

January 15, 2008

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE N.Y.C. LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF CONGREGATION TIFEREETH ISRAEL IN CORONA, QUEENS AS A LANDMARK**

Good day, Chair Tierney and Commissioners. I am Ann-Isabel Friedman, speaking on behalf of The New York Landmarks Conservancy.

The Conservancy enthusiastically supports the proposed designation of Congregation Tifereth Israel, at 109-18 54th Avenue in Corona, Queens as a New York City landmark.

This is a rare, surviving wooden synagogue, substantially intact as designed in 1911, and one of the oldest surviving purpose-built synagogues in the city. The congregation has been actively pursuing restoration of the building for 10 years, and has incrementally been honored with a Queensmark designation in 1999, New York State and National Register nomination in 2002, and now, in early 2008, with New York City landmark designation.

Like much of the city, the lots and blocks immediately adjacent to the synagogue have experienced rapid redevelopment in recent years. The synagogue is under pressure from encroaching residential development. With demographic changes and real estate pressure, we have lost several landmark-quality New York City synagogues in the last several years, most recently Temple Emanu-El, a handsome Georgian structure in Borough Park, in March 2007. New York City landmark designation will protect Tifereth Israel from future demolition and redevelopment. The Conservancy is currently surveying synagogues in Brooklyn and Queens, and will be sharing our database with the Commission. We are finding an absolutely explosive growth in synagogue development outside of Manhattan in the 19-teens and twenties, including several monumental classical synagogues and community buildings by major architects, such as Arnold Brunner and Emery Roth. We're also finding many others, from classical to delightfully eclectic, with Byzantine and Moorish flourishes, by skilled local practitioners.

While Congregation Tifereth Israel is little altered from its historic appearance, the stucco installed over the synagogue's original wooden clapboard siding, already in place in the circa 1940 tax photograph, has held moisture against the building, accelerating deterioration of the dozens of wood window frames and sash; while termites have destroyed the basement windows. A 2005 New York State EPF grant for restoration, matched by a Queens Borough President capital grant, will fund substantial restoration of the moisture and termite-damaged exterior – and return the original wooden clapboard and wood windows to the facades. However, this substantial city funding, and match to the state grant, must be preceded by New York City landmark designation.

It has been a delight to work with Commission staff in researching the nuances of Tifereth Israel's cultural history, from Estee Lauder to Madonna. I thank you, and your staff, for all your help in moving this designation forward.

I also thank you for the opportunity to present The New York Landmarks Conservancy's views.