

My name is Paul Steinke, executive director of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. I am here today to offer testimony regarding the Society Hill Neighborhood Plan produced by KSK Architects, Viridian Landscape Architects and Urban Partners.

Society Hill is considered one of the most ambitious and successful urban renewal undertakings in recent American history. This effort, which likely could not be replicated today, marshaled the financial investment and creative energies of the Federal government, City Hall and the private sector to transform a neglected and deteriorated section of the city into the charming, restored historic residential neighborhood that it still is today. While it wasn't perfect; many families were displaced in the process, many worthy buildings were selectively demolished; it still stands as one of the nation's most successful mergers of neighborhood redevelopment and historic preservation.

At the heart of the neighborhood stands Society Hill Towers, designed by I.M. Pei. These three high rises are by design the focal point of the neighborhood and the tallest buildings around. Otherwise, the restored historic residential neighborhood surrounding the towers was carefully and intentionally planned to maintain a consistent dominant height of two to four stories, occasionally punctuated by church steeples and a handful of other midrise structures.

A significant part of Society Hill's unique charm is in its skillful blending of historic and contemporary architecture that largely conforms to a low-rise scale, helping to convey a sense of the neighborhood's long and rich history when very tall buildings were yet been feasible.

The Society Hill Neighborhood Plan seeks to codify this intentional neighborhood development pattern by suggesting that a height limit be established along Walnut Street from 4<sup>th</sup> Street, east to Front Street. The Preservation Alliance is in support of this concept. This stretch of Walnut Street forms the southern boundary of Independence National Historical Park, which abuts Society Hill and is itself characterized by historic landmarks that are modest in height, contributing to the historic character of the area.

Today, Independence Park and Society Hill together form perhaps Philadelphia's most precious and venerated historic precincts. Society Hill, for its part, is not only a sought-after destination for tourists, but is equally prized as a choice residential neighborhood overwhelmingly because of its historic character, of which its low-rise nature is an essential component.

Excessively tall buildings along Walnut Street that are dramatically higher than neighboring buildings could disrupt the historic scale and character of this part of the city, while undermining the primacy of Pei's timeless Society Hill Towers development. They could also detract from the historic character of this part of our city, which is not only its oldest section but also arguably the most valuable in terms of Philadelphia's place in history, and its appeal as a visitor destination. We should be very careful with how we treat this area and not succumb to market pressures in developing tall buildings, simply because there may be demand for them in our present moment. Real estate valuations may boom and bust, wow and flutter, but Society Hill remains, despite unpredictable shifts of taste or opportunity.

Thank you.