

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia Office of the Chief Clerk Room 402, City Hall Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 241121)

RESOLUTION

Calling on the Department of Licenses and Inspections to halt any potential demolition plans to the iconic Joe Frazier's Gym on North Broad Street; and calling on the City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, and all other associated parties to identify alternative uses for Joe Frazier's Gym.

WHEREAS, "Smokin'" Joe Frazier was Philadelphia's heavyweight boxing icon who captured Olympic gold at the 1964 Tokyo Games, won the world heavyweight championship in 1970, and handed Muhammad Ali his first professional defeat in their legendary 1971 "Fight of the Century" match at Madison Square Garden; and

WHEREAS, Frazier's professional boxing career was kickstarted in 1965 with the financial backing of investors who called themselves the "Cloverlay Group"; and

WHEREAS, In 1968 the Cloverlay Group purchased a then-77 year old warehouse on North Broad Street to convert into a gym for Frazier, where he would train for his most high profile fights, including bouts against Muhammad Ali and "Big" George Foreman. Prior to its conversion to Joe Frazier's Gym, 2917 North Broad Street had been a millwork, a window-blind factory, a woodworking shop, a bowling alley, and even a dance hall; and

WHEREAS, Following his retirement in 1975, Frazier purchased the gym from the Cloverlay Group and opened it to the public, training fighters such as Bert Cooper, Duane Bobick, Jesse "Hollywood" Hart, and his son Marvis Frazier; and

WHEREAS, Frazier maintained a small apartment above the gym where he lived on and off until his death in 2011. At the time, the gym was managed by Marvis, who also operated it as a community center for inner city youth; and

WHEREAS, Frazier faced financial struggles from failed business ventures during his twilight years. His failure to keep up with \$127,000 in unpaid taxes on his gym led to lawsuits from the City, the shuttering of the gym for renovations in 2008, a Sheriff's sale, and then another sale of the property to Broad Enterprises Group LLC for \$365,000; and

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WHEREAS, At the time of Frazier's death, the gym was leased to "In & Out Furniture and Bedding," a discount furniture store selling room packages at "knockout prices." The gym's upper floors were vacant, and all of Frazier's gym equipment was cleared out after the sale; and

WHEREAS, The historic significance of Joe Frazier's Gym led to its placement on the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia's 2011 Endangered Property List and the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 2012 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic places. At the time, the gym had no official historic designation at the local or national level; and

WHEREAS, That same year, Temple University architectural students began an effort to nominate Joe Frazier's Gym to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, which would give it legal protections against major alterations and demolition; and to the National Register of Historic Places, which would grant owners of the property access to historic preservation tax credits and technical assistance with preservation efforts; and

WHEREAS, These efforts were rewarded in 2013, when the National Park Service announced that Joe Frazier's Gym had been named to the National Register of Historic Places. It was also named to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places that same year. These announcements accompanied another by the City of Philadelphia to finally erect a statue of Joe Frazier outside Xfinity Live! in 2015 after decades of criticism for featuring a statue of the fictional *Rocky Balboa* but not one of the real-life Frazier; and

WHEREAS, The public honorifics continued as Glenwood Avenue, by which Joe Frazier's Gym sits, was also named "Smokin' Joe Frazier Boulevard" by Philadelphia City Council in 2018 after a petition from members of the Frazier family; and

WHEREAS, The designation of Joe Frazier's Gym on the National Register of Historic Places does not preclude potential demolition of the building, and in the years since preservationists won its historic designation, Joe Frazier's Gym has continued to deteriorate as the Preservation Alliance has struggled to contact the property's current and previous owners about the building; and

WHEREAS, In 2022, a new company, Broad St Holdings LLC, acquired the gym for \$850,000. The building's suburban owner has failed to pay about \$26,000 in combined taxes and utility bills linked to the property, and the building has since failed three straight City inspections between 2023 and 2024, leading the Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections to declare the property "unsafe"; and

WHEREAS, If the gym continues to deteriorate to the point where it is deemed "imminently dangerous," the City can step in and demolish it despite its landmark status; and

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WHEREAS, According to a 2014 study by the Urban Land Institute commissioned by the Preservation Alliance, there remains “flexibility in renovating the building for new purposes” given its historic significance, despite the many structural challenges to renovation; and

WHEREAS, Preservationists and architectural engineers have consistently touted the building’s potential as a reinvigorated boxing gym, boxing museum, and community center. As the building faces serious structural challenges due to neglect, it is imperative that the City work to find alternative uses to the legendary building; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That it hereby calls on the Department of Licenses and Inspections to halt any potential demolition plans to the iconic Joe Frazier’s Gym on North Broad Street; and that it hereby calls on the City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, and all other associated parties to identify alternative uses for Joe Frazier’s Gym.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the twelfth day of December, 2024.

Kenyatta Johnson
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Elizabeth McCollum
INTERIM CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember Young

Sponsored by: Council President Johnson, Councilmembers Young, Gilmore
Richardson, Thomas, Jones, Landau, Lozada, Brooks, Harrity,
O'Rourke, Driscoll, O'Neill, Squilla and Bass