

**THE NEW YORK  
LANDMARKS  
CONSERVANCY**

December 14, 2011

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITINGS AND MARITIME USES OF THE NEW  
YORK CITY COUNCIL REGARDING THE DESIGNATION OF THE BOROUGH HALL  
SKYSCRAPER HISTORIC DISTRICT, BROOKLYN**

Good day Chair Lander and members of the Subcommittee. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking on behalf of The New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy supports designation of the entire Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District and urges the Council to affirm that designation.

Almost six years ago, the Conservancy, the Brooklyn Heights Association and the Municipal Art Society joined forces to investigate whether landmark protection could be extended to the significant group of buildings along the Court Street corridor, which had been left out of the Brooklyn Heights Historic District in 1965. We were galvanized by the demolition of the 1857 Brooklyn Gas Light Company headquarters on Remsen Street. The demolition with little fanfare of the oldest and finest commercial building in the area made it clear that something needed to be done. The report we produced recommended a new Historic District running from Montague Street to Livingston Street.

In many ways this is not only a great collection of buildings, it is also the symbolic center of Brooklyn. Spanning a century of high-quality commercial and municipal architecture, these structures survive as a testament to the development and distinct identity of the borough's first business district. Collectively they tell the story of the growth and development of Brooklyn's core. They are aesthetically, historically and culturally significant structures and therefore they are all worthy of inclusion in a historic district.

Nonetheless, some would try to cloud that fact with rumors of purported costs and with scare tactics.

We have heard unsubstantiated arguments that designation will increase owners' costs. Conservancy staff has spoken to professionals at eight architecture and engineering firms with experience working on older buildings within and outside historic districts, and they have indicated that this is simply not the case. (A summary of those discussions is attached to the testimony.) The practitioners have told us that the costs of materials, labor, filings, and professional fees for designated buildings are not significantly higher than for unprotected properties.

We have heard arguments that designation will impede commercial activity. Instead, we suggest looking at the examples of SoHo, TriBeCa, or Ladies Mile where landmark designation has led to busy commercial thoroughfares.

Property owners in New York City face a myriad of rising expenses every year, from fuel costs to DOB requirements, to ever-higher property taxes. Landmark designation does not automatically require any actions or impose any costs, and when work is performed the additional costs are minimal.

In fact landmark designation has been shown to have positive benefits, such as stabilizing and increasing property values as stated by the City's Independent Budget Office in its 2003 report. This is one of the reasons that so many neighborhoods have requested landmark designation. Owners of over 29,000 designated buildings, in over 100 historic districts across the city are maintaining those properties in communities that are thriving. The evidence that designation works is everywhere.

The facts are clear. The fears are unfounded. We see no evidence in our work or from the professionals in the field that there is any significant expense associated with landmarking. Carving up this District would be a real blow to the City's efforts to protect the superb architecture that gives New York its special character.

Misinformation should not trump merit.

We ask that you affirm designation of this District in its entirety and give it the recognition it richly deserves. Thank you for the opportunity to present the Conservancy's views.