



Chestnut Hill Local

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Thursday, December 26, 2024

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2024 HEADLINES THAT HIT HOME

A year of change for our built environment



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Years of controversy over the possible future of the Julia Hebard Marsden House on Germantown Avenue, now the Chestnut Hill Health Care Women’s Center, ended in May, when the building was added to the Philadelphia Historical Register.



Posted Wednesday, December 25, 2024 12:00 am

by Donna Shaw and Carla Robinson

In a year marked by both preservation victories and development challenges, Northwest Philadelphia neighborhoods navigated significant changes while setting new precedents for historic preservation. From Chestnut Hill to Germantown, 2024 proved to be a year of significant change, setting precedents that will likely influence development and preservation efforts for years to come.

Chestnut Hill celebrated an early victory in May when the Philadelphia Historical Commission unanimously voted to add the Chestnut Hill Hospital's Women's Center to the Philadelphia Register. The building at 8835 Germantown Ave., formerly known as the Julia Hebard Marsden House, represented a successful adaptation of a historic home for modern medical use. The designation came as the result of collaborative efforts between the Chestnut Hill Conservancy and Temple Health-Chestnut Hill Hospital.

Almost two years after the August 2022 fire that devastated the historic Hiram Lodge in the heart of the Chestnut Hill business corridor, developer Michael Young purchased the 145-year-old stone structure at 8427 Germantown Ave. for \$1.85 million, promising to restore the building while maintaining its ground-floor retail space and converting upper levels into condominiums. Young, who is currently developing another mixed-use project on Germantown Avenue, said he is committed to preserving most of the property's public parking spaces, addressing a crucial community concern about development in the commercial district.

The long-vacant Greylock estate marked another point of local controversy. After months of wrangling, the city's Zoning Board of Adjustment unanimously approved variances for a redevelopment project proposed for that site, despite opposition from the city Planning Commission. Developer Lavi Shenkman's approved plan will convert the historic mansion into six condos and add three new detached buildings with seven townhomes on the mansion's west side - one triplex and two duplexes. It also includes converting the mansion's gatehouse into two dwellings, bringing the total to 15 units. While opponents indicated they might appeal the decision, the approval represents a major step forward for one of the area's most contested development projects.

Another contentious development battle continued at Bethlehem Pike and Summit Street, where residents disappointed by a June appeals court ruling took their fight against a proposed five-story mixed-use development to the state Supreme Court. The Chestnut Hill Community Association, which has led opposition to Frankel Enterprises' project at 10 Bethlehem Pike since early 2021, hopes the state's highest court will intervene. If the court declines to hear the case, the developer will be free to proceed with the original design, marking a significant change to the neighborhood's landscape.

The year also brought major changes to Philadelphia's short-term rental landscape, with new regulations taking effect Jan. 1. The rules, passed by City Council in 2021, require property owners in most residential zones to obtain variances for units where they don't live onsite, though owner-occupied Airbnbs remain exempt. The Chestnut Hill Community Association board demonstrated a balanced approach to these changes, recommending approval for a variance at 7929 Roanoke St., with specific conditions to protect neighborhood interests.

Preservation efforts gained recognition through the Chestnut Hill Conservancy's inaugural Preservation Party, which honored seven outstanding architectural and cultural heritage projects. The event also marked the induction of five historic properties into its Architectural Hall of Fame: the Rex House, St. Martins Station, Streeper's Pharmacy, the John Story Jenks School and 8003 Navajo St., celebrating the neighborhood's commitment to maintaining its architectural heritage.

In Mount Airy, preservation efforts reached a crucial milestone as the West Mount Airy Neighbors' Historic Preservation Initiative secured unanimous approval from Philadelphia's Committee on Historic Designation for an ambitious project protecting 30 historic apartment buildings. The proposed Northwest Apartments Thematic District would safeguard buildings constructed between 1910 and 1940 along the Chestnut Hill West SEPTA line, requiring greater oversight for exterior renovations while preventing demolition. The initiative, sparked by the controversial 2021 demolition at Wood Norton Residences, faced objection from only one property owner and awaits final approval from the full historic commission on December 13.

Germantown's preservation landscape saw both setbacks and successes throughout the year.

A significant disappointment came when a judge dismissed local developer Ken Weinstein's petition to take control of the former Germantown YWCA, ruling that the property didn't meet Pennsylvania's Act 135 criteria for conservatorship despite its decades of vacancy and deterioration under city ownership. While Weinstein announced plans to appeal, the ruling extended a years-long stalemate over one of Germantown's most historically significant properties. The situation became more complex when KBK Enterprises, the controversial developer chosen eight years ago by the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, failed to secure financing for the historic building at 5820 Germantown Ave., leaving neighborhood residents demanding action as the structure continues to deteriorate.

However, the neighborhood achieved a significant preservation victory when the Philadelphia Historical Commission unanimously designated the Germantown Urban Village Historic District. The district, nominated by preservationist and architectural historian Oscar Beisert in October, centers on Market Square, which has served as the community's commercial heart for more than a century. The designation ensures that buildings within the district are protected from demolition and requires Historical Commission review for new construction and exterior alterations, preserving the historic character of this vital commercial center.

Throughout the year, these developments highlighted ongoing tension between growth and preservation in Northwest Philadelphia's historic communities, where residents seek to balance progress with protection of the area's architectural heritage.

OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU

Bridges, trains, water and parks: Infrastructure ... (/stories/bridges-trains-water-and-parks-infrastructure-challenges-of-2024,35013)

2024: What we'll remember from this passing year (/stories/2024-what-well-remember-from-this-passing-year,35015)

Bass, Council back \$1.3B Sixers arena plan (/stories/bass-council-back-13b-sixers-arena-plan,34935)

GMA returns to Chestnut Hill (/stories/gma-returns-to-chestnut-hill,34936)

Donate to CHCA Annual Appeal (https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=HNBT34YY8VANC)

LOCAL CALENDAR

<p>Wed, Jan 08 @6:00pm Sponsored (</p> <p>Hospitality & Business Networking Elevating Your...</p> <p>Devil's Alley Bar & Grill Philadelphia, PA</p> <p>Thu, Dec 26</p> <p>STOMP</p> <p>Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts</p> <p>Thu, Dec 26</p> <p>Community Crafting Circle - Queen Memorial Library</p> <p>Queen Memorial Library</p> <p>Thu, Dec 26</p> <p>LIVE THEATER - PETER PAN</p> <p>The Arden Theatre Company</p>	<p>Thu, Dec 26 @2:30pm Sponsored (</p> <p>Turtle Talks</p> <p>The Academy of Natural Sciences Philadelphia, PA</p>
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THE LATEST

Dec 26, 2024 issue (/stories/dec-26-2024-issue,34978)



(/stories/dec-26-2024-issue,34978)



GA hoopsters go 2-1 in non-league basketball bouts (/stories/ga-hoopsters-go-2-1-in-non-league-basketball-bouts,35026)

In the first two basketball games they played last week, the girls of Germantown Academy defeated a top team.

(/stories/ga-hoopsters-go-2-1-in-non-league-basketball-bouts,35026)

Celebrating a diverse year of magic for our local theaters (/stories/celebrating-a-diverse-year-of-magic-for-our-local-theaters,35025)

Two outstanding holiday shows cap a year of diverse and captivating theater in the Chestnut Hill region.



(/stories/celebrating-a-diverse-year-of-magic-for-our-local-theaters,35025)



A historic organ restored and anniversaries celebrated (/stories/a-historic-organ-restored-and-anniversaries-celebrated,35024)

The Aeolian-Skinner pipe organ at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Chestnut Hill, finally made its re-debut.

(/stories/a-historic-organ-restored-and-anniversaries-celebrated,35024)



Milestones mark a banner year for NW Philadelphia arts (/stories/milestones-mark-a-banner-year-for-nw-philadelphia-arts,35023)

NW Philadelphia’s arts and cultural institutions celebrated significant achievements in 2024.

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last Thursday

Good Morning America returned to the Hill for the second time in two years to feature Bredenbeck's Bakery and their gingerbread truck sculpture.



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GMA returns to Chestnut Hi...

It was "Good Morning America's" s...

14

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5



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