

*[Update: June 24, 2005] On May 27, 2005, owner/developer of the Dilworth House, John and Mary Turchi, filed an application with the Philadelphia Historical Commission to “reclassify” the Dilworth House as a “non-contributing” site in the Society Hill Historic District (the property is presently classified as “significant”). Concurrently, the property owners asked the Commission to review and approve the demolition of the Dilworth House for the purpose of constructing a new condominium tower on the site. The plans for the new construction will be reviewed by the Commission’s Architectural Committee on July 26, 2005. The consideration of the reclassification of the property by the Commission’s Designation Committee will be July 28, 2005 with an expected report to the full Historic Commission at its August 12, 2005, meeting.*



When the renewal of Society Hill was just beginning in the 1950s, Richardson Dilworth, then Mayor of Philadelphia, built a house for himself and his family on the east side of Washington Square. Dilworth's intent was to draw attention to the eastern part of the city, then a very unfashionable place to live. It worked, and soon many other prominent Philadelphians started buying property in Society Hill and restoring it.

Although Dilworth's house is a 1950s Colonial Revival house and not an original 18th century version, it was designed by an architect noted for his revival styles - George Edwin Brumbaugh. The house is listed as "significant" in the Society Hill Historic District. The house stands between the Philadelphia Athenaeum and the recently rehabilitated Lippincott building.

Recently John Turchi, a developer, purchased the Dilworth house and wishes to demolish it to build a ten-story condominium, greatly exceeding the height allowed by zoning.

John Turchi, the developer, has chosen noted architect Robert Venturi to design the condominium. Meanwhile, the Society Hill Civic Association is publicly opposing any proposal to demolish Dilworth's house, and is asking others to sign its petition. To do so, go to [www.savedilworthnow.org](http://www.savedilworthnow.org).

[The following information is taken from the Save Dilworth Now web site]:

#### ABOUT THE DILWORTH HOUSE

The Dilworth House is a symbol of one of the most important chapters in the history of Society Hill. It was built in 1957 by Mayor Richardson Dilworth (the Mayor from 1956 to 1962) and his wife Ann as a personal show of support for the urban renewal programs that Mayor Dilworth championed.

By the 1950's the area of the Philadelphia now known as Society Hill had become a rundown neighborhood. Urban renewal plans had been on the books but they could not and did not succeed without the leadership and vision of Mayor Dilworth and of course the roles played by other public officials and private citizens.

Building this house on Washington Square was a show of commitment from one of the preeminent forces in City politics. Mayor Dilworth's house has great symbolic significance because his fine newly constructed home served as a catalyst to other pioneers who recognized that the effort to revitalize Society Hill had the full support of City Hall. The urban renewal of Society Hill, at its core, was an economic development project, designed to attract more middle-class citizens to this part of town. To strengthen Society Hill was to strengthen the entire City of Philadelphia. It worked.

The Dilworth House was designed by the noted and respected architect George Edwin Brumbaugh, who helped restore Washington Square just across the street. In designing the Dilworth House, Mr. Brumbaugh chose to design a new house in the "old vernacular," drawing upon for inspiration and guidance the rich regional detail of the early period.

In 1999, the Philadelphia Historical Commission designated Society Hill as an "historic district," emphasizing the redevelopment and preservation successes of the 1950's and 1960's. It was in this context that the Historical Commission classified the Dilworth

House as having “significant” historical value -- the highest level of protection afforded by the City’s historical preservation law.

In May 2005, John Turchi, a real estate developer filed papers with the Historical Commission seeking permission to demolish the Dilworth House. Mr. Turchi’s argument is that the Dilworth House has no historic value and he wishes to raze the Dilworth House to make way for a 15-story condominium. Mr. Turchi is pulling out all the stops. He has hired some of the best lawyers in town and has also hired noted local architect Robert Venturi to design the proposed condo.

#### TIMELINE OF RECENT EVENTS:

##### **1999-2000**

##### **The City Creates the Society Hill Historic District**

The Philadelphia Historical Commission designates the neighborhood of Society Hill as a “Historic District.” As part of this designation, the Commission inventories everything in the neighborhood and classifies each property in terms of its historic value. The Dilworth House is classified as “Significant,” which is the highest value. Under the law a “Significant” house is the most difficult to demolish.

##### **May 15, 2001**

##### **Dilworth House Up For Sale**

The Dilworth House is listed for sale on the open market at an initial asking price of \$1,750,000.

##### **May 15, 2001**

##### **Dilworth House Marketed as a Landmark Building**

The multiple listing service (MLS) entry contains a narrative that describes the property as follows: “Landmark double property in Washington Sq. built in 1957 by J. Cornell as a brick Colonial authentic reproduction townhouse estate for former Mayor Richardson Dilworth and his family as part of the reclamation, restoration and redevelopment of Society Hill. The house is superbly built in its classic simplicity and features an unusually large garden and parking for 2 or more cars. The house was specifically built for the Dilworth’s use.”

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##### **May 31, 2001**

##### **Turchi Buys the House**

Mr. and Mrs. Turchi purchase the Dilworth House by paying the asking price, plus Mr. and Mrs. Turchi pick up the broker’s commission and the transfer taxes. Mr. Turchi stated that at the time of the purchase he intended to move into the house with his wife.

##### **October 8, 2001**

##### **Turchi Touts the House’s Historic Heritage**

In unrelated litigation involving a neighboring property, Mr. and Mrs. Turchi's lawyer argues to the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas that Turchi cares very much about the important historic attributes of the Dilworth House. Specifically they push that argument by making the following written statement to the Court: "The property is the former residence of Mayor Richardson Dilworth. Turchi proposes to erect additions attached to the rear of the residence for kitchen, dining room, study and recreation room. A separate addition is proposed at the rear of the lot to accommodate a parking garage and a household apartment. *The Residence and Lot will be restored to its former grandeur consistent with its historic heritage and with the Society Hill Historic District.*"

### August 26, 2003

#### **Turchi seeks Approval to Expand the House**

A "preservation consultant" representing Turchi appears before the Architectural Review Committee of the Philadelphia Historical Commission to advocate for Turchi's application to expand the rear of the house and to construct a detached garage and guest house. According to the official minutes of the meeting, the Executive Director of the Historical Commission stated that the Dilworth House was erected in 1957 "to bolster the redevelopment of Society Hill, which had fallen to a dilapidated state;" and "that the Colonial Revival building is significant for its cardinal role in the preservation of one of the city's most historic neighborhoods." The Committee unanimously recommended "denial" of the proposal; however, the Committee members urged Turchi's representatives to incorporate various suggested in a revised design and return for another review. Turchi's representatives did so.

### September 2003

#### **The City Allows a Very Modest Expansion**

After reviewing the application and making slight modifications, the Philadelphia Historical Commission approves Mr. Turchi's proposed changes. Turchi never implements any of the changes. Neither Turchi nor his wife ever moves in.

### 2003-2004

#### **The Real Estate Boom Continues**

The Philadelphia real estate market continues to improve at a dramatic rate, sending property values through the proverbial roof. A condominium boom occurs in Center City Philadelphia. Developers and investors trip over themselves to build mid-rise and hi-rise condos.

### Spring 2004

#### **Turchi Wants to Demolish the House**

Turchi decides he now wants to demolish the Dilworth House to make way for a 14-story condominium.

### February 2005

#### **Turchi Publicly Denigrates the House**

Turchi tells the press, "I don't think the house has any real value."

**June 2005**

**Turchi Seeks Approval to Demolish the House**

Turchi files papers with the Philadelphia Historical Commission seeking to demolish the Dilworth House.

For more information on the Dilworth House, go to [www.savedilworthnow.org](http://www.savedilworthnow.org).

*“Demolishing this terrifically important Dilworth House, if Philadelphia does this, I think it is taking a great step backwards from the days when it really supported and built the wonderful concept of turning Society Hill from a slum into a wonderful place to live....There is no excuse for doing it....Don’t let this horrible backward step happen.”*

*-- Edmund N. Bacon*

*Executive Director of the City Planning Commission  
(1949-1970)*