

**THE NEW YORK
LANDMARKS
CONSERVANCY**

July 11 2017

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE N.Y.C. LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING DEMOLITION OF 60 NORFOLK STREET, BETH HAMEDRASH HAGODOL SYNAGOGUE (ORIGINALLY NORFOLK STREET BAPTIST CHURCH) AN INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK

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

The Conservancy has been a long-time advocate for Beth Hamedrash Hagodol, the oldest Russian Orthodox Synagogue in the country, and once a center of Jewish immigrant life in the Lower East Side. In the years immediately before this tragic fire, we worked with the rabbi and local supporters to find a good outcome for this building, which had become neglected and significantly deteriorated. We funded a conditions report which established that the structure could be restored. We welcomed the dialogue between the rabbi and a nearby non-profit to explore ways to utilize development rights, support the building, and create a new space for the congregation.

Our staff has reviewed the report prepared by Howard L. Zimmerman Architects. We agree with its conclusions, that little of this landmark is salvageable. However, we do believe that if feasible, any historic fabric that can be maintained should be. The report calls out the rear (east) and south walls as being potentially beyond repair. The corollary is that they potentially could be repaired.

As the LPC designation report states, this landmark was designated for its "austere simplicity" and its cultural history. Despite the horrific outcome of the fire, that history cannot and should not be erased. The incorporation of historic materials into any new structure would be a way to honor the heritage of Beth Hamedrash Hagodol, and its place in the narrative of the Lower East Side.

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