

January 29, 2013

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES REGARDING PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF THE EAST VILLAGE/LOWER EAST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Good day Chair Lander and Councilmembers. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

The Conservancy strongly supports landmark designation of the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District. These blocks are a rich collection of row houses and tenements from the 19th and 20th centuries which maintain much of their historic fabric. Italianate and Neo-Grec brownstones and apartment buildings in the Romanesque Revival, Renaissance Revival and Queen Anne styles line the streets next to handsome religious properties and cultural venues. While there have been some alterations to these structures, they have, in large part, the same scale, height, and volume as when built.

The unique character of these buildings animates a neighborhood that retains long-time residents and has been a powerful lure to generations of newcomers. In addition to architectural merit, the East Village derives a special sense of place from the vast sweep of history that has taken place on its streets. From early days as a base for merchants, to decades of welcoming immigrant communities, to serving as the home for the social movements and artistic communities so prominent in more recent years, the East Village truly tells the story of New York.

We would like to remind building owners of the advantages of landmarking. The City's own Independent Budget Office has issued a study stating that historic district designation stabilizes and improves property values. Just as designation has benefited other parts of Lower Manhattan, landmarking the East Village Districts will enhance these neighborhoods, ensuring that any alterations are guided by the Landmarks Law.

The East Village/Lower East Side District includes several historic religious properties, some of which have spoken against designation. In 2011, Conservancy staff attended a meeting, convened by Council member Rosie Mendez, to discuss their particular concerns. Landmarking will not freeze these buildings in time, restrict the rights of their congregations, or force them to undertake costly, time-consuming repairs. While leaky roofs and boilers always need to be repaired, the LPC regulation process, like any other City agency, helps to ensure that work is performed correctly. Changes to interiors are not regulated, and the guidance that the Commission provides can help safeguard that any funds spent will be a good investment in the long-term stewardship of the building.

Throughout the 27 years that the Conservancy's Sacred Sites Program has been offering assistance to historic religious properties, we have worked with congregations to consider phased fundraising and restoration projects, capacity building, shared space usage, redevelopment plans, air rights sales, or even the sale of the building to a new congregation. In working with hundreds of such properties across the City and State, we have seen these approaches work.

We have also provided direct assistance: Sacred Sites has granted over \$3 million to 200 New York City landmark religious properties, and our Historic Properties Fund has made over \$5.1 million in low-interest loans for restoration work on these buildings. Most recently we awarded a \$25,000 challenge grant to Community Synagogue for façade restoration and roof replacement, and a \$12,000 grant to the Hopper House on Second Avenue for professional services.

Beyond our funds, landmark designation can trigger grants from the City and State. Flushing Meeting in Queens has completed work financed with \$500,000 in City capital funding and a \$100,000 State grant, while Tifereth Israel in Corona has nearly completed a \$1.7 million restoration project using \$1.1 million in City capital funds, \$200,000 from the State, and \$400,000 in private funding, which we helped them raise. In these and many more instances, landmark designation has supported buildings, congregations, and communities.

There is no doubt that the East Village will continue to grow and evolve as it has for over 200 years; with landmark designation, new generations of residents, business owners, artists, and immigrants will be able to rediscover and use this community's rich architectural heritage.

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