

February 11, 2014

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE N.Y.C. LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF THE PARK AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Good afternoon, Chair Tierney and Commissioners. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking on behalf of the Landmarks Conservancy in support of the Park Avenue Historic District.

Park Avenue was planned as a unified concourse from the days of the 1811 Commissioner's Plan. Many of the existing buildings were developed 100 years later, after rail lines were sunk below the street and covered and the grassy median at the heart of Park Avenue installed. Those malls lined by the blocks of early 20th-century, high-rise apartment buildings create a dignified sense of place.

The buildings were designed by the prominent architects of the day, including George & Edward Blum, Rosario Candela, J.E.R. Carpenter, Emery Roth, and Schwartz & Gross in styles typical of the era, such as Renaissance Revival and Georgian Revival. Most have retained their original height and scale, with decorative elements intact.

Sections of Park Avenue below 79th Street and between 91st and 95th Streets, within the Upper East Side and Carnegie Hill Historic Districts, are protected by the Landmarks Law. The buildings within the proposed Park Avenue Historic District are equal in architectural significance. This designation will offer the entire grand thoroughfare the recognition that it merits.

One building, the parish house at the Park Avenue Church (1010 Park Avenue), has been the focus of recent media attention, as the Church has stated that it wishes to craft a real estate transaction that would result in a new building at that site. While the 1909-11 Bertram Goodhue-designed Church is without question worthy of landmark designation, the parish house presents an interesting question. It is an amalgam of layers of history and additions. One section of the façade is original. The remainder of the 1960's-era street wall meets the age threshold for designation and was clearly built as infill to mimic the Gothic-inspired church, in massing, materials, and details. However, the majority of the 1960's construction at the rear of the parish house site is not consistent with that design, and is not sympathetic to the proposed Historic District.

In the 1970 Chelsea Historic District designation report, the Commission designated the entire General Theological Seminary but anticipated that the institution might wish to alter its complex to meet its evolving needs, and that it could do so under the guidance of the Commission. While it is not an exact parallel, we believe that the Commission should build into this designation report a nuanced regulatory approach that is responsive to the complex history of this site.

We commend the Commission, the Church, and the community for participating in a process that moves this site toward a better solution than the one circulated last summer, and moves this most deserving Historic District toward designation.

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