

**THE NEW YORK
LANDMARKS
CONSERVANCY**

May 2, 2012

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL LAND USE AND HOUSING AND BUILDINGS COMMITTEES REGARDING PROPOSED BILLS INT 0020-2010, INT 0080-2010, INT 0220-2010, INT 0222-2010, INT 0357-2010, INT 0532-2011, INT 533-2011, INT 0845-2012, INT 0846-2012, INT 0850-2012, INT 0849-2012

Good morning Chair Comrie, Chair Dilan, and members of the City Council. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about policies and procedures at the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Overall, the Council has a good record on landmarks issues; however, we have found the large volume of bills and the quick timing of this hearing to be a surprise. It has likely prevented all interested parties adequate time to respond, and we will not be commenting in depth on the entire agenda.

Several of the bills address an ongoing debate about the transparency and timeliness of the landmark designation process. We believe that the bills are well intentioned, but unless the City increases the LPC budget both substantially and permanently, many of these items would be very difficult to undertake, and there needs to be much more discussion before any specific timelines are implemented.

Int 0533-2011 calls for the LPC to provide a list of energy-efficient windows, but does not specify energy-efficiency standards, or consider that in some cases, treatments less invasive than window replacement, such as repairs to weather-stripping or installation of new glazing in existing window frames, can create higher levels of energy savings and sustainability.

We have very serious reservations about Int 0845 -2012 and Int 0846-2012. Int 0845 would go against the spirit of the Landmarks Law. Currently, there are circumstances in which the LPC allows non-historic replacement materials, but we rely on their staff's guidance to judge proposals for such usage. This bill would bypass that experience and expertise.

Int 0846-2012 is the most worrisome. Of the hundreds of thousands of buildings in the City, only about 3% are designated landmarks. That leaves a good 97% available for development opportunities. The LPC should not have to become an extension of the City Planning Department or the Economic Development Corporation in order to designate landmarks. And we believe that any analysis would be incomplete without also addressing the positive economic activity that landmarking generates, from tourism and jobs, stable or increased property values, and preservation tax credits.

In enacting the Landmarks Law, the City recognized the value of its architectural heritage. The Law has served the City well by encouraging local jobs, tourism, and sustainability. And it is very popular with the dozens of neighborhood groups and thousands of citizens who request, advocate for, and welcome landmark designation. But the proposed bill would place a higher value on development. New York has never been, nor is it currently, development-deprived. Even during a mayoral administration that has nurtured a development-friendly atmosphere, there have been more historic district designations than ever before, because building owners across the City want to protect the character of their neighborhoods.

Finally, regarding the concerns voiced previously to the Council that landmarks designation will increase owners' costs. Conservancy staff has spoken to professionals at 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've also undertaken a study comparing façade restoration and Local Law 11 projects on similar Park Avenue co-ops within and outside the boundaries of the Upper East Side Historic District. In this case, what we've found is that there are no conclusions that can be attributable to landmark status. Of the three comparisons we've developed, some work has cost more, and some less, but this seemed to be based on the characteristics at each individual property, not on the landmarks status. (A summary is attached.)

There should be additional time to discuss any of these bills more thoroughly before they are brought to a vote. No city agency is perfect, but we believe that the Landmarks Commission performs an extraordinary task in carrying out the Landmarks Law, and protecting the remarkable architecture of our City, and we hope that the most damaging bills proposed today do not prevent them from fulfilling that mandate.

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