

THE NEW YORK  
LANDMARKS  
CONSERVANCY

November 6, 2017

Honorable Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Centre Street, Ninth Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Emergency Request for Evaluation for 550 Madison Avenue, Manhattan

Dear Meenakshi:


The Conservancy requests that the Commission immediately calendar the former American Telephone & Telegraph Corporate headquarters building at 550 Madison Avenue. As an exemplar of post-modernism, it is generally accepted as one of the first and best known symbols of the post-modern movement and is the only major example found in New York City. It represents a pivotal moment in the architectural history of New York City at the close of the 1970s. Designation as an individual landmark would ensure that it remains part of the richly diverse architectural fabric of Greater Midtown East.

Colloquially referred to as the "Chippendale" building, it was designed by Philip Johnson and John Burgee with Harry Simmons as associate architect in 1978. The 660-foot tower, completed in 1984 was a monumental departure from the recent modernist designs in that it drew on classicist expression: the eight-story base with its arches inspired by Warren & Wetmore's New York Central Building (1929, designated a New York City landmark, 1987); the graceful fluted shaft of rose-gray granite punctuated by narrow windows, surmounted by its distinctive thirty-foot tall broken pediment. While in its day it was debated by some critics "as a curiosity, an aberration, an outrage" yet regardless of its detractors, the AT&T building was at the cutting edge of architectural theory and design and broke the modernist orthodox of glass tower in a plaza.

Philip Johnson said of his design, "I believe we are standing at the edge of a mighty watershed between the past half-century of modern architecture and a new uncertain, unclear, but clearly fascinating future." Accordingly, this building remains a vital link to the cultural, commercial and social history of New York City and therefore, we urge the Commission to work quickly to designate and thus protect this building from catastrophic loss.

While there have been modifications to the base of the tower over time, the integrity of Johnson's designs remain intact and the current owners would certainly benefit from the LPC in the design of future alterations.

Yours truly,



Peg Breen  
President