation Committee.

Approved by SAH Board 30 April 2020.