

June 22, 2010

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE N.Y.C. LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF THE GRAND CONCOURSE HISTORIC DISTRICT IN THE BRONX

Good afternoon, Chair Tierney and Commissioners. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy supports designation of the Grand Concourse Historic District.

When the Bronx Historic Preservation Task Force released its 2008 report, its top priority was designation of the Grand Concourse as a historic district. We agree. This street, once called the Park Avenue for the middle class merits designation for the sense of place derived from its plan, its architecture, and its history.

The wide boulevard envisioned by French engineer Louis Reiss was typical of the City Beautiful style. It was completed 100 years ago, just as improvements in transportation and infrastructure were luring residents from Manhattan. The newcomers were also attracted by the long rows of low-scale apartment buildings which featured all of the best of technology and design from the early 20th century. The buildings were sited with gardens and open spaces; and the interiors were comfortable, airy, and light. The styles ranged from Classical Revival to a large concentration of striking new Art Deco and Art Moderne facades, featuring colorful bricks, terra cotta, tiles, etched glass, and mosaics.

For immigrant families used to the degradations of the crowded Lower East Side, the Grand Concourse really was their Champs Elysees, and certainly a sign that this new middle class had achieved some part of its American dream. Today, after years of upheaval, new generations are rediscovering the Grand Concourse.

It is fortunate that the wide promenade and the low buildings with their bands of windows and streamlined details retain much of their historic profile, with limited changes to height, massing or detail. Just after its centennial anniversary the Grand Concourse deserves both the recognition of and the guidance from the Landmarks Commission as it moves into its next 100 years.

The Conservancy is pleased to support designation of the Grand Concourse Historic District as a representation of twentieth-century residential architecture in the Bronx. We look forward to providing its residents and owners with technical and financial assistance. And we hope that the Commission will consider the blocks north of this proposed district, which are included in the National Register Historic District for designation.

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