

July 23, 2018

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY
2018 CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION**

Good evening Chair Perales and Commission members. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy is a 45-year old organization dedicated to preserving, revitalizing, and reusing New York's architectural resources. Through financial and technical assistance, advocacy, and education, the Conservancy ensures that historically and culturally significant buildings, streetscapes, and neighborhoods continue to contribute to the City's economy, tourism, and quality of life.

The land use issues that this Commission has discussed are central to our work in preservation and planning. We understand that this body intends to defer consideration to future Commissions, however, given the critical nature of these topics, we wanted to respond to the preliminary staff report.

New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission is one of the strongest and most effective preservation agencies in the country. Its protection of historic resources was integral in reinvigorating the City's economy after the dark days of the financial crises in the 1970s and 80s. In the recent boom years, it has been a balance, working to maintain the dynamic mix of old and new that makes New York unique.

The Conservancy's own study on the economic impacts of designation found tremendous benefits. More than \$800 million is invested annually in New York's historic buildings, creating 9,000 jobs and providing paychecks of over \$500 million each year. Heritage tourism is a major component of the City's visitor industry, which provides jobs for 130,000 New Yorkers. Historic districts are the densest residential neighborhoods in every borough, usually having a density of two to three times that of the borough overall. And both historic office and apartment buildings use significantly less energy per square foot than their more recently built competitors.

This success leads to the conclusion that the LPC should absolutely continue as an independent agency. The Landmarks Law charges it to safeguard the buildings and places that represent New York City's cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history in order to:

- Stabilize and improve property values
- Foster civic pride
- Protect and enhance the City's attractions to tourists
- Strengthen the economy of the City
- Promote the use of historic districts, landmarks, interior landmarks, and scenic landmarks for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the City

These goals are just as relevant now as when the Law was written over 50 years ago. In its statement to this Commission, the Real Estate Board once again criticized the landmarks process just as it has for those same 50 years. Once again, preservation's accomplishments prove them wrong.

We believe that the LPC would be even more successful if there was a requirement for a Commissioner, perhaps even the Chair, to have a background in preservation. When the Law was established, this was a new field, so the requirements to have a historian, architects, and a realtor, among others, were sensible. In the decades since, the field of preservation has been professionalized, with several academic degree programs that have produced thousands of alumni. The LPC's preservation staff is required to have a degree; it should be a prerequisite for an appointed Commissioner.

On the larger planning issues, we have heard from constituents across the City who say that their voices are not being heard when it comes to new development in their neighborhoods, that the Department of City Planning zones, but doesn't plan. We urge this and future Commissions to consider a more comprehensive approach. We should have a planning agency that considers all of a community's needs, its existing resources, and its capacity, and then makes decisions based on those factors, instead of the current system, which relies on uncertain outcomes and negotiations with developers.

Until that large-scale change is realized, we believe that Community Boards need to be strengthened. We agree with others who have testified that these volunteer members should have assistance to address the extraordinarily complicated land use issues they face. We support consistent, City-wide training, and additional resources for Boards to engage professionals as staff or consultants.

Thank you to the members of this Commission for your devotion to this work, and thank you for the opportunity to express the Conservancy's views.