

January 24, 2017

**STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING THE PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF THE WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL, 301 PARK AVENUE, MANHATTAN, AS AN INTERIOR LANDMARK**

Good morning Chair Srinivasan and Commissioners. I am Glen Umberger, speaking on behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. We are delighted to support the designation of the Waldorf Astoria's Park Avenue Foyer, the Main Lobby with the adjacent hall and arcade, Peacock Alley, Lexington Avenue Foyer and stairs, the Grand Ballroom and Silver Corridor, the Basildon Room, the Jade Room and the John Jacob Astor Salon.

With the threat to the Plaza Hotel's interiors in 2004, the great public spaces of our historic hotels were brought to our attention, significant not only for their architectural qualities, but for their cultural significance as places that hold the collected memories of all New Yorkers. When we learned of the potential threat to the Waldorf Astoria interiors, we immediately reached out to the owners and to the Commission because we believe these spaces are equally significant in their architectural and cultural value and deserve to be protected from demolition. In light of our concerns, we researched the history of these public spaces and submitted our findings to the Commission. A few of the highlights of that report include the following:

When the Waldorf Astoria Hotel was designated an individual landmark in 1993, the LPC designation report stated that "[t]he key to understanding the understated modernism of [Lloyd] Morgan's Waldorf may be found in the contemporary descriptions of the hotel's interior and its furnishings." At the hotel's opening, the *New York Times* opined that the Waldorf Astoria "combines luxuriousness of appointments with comfort and decorative charm... [I]obbies, dining rooms and ball rooms show smart contemporary effects and beautiful period interpretations." While the interiors were not included in the original landmark designation, these magnificent rooms now under consideration epitomize the essence of what makes the Waldorf Astoria truly extraordinary including mosaics, murals and nickel-bronze elevator door panels by the French artist, Louis Rigal, on the lobby level, with columns and pilasters in striking varieties of marble, decorative painting and exotic wood paneling used throughout these rooms. In spite of several renovations over the years, these spaces retain much of their original splendor.

The public spaces on the lobby level are not only stunningly beautiful, but the circulatory patterns were planned by the architects to allow the hotel to efficiently host multiple events simultaneously, while providing personal service to its guests. The third floor includes the largest group of ballrooms in the country at the time, consisting of the three-story Grand Ballroom and the adjacent Silver Corridor, with its coved ceiling ornamented by a series of murals salvaged from the old Waldorf-Astoria. Likewise, the smaller ballrooms, foyers and galleries are remarkable, most notably the Basildon Room which was reconstructed from an eighteenth-century salon taken from Basildon Park in Berkshire, England. It features reclaimed paneling, cornices, a marble mantle and oil paintings that were purchased at auction by architect, Leonard Schultze, and ingeniously retrofitted for inclusion in the new hotel. Eighty-five years later, these interiors evoke the Art Deco

*Zeitgeist* and remain an enduring embodiment of the cultural, social and architectural history of New York City.

We thank the owners, the Anbang Insurance Group, elected officials and advocates for supporting this designation, and the Landmarks Preservation Commission for swiftly bringing this matter to a hearing.

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