

December 4, 2018

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF THE 817 BROADWAY, 826 BROADWAY, 830 BROADWAY, 832 BROADWAY, 836 BROADWAY, 840 BROADWAY, AND THE ROOSEVELT BUILDING AT 841 BROADWAY, MANHATTAN AS INDIVIDUAL LANDMARKS

The Conservancy is pleased to support designation of these seven buildings. Along with the neighboring landmarks at 827-831 Broadway, this group forms a rich streetscape that well represents the history and architecture of Manhattan just south of Union Square.

The seven buildings are all located along Broadway near the intersections of 12th and 13th Streets. Six date from near the turn of the 20th century, in the Renaissance Revival Style typical of that era; one is from 1876, in the emblematic Second Empire/ Neo-Grec style. They are all notable for their intact architecture, which features abundant and vibrant decorative details. The architects include distinguished names, such George B. Post, Cleverdon & Putzel, Robert Maynicke, and Steven D. Hatch.

These buildings reflect the story of this neighborhood. The original uses were mostly commercial, such as garment manufacturing and wholesale, publishing, retail showrooms, and even a movie studio. Some housed artists in the mid-century, and today they feature offices and stores, and residential conversions. There is no doubt that they merit landmark designation.

However, we are mindful that designation does not preserve buildings in amber. As they have for the last 125 years plus, these buildings will evolve as needed, but now under the guidance of the Landmarks Commission. Like the buildings themselves, the mix of businesses along Broadway contributes to a vibrant quality of life in this neighborhood, and we would not want to see it diminished. We believe that designation helps owners preserve not only buildings, but also this dynamic character.

We understand that there are concerns about these designations. Several years ago when this issue was under discussion at another hearing, we took an informal study of co-op owners and contractors. It found that designation did not have to increase the time and money spent on investing and caring for older buildings. The Conservancy is also pleased to offer the services of our Technical Services and Historic Properties Fund staff to the owners of the buildings proposed today. And we applaud recent LPC initiatives to ease the process for owners. As noted in our testimony on the proposed Rules revisions, we urge the Commission to update illustrated guides on its website when the revisions come into effect, and to create special guides for building types such as commercial storefronts.

We appreciate the hard work of local advocates in surveying and documenting the landmark-quality buildings in this community and we thank the Landmarks Commission for bringing these proposed designations forward. As the City attracts more tech companies, we know, based on our 2016 study on the economics of preservation, that they want to be in historic buildings, like the ones under consideration today, and like others in this area. But without protections, we are concerned that many of those structures will be lost, so we ask the LPC to consider additional individual designations or a historic district.

Thank you for the opportunity to express the Conservancy's views.