

JOE FRAZIER'S GYM



An Urban Land Institute
Technical Assistance Panel
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**Urban Land
Institute**

Philadelphia
Serving Eastern and Central
Pennsylvania, Southern New
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On behalf of



**PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE**

for greater philadelphia

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About ULI – the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) was established in 1936 as a nonprofit educational and research institute and is supported by more than 32,000 members representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines around the globe. ULI's mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land to enhance the total environment and to create and sustain thriving communities.

In 1947, ULI began providing advice to nonprofits and units of government that needed help in planning and development. At the regional level, ULI Philadelphia offers Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) which bring together planners, developers, lenders, architects, and related professionals in an atmosphere free of politics and preconceptions to evaluate specific needs and make recommendations on implementation. A TAP is a voluntary process. None of the professionals involved receive monetary compensation for their work.

Introduction and Background

Located at the intersection of Broad Street and Glenwood Avenue in North Philadelphia, the property known as Joe Frazier's Gym began its life in the mid-1890s as a factory manufacturing window sashes and blinds. Although typical of 19th century industrial buildings, the site's historic significance is not in its bricks and mortar but in the boxing legend who trained and lived within its walls, in his inspirational story, and in his affection and support for his adopted community. Joe Frazier's Gym is a great source of pride in a neighborhood that has been largely ignored due to economic circumstances.



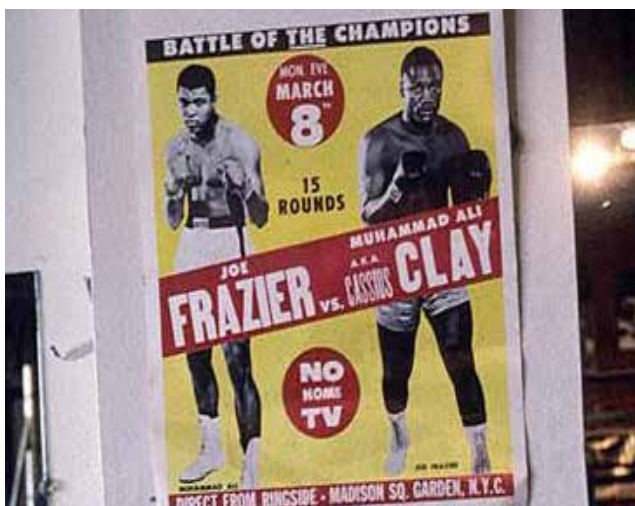
Site aerial.

The three-story building is 50' wide and 230' deep for an approximate total of 20,000 square feet. The first floor façade is clad in a buff stucco material intended to resemble limestone. "Joe Frazier's Gym" appears in relief above the entry, flanked by boxing gloves also in relief.

Joe Frazier was born in South Carolina in 1944, moved to New York City in his mid-teens and had moved to Philadelphia by 1961. Although he boxed as a youth in South Carolina, it was in Philadelphia where he began to take the sport seriously. When he wasn't working at his job at a local meatpacking plant, he boxed at the Police Athletic League (PAL) location at Broad and Cecil B. Moore Avenues and caught the attention of one of the gym's trainers.

By 1964, he had become one of Philadelphia's top fighters and was encouraged to compete for a spot on the U.S. Olympic boxing team. After winning the gold medal as a heavyweight in 1964, he turned professional and found backers among Philadelphia's most well-known families. In 1969, an investor group bought the building and converted it to a training center for

Frazier named the Cloverlay Gym. Frazier acquired the property in 1975 with winnings from his heavyweight bouts including the pugilist classics the “Fight of the Century” and “Thrilla in Manila,” both against Muhammad Ali. He renamed the property Joe Frazier’s Gym and installed the stucco relief above the entry that remains today.



Poster of the Joe Frazier/Muhammad Ali “Fight of the Century”.

A popular figure in the neighborhood, “Smokin’ Joe” opened the gym with membership levels for aspiring professional boxers and local amateurs, at times living in an apartment above. Frazier’s reputation and generosity made it a destination for boxing fans from around the world, as well as a *de facto* community center. Although busy, the gym was never particularly lucrative, and closed in 2008.

In 2011, the property was listed in a Sheriff’s sale to recover unpaid property taxes. Afraid that the building might be destroyed along with Frazier’s legacy, students at Temple University’s Department of Architecture nominated the property as an endangered structure and submitted the nomination to The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. The Alliance then nominated the property for the Philadelphia Historical Commission’s Register of Historic Places. As the nomination was being

prepared, the building was sold. The buyer bought the property for \$365,000 and leased it as a retail furniture store which remains its current use on most of the first floor. Joe Frazier died the same year, in November 2011.

But the students’ nomination of the property set off a chain of events. The original nomination succeeded and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) became interested in the property. The NTHP set up a three-way partnership with Temple’s Department of Architecture, The Preservation Alliance and the NTHP itself. The NTHP also successfully nominated the site for National Treasure designation. With that support, the Preservation Alliance requested that ULI Philadelphia convene a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to study and recommend potential appropriate and financially sustainable options for Joe Frazier’s Gym. The TAP convened on May 13, 2014 at Temple University’s Student Faculty Center. Eleven professionals participated in the all-day session as Panelists; 21 stakeholders were interviewed including members of the community, a professional boxer, preservationists and representatives from local community organizations.

Key Issues

The Preservation Alliance asked ULI Philadelphia to focus the Panel on three broad areas: (1) **market issues** that might affect redevelopment of the property, (2) **physical and legal disability of redevelopment** (3) **financing and partnership options** that could advance redevelopment.

The Panel considered several key issues in addressing the ultimate goal of using the property in a manner that would benefit the community and honor Joe Frazier’s legacy in a positive and financially sustainable way. These included:

- Who or what is the best owner for the property? Should it be privately owned or should a non-profit take ownership?
- What is the best use for the property? Is it a long-term or short-term solution, for example, a three-year lease?
- What are realistic market options for the property? As it exists today, the building has a floor plan that is not conducive to most uses, the location in North Philadelphia is somewhat isolated and there is little demand in the immediate area for commercial or residential space.
- What attributes can be leveraged? Transit access is excellent as SEPTA's North Broad Street station just two blocks away serves two regional rail lines and the Broad Street Subway is nearby. Most importantly, Frazier's legacy of community engagement sets an inspiring standard.

Initial Assessment

In making its initial assessment, the Panel was most concerned that there is “**no big picture** to which the project can be attached” – the property is located between the Temple Health System campus and the Temple University campus. It is not part of Temple's long-range plan nor is the neighborhood part of any updated master plan within the City of Philadelphia. That, in addition to a **weak real estate market in that area**, limits potential development.

The Panel's discussion also covered the value of the property. Ironically, the historic designations awarded have led the out-of-state owner to value the property for more than market conditions would indicate, and far more than its assessed value. The owner's former broker

stated that the owner rejected an offer for \$640,000 in 2012 as he believes it is worth closer to **\$1 million**. It is believed that the property has a retail tenant with three years remaining on a five-year lease at \$72,000 a year, possibly with a five-year extension. The retailer has multiple locations within the Philadelphia market and independent observations indicate that this location is probably the weakest of the group.



Interior of store.

Physically, the long and narrow building presents many challenges. It would **require many upgrades to meet building codes**. For example, the building is not ADA-compliant and lacks appropriate exit stairs. Opportunities for natural light are limited by side walls being located on the property line. The cost to convert the second and third floors to useable space would be significant. There may be structural problems as well – one of the challenges of this TAP was that the owner did not allow interior access other than the first floor retail space. On a positive note, because the historic significance of the building is Joe Frazier's importance to the community and to the sport of boxing (as opposed to architectural merit), there would **be flexibility in renovating the building for new purposes**.

The Panel discussed but rejected the idea of returning the building to the function of a boxing gym. Boxing's popularity is in decline and other boxing gyms in the city are struggling. **A stand-alone museum is also impractical** although the Panel believes that finding a way to honor and memorialize Joe Frazier can and should readily be part of any plan. Much of Joe Frazier's memorabilia has been sold over the years, but Temple professor Dennis Playdon has been gathering materials for archives and believes that members of the boxing community would contribute Frazier materials to a commemorative display.

When Panel members interviewed him, World Light-Heavyweight Champion Bernard Hopkins said Frazier should be remembered as "more than a fighter." He said Frazier acted as a surrogate father for many in the community and that the gym was a "safe haven."

Time and again, local community members spoke of a twofold use of the building: **honoring Joe Frazier and creating a community center** that would provide much-needed activities for the neighborhood's children.



The gym where Joe Frazier trained for his victorious bout against Muhammad Ali.

Alternatives for Joe Frazier's Gym

Numerous options were discussed for the Gym, both ambitious and modest. The options for honoring

Joe Frazier at the Gym are limited under the current ownership model. Two immediate short-term considerations emerged:

- With the current owner and ground floor tenant in place, **establish a small fundraising office**, a "beachhead" so to speak, to test the viability of a Joe Frazier museum.
- **Continue with private ownership** but investigate **non-programmatic recognition** of Joe Frazier. Examples include a historic plaque or marker in front of the building, a mural on the side, or using the prominent rooftop billboard for a message about Frazier's legacy.

If Joe Frazier's Gym were purchased by an individual, nonprofit or sponsoring organization whose goals were aligned with those of the community and The Preservation Alliance, there are more potential alternative uses:

- **Identify a nonprofit as the building's major owner/tenant**, one whose programming is in line with Frazier's legacy. A Boys & Girls Club representative who attended the session as a stakeholder noted that the club could potentially be interested as its nearest location is in Nicetown. The Police Athletic League (PAL), which had such a positive influence on the young Frazier, was ruled out because of size constraints and a shift in PAL's strategic plan. Big Brothers Big Sisters was suggested as a viable option as it is investigating opening a mentoring center in a nearby neighborhood. A representative from the Sadiq Mosque being constructed nearby indicated that the Mosque may need additional space as well.
- Identify a philanthropic "angel" to purchase the building and make the necessary improvements so the facility could support Joe Frazier's legacy. Possible uses include an Information Technology training center for the

community, a new business incubator, or a karate studio/ or similar for neighborhood children and youth.

- Find a buyer for the building and propose **selective demolition**. For example, if only the front 25 percent of the building were to be retained, the back portion of the property could be developed as a community park or playground. However, stakeholders and other community members participating hold strong feelings that any demolition -- in part or in whole -- would be considered as disrespectful to both the community and Frazier's legacy.

Next Steps

The Panel raised several issues which should be answered before a more aggressive effort to save the building is undertaken.

- **Lease Review:** Regarding the property: it was suggested it would be beneficial for the current lease to be reviewed if the owner would permit it, including the status of the billboard on the property's roof which may or may not be legal and which may or may not be part of the lease. Building code issues and related violations are unknown and would need to be investigated.
- **Community Engagement:** The Panel suggested followup with the boxing community and the community at large to explore support for a project related to Frazier's legacy. Additional interviews with nonprofits, potential tenants, philanthropic organizations and nearby neighbors and groups would help determine the feasibility for a project and determine what might constitute an appropriate use.

Recommendations

Key to any feasible plan for Joe Frazier's Gym is encouraging a sale between the current owner and an appropriate buyer. The Panel agreed that the ideal buyer would be a philanthropic individual or organization, or a corporate owner who would not only purchase the building but would also invest in necessary renovations.

There may be funding opportunities to support various ideas in this report through foundation grants and other sources which could be identified and approached by The Preservation Alliance and the NTHP.

The Panel believes that the property could be self-sustaining once operational, as a facility for a nonprofit with perhaps additional office space leased to small businesses or the neighboring mosque. This could also spur related economic development in the immediate area. The repurposed gym could then be designed to include a small but meaningful collection of memorabilia from Frazier's boxing career, and would be open to the community and fans who recognize Smokin' Joe as one of the greatest boxers in the history of the sport.

*Images courtesy of The National Trust for Historic Preservation.
Learn more at <http://www.savingplaces.org/treasures/joe-fraziers-gym#U6w5OZRdW4h>.*

Stakeholders Interviewed

Bilal Abdussalaam, Devotee, Ahmadiyya Community.

El Amor Brawne Ali, 37th Ward Leader.

Romona Riscoe Benson, Former Executive Director, Multicultural Affairs Congress; Manager of Corporate Relations, PECO.

Diane Bridges, Executive Director, Neighborhood Enrichment and Transformation Community Development Corporation.

Deborah Gary, President, DHEX Enterprises, LLC.

Ariel Goldring, Director of Grants and Stewardship, Boys & Girls Clubs of Philadelphia.

John A. Haak, AICP, Senior Planner, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Andrea Haley, Student, Temple University.

Bernard Hopkins, World Light-Heavyweight Boxing Titleholder.

Ben Leech, Director of Advocacy, The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.

Brent Leggs, Project Manager, National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Larry Needle, Executive Director, Philadelphia Sports Congress.

Dennis Playdon, Adjunct Professor of Architecture, Temple University.

Ted Qualli, Executive Director, Police Athletic League (PAL).

Ashley Richards, AICP, Planner, Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Linda Richardson, President, Uptown Entertainment & Development Corporation.

Larry Sprague, Executive Director, Sustainable Energy Funding Program.

Joshua Villwock, Real Estate Broker.

Gary Williams, 32nd Ward Leader and former State Representative.

Leslie Wolff, Joe Frazier's former business manager; CEO, Smart Marketing Group.

Technical Assistance Panelists

Peter A. Angelides, Ph.D., AICP

TAP Co-Chair

Senior Vice President and Principal, Econsult Solutions

Peter Angelides is principal of Econsult Solutions and a member of the teaching faculty at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Angelides, trained in both economics and city planning, applies critical economic thinking to complex projects in real estate, economic development, transportation, tax policy, valuation, and litigation. Dr. Angelides has assisted clients in a broad range of industries, including real estate development, transportation entities, local and regional governments, affordable housing, energy, health care, pharmaceuticals, insurance, and software. In recent work, he assessed the costs and benefits of SEPTA's West Trenton track separation project, and examined the financial feasibility and economic impact of using tolls to finance transportation infrastructure improvements. Dr. Angelides teaches courses in the areas of Urban Economics, Public Finance and Infrastructure Investment at the University of Pennsylvania, at both the Department of City and Regional Planning and at the Fels Center of Government. He is an active member of ULI Philadelphia and has served on and led several TAPs.

Richard W. Huffman FAIA

TAP Co-chair

Mr. Huffman was a principal of the firm Wallace Roberts & Todd for over 30 years. He has directed major redevelopment projects throughout the United States and abroad including the award-winning Canal Walk in Richmond, Virginia, the Growth Management Plan for downtown, Washington DC, residential redevelopment strategies in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Buffalo, New York and Philadelphia, as well as the urban design plan for Liberty Place in Philadelphia. He received master's degrees in Architecture and City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania. He is co-chair of the ULI Philadelphia TAP Council and has served on national ULI Advisory Service Panels in Los Angeles, Cleveland, Milwaukee, New Orleans and Washington, DC, as well as multiple ULI Philadelphia TAPs.

Amachie Ackah

Founder, Clay Cove Capital

Mr. Ackah has extensive experience within all sectors of real estate including multi-family portfolios totaling over 5,000 units, more than three million square feet of office product, the redevelopment of several retail properties as well as the acquisition of distressed retailers. Mr. Ackah has been actively involved in the hospitality and lodging sectors, including the acquisition of the Clift Hotel in San Francisco, the development of the largest portfolio of Marriott limited-service hotels in Canada, the conversion of historic buildings to hotels in such cities as Columbus, OH and Edmonton, Canada; the redevelopment of the Sheraton Meadowlands in Northern New Jersey; and the development of the Roaring Fork Club in the Aspen region. He was previously associated with Cedar Hill, Lubert-Adler Partner, and the Buccini/Pollin Group, and was a member of the investment team at the Praedium Group and an analyst at Goldman, Sachs & Co. Mr. Ackah holds a B.A. from Williams College and an M.B.A. in Finance and Real Estate from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania where he was distinguished as a Murphy Fellow by the faculty of the Zell-Lurie Real Estate Center. He is a member of ULI's Hotel Development Product Council and co-chair of ULI Philadelphia's Capital Markets Council.

Mike Aylmer

Assistant Vice President, Berkadia

Mr. Aylmer has worked in the commercial real estate industry for 12 years, beginning his career at Legg Mason Real Estate Services as a loan portfolio specialist, where he managed loan portfolios that totaled several hundred million dollars. In 2007, Mr. Aylmer switched roles and joined NorthMarq Capital's loan production team as an analyst. He has contributed to the closing of over \$100 million in commercial real estate financing, with the responsibility of underwriting and presenting debt and equity transactions to investors. In 2012, Mr. Aylmer was promoted to loan producer. While working in a production role at NorthMarq, he closed several loans secured by a variety of commercial real estate asset types sourced from Life Company, CMBS, agency and bank relationships. Mr. Aylmer is currently a loan producer at Berkadia Commercial Mortgage where he is responsible for debt and equity originations in

the greater Philadelphia market. He received his bachelor's degree from St. Joseph's University and an MBA from La Salle University. He is an active member of ULI and currently co-chairs the ULI Philadelphia Young Leaders Council.

John H. Cluver, AIA, LEED AP

Partner, Voith & Mactavish Architects LLP

Mr. Cluver received his professional degree in architecture from the University of Notre Dame and a Certificate in Historic Preservation from the University of Pennsylvania. He has worked on a wide range of rehabilitation projects for educational, commercial, and civic institutions in the Mid-Atlantic region, both as architect and preservation consultant. His preservation projects have included work at Vassar College, Drexel University, Old Original Bookbinder's, and the Bryn Mawr Film Institute. Mr. Cluver has written and spoken on a variety of topics, with a particular interest in energy efficiency in historic buildings and the relationship between historic preservation and sustainable design. He has been an adjunct professor at Moore College of Art and Design, teaching a design studio on historic preservation. In 2006 Mr. Cluver spent a week assessing conditions in New Orleans with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He currently serves on the City of Philadelphia's Historical Commission Architectural Advisory Committee, and was named Young Architect of the Year by the Philadelphia Chapter of the AIA in 2008. He currently chairs ULI Philadelphia's Building Reuse team, an initiative with The Preservation Alliance and the NTHP.

Janet Kimbleton Grace, LEED AP, ID+C

Senior Project Manager, AthenianRazak, LLC

Ms. Grace has specialized in the documentation, management and coordination of large urban projects throughout her career. Early in her career she was responsible for leading the team providing programming, space planning, interior design, interior construction documentation and FF&E selection, and move coordination for the Independence Blue Cross headquarters at 1901 Market Street, then the largest interior fit-up project in Philadelphia. She recently completed a decade-long phased historic renovation and addition to the Bryn Mawr Film Institute that allowed the theater to remain

operational during five phases of construction, while complying with funding restrictions of private and public investment. A graduate of the University of the Arts with a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Studies, Ms. Grace is the founder and past president of DOCOMOMO Philadelphia, an organization spearheading the preservation of modern architecture.

Puja Suneja Peruto

Puja Suneja Peruto has over a decade of experience assisting clients with real estate strategy, public/private partnership advisory, market and financial due diligence, and complex real estate valuations. Her clients have included a wide range of domestic and international public and private real estate owners, investors, debtors and users. Ms. Peruto began her career at Studley, Inc. providing market research, lease review, statistical analysis and quarterly reporting for an office of 20 brokers. She then moved to the Ernst & Young Transaction Real Estate group where she managed the real estate work for over \$60 billion in transactions and a variety of strategic assignments for both public and private institutions. Ms. Peruto has a Bachelor of Science in Economics from The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to her active engagement in ULI at both the local and national levels, she serves on the Advisory Council at Villanova University's Daniel M. DiLella Center for Real Estate.

Peter J. Porretta, AIA

Principal Architect, Lighthouse Architecture

Mr. Porretta brings a unique sensibility to architectural design, having grown up in his family's construction business. His design and construction experience was broadened by a master's degree in business administration and co-ownership in a real estate development company. Mr. Porretta is a National Council of Architectural Registration Boards Certified Architect, a Construction Specifications Institute Certified Construction Specifier and Certified Construction Contract Administrator, and a U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional (LEED AP). In addition to ULI Philadelphia, where he serves as co-chair of the South Jersey Regional Satellite Council, Mr. Porretta's memberships include American Institute of Architects,

Construction Specifications Institute and International Code Council, and Lambda Alpha International – the Honorary Society for the Advancement of Land Economics.

Timothy Proctor

Senior Vice President and Regional Director of Commercial Real Estate, TD Bank

At TD Bank, Mr. Proctor oversees lenders who provide commercial banking services to professional real estate investors and developers in a range of categories including office, retail, industrial, multi-family, student housing, self-storage and hotel. Prior to joining TD Bank, he spent several years with Wells Fargo, most recently serving as the New Jersey office manager for the company's Real Estate Banking Group, which provides acquisition, construction and bridge financing throughout the country for New Jersey-based real estate investors and developers; he previously opened the Philadelphia office for Wells Fargo and led the team in providing similar real estate finance services for the region. Before joining Wells Fargo in 2001, Mr. Proctor was a vice president with Wachovia Bank and its predecessors in their Philadelphia and Ewing, New Jersey offices. He is a past president of the Greater Philadelphia chapter of NAIOP and an active ULI participant.

Eric L. Stern, Esq.

Partner, Morgan Lewis

Mr. Stern is the firm-wide real estate practice leader at Morgan Lewis, where he represents REITs, private equity funds, developers, corporate real estate users, lenders, retailers and business owners. Mr. Stern has published articles on various topics in real estate law, and has lectured on behalf of the American Bar Association, Real Property Section, the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), CLE International, Law Seminars International, the Pennsylvania Bar Institute, Philadelphia Bar Association, and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. He is a member of ULI, ICSC, the National Association of Real Estate Investment Trusts (NAREIT), the Advisory Board of the Samuel Zell and Robert Lurie Real Estate Center of the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and he served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Association of Industrial

and Office Properties (NAIOP) from 2000-2006. Mr. Stern was elected the American College of Real Estate Lawyers (ACREL) in 2000, is listed in Chambers USA: America's Leading Lawyers for Business (2003-2013), and in The Best Lawyers in America (2006-2014). Mr. Stern is a 1978 graduate of Brandeis University, a 1981 graduate of Boston College Law School, and is a member of the Pennsylvania and Massachusetts state bars.

Jonathan Weiss

Founder, Equinox Management & Construction, LLC and TempleTown Realty Companies

Jonathan Weiss is the founder of Equinox Management & Construction, LLC and the TempleTown Realty companies. Equinox is a Philadelphia-based, fully-integrated real estate development, property management, general contracting and property maintenance company with a focus on urban infill development. Equinox is committed to sustainability in the built environment and recently completed the largest LEED-certified modular structure in the country. This year Equinox will break ground on Folsom Powerhouse, a community of high-efficiency sustainable townhomes in the Francisville neighborhood of Philadelphia. Equinox and its affiliate, TempleTown Realty, is also one of the leading providers of off-campus housing in Philadelphia. Mr. Weiss is a graduate of Amherst College and the University of Pennsylvania and is an active ULI member.



Urban Land Institute Philadelphia

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