

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND  
MARITIME USES

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March 9, 2017  
Start: 11:39 a.m.  
Recess: 12:08 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.  
16<sup>th</sup> Fl

B E F O R E: ANNABEL A. PALMA  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Deborah L. Rose  
Rosie Mendez  
Stephen T. Levin  
Inez D. Barron  
Ben Kallos

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Andrea Goldwyn, Manager  
New York Landmarks Conservancy, Harlem Branch

Simeon Bankoff, Executive Director Historic  
Districts Council

Marcel Negret, Project Manager  
Municipal Art Society of New York

Jill Hanson  
Save Harlem Now

Saveria Ashberry Crestfield (sp?), President  
Mount Morris Park Community Improvement Assoc.

Lisa B. Jones, President & Resident  
YMCA Tenant Association

[sound check, pause] [gavel]

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Good morning. I'm Council Member Annabel Palma, and I'm sitting in for Council Member Koo, Chair of the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime uses, who has an emergency and is unable to be here with this morning. We are joined by Council Member Ben Kallos, Council Member David Greenfield, Chair of the Land Use Committee, and Council Member Bill Perkins. We will be holding a public hearing on one landmark application today, proposed for designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission pursuant to Section 3020 of the City of the New York City Charter. Today's application is Land Use 579, the Young Men's Christian Association Building located on West 135th Street Branch known as Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center located at 181st West 135th Street, 181 West 135th Street in Council Member Perkins district in Manhattan. This application is the last of 95 designations filed with the—with the Council as part of the LPC's Backlog Initiative. LPC will present on this application and then we will hear testimony from the public. I will now open the public hearing for Land Use 579, and will ask Mark Silverman from the

Landmarks Preservation Commission and Kate Lemos  
McHale from the Landmarks Preservation Commission to  
come up and provide this testimony. Thank you.

[pause] [background comments]

KATE LEMOS MC HALE: Good morning Council  
Members. My name is Kate Lemos McHale, Director of  
Research at the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
[coughs] I'm here today to testify on the  
Commission's designation of the Jackie Robinson YMCA  
Youth Center at—not loud enough. Oh, sorry, at 181  
West 135 Street, Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1920, Lot  
7. It was designed by John Jackson and built in 1918  
to '19. After hold a special backlog public hearing  
on November 12, 2015, the Landmarks Preservation  
Commission voted unanimously to designate the YMCA on  
December 13, 2016. Built in 1918 to '19, this was  
the first purpose built African-American YMCA  
building in New York City, and became a center of  
intellectual and social life for African-American in  
the first half of the 20th Century. The Italian  
Renaissance Revival Style Building was designed by  
John Jackson, a specialist in YMCA buildings  
following design guidelines that were developed and  
used to give branches across the country a uniform

1 look. African-American YMCAs were the direct results  
2 of the National Organization's policy of racial  
3 segregation from its beginnings in 1851 until 1946.  
4 Excluded from white YMCAs, African-American were  
5 encourage to form separate branches, which became  
6 autonomous community centers. The first African-  
7 American YMCA in New York City is pictured here  
8 located on West 53rd Street, which was created by  
9 combining two row houses. With the growth of the  
10 African-American population in the city, particularly  
11 in Harlem from the Great Migration and soldiers  
12 returning from World War I, the increased demand for  
13 services fueled the need for a new branch.  
14

15           In 1910, Sears and Roebuck President  
16 Jules-Julius Rosenwald with guidance from YMCA  
17 International Secretary Jessie Moreland, established  
18 a challenge grant offering \$25,000 to any city that  
19 raised \$75,000 for a new YMCA building with high  
20 quality amenities for African-American men. This  
21 program ultimately led to the construction of 24 new  
22 African-American YMCAs across the country. In New  
23 York City thousands of African-Americans supported  
24 the YMCA's building fund drives raising \$75,000 with  
25 contributions ranging from 75 cents to \$1,500.

2 Additional funds were raised through postcard  
3 campaigns and local corporate donations and the  
4 Jackie Robinson Y opened in November 1919.

5           By the mid 1920s, the Jackie Robinson Y  
6 became a center of the Harlem Renaissance where the  
7 African-American Literati met to exchange ideas,  
8 where lectures were given and plays and music were  
9 performed. Among the noteworthy individuals  
10 associated with the Y were James Weldon Johnson,  
11 early Director of the NAACP, Alain Locke, the first  
12 African-American Rhodes Scholar, the acclaimed actor  
13 and social activist Paul Robeson and authors Claude  
14 McKay, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Ralph  
15 Ellison. The Y was also noted for its ongoing  
16 community services, its educational counting-  
17 counseling, veterans and jobs programs and Black  
18 Achievers in the Industry awards donors.

19           In the 1930s, the building became a youth  
20 center and home of the Boy's Department of the Harlem  
21 YMCA. In 1947, Jackie Robinson and his teammate Roy  
22 Campanella began coaching and mentoring the children  
23 there, an association that would last the rest of  
24 Robinson's life. Because of his significant  
25 involvement, the building was dedicated to him and

renamed the Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center in  
1976. The Jackie Robinson Y is notable for the  
significant role it played in shaping the civic and  
artistic culture of Harlem, and for its association  
with Jackie Robinson. The building remains intact  
and contributes the civic hub of 135th Street between  
Lenox and Seventh Avenue, along with the Harlem YMCA  
branch across the street and the New York Public  
Library Schomburg Collection for Research and Black  
Culture both New York City individual landmarks.

Thank you. [background noise, pause]

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I—I know that Council  
Member Perkins has a statement. So Council Member  
Perk—Perkins, I will turn the floor over to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER PERKINS: Well, thank you  
very much for that consideration. Obviously, this is  
a very significant landmark presence in—in the  
neighborhood, and has sig—very valuable historical  
residents in terms of not just its presence, but  
those who were more or less engaged with it, all of  
whom seem to have been stars in their own right, and—  
and have made great contributions to the neighborhood  
and to the larger community as well. Even as it is  
quite offensive that it was born out of a very, very

1  
2 period of segregation and racism and perhaps it's a  
3 good thing that it's landmarked that we will never  
4 forget the potential of our bad deeds, and hopefully  
5 through—through this sector and through this  
6 institution we can continue revisit that—those  
7 histories some of which go beyond just the African-  
8 American community, but in others communities as  
9 well, and—and to resurrect that moment of  
10 embarrassment and that moment of shame in which folks  
11 were demonized and segregated against and somehow  
12 were the—not given their due as citizens or members  
13 of the larger community. So, I—I applaud the fact  
14 that we're doing this, and it—it will be a reminder  
15 of what can come out a—of a bad moment, and become a  
16 treasure for our young people, for our—communities in  
17 general, and hopefully we won't revisit those types  
18 of racist segregated approaches to how we can live  
19 together. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you Council  
21 Member. Any other questions? Seeing none, I thank  
22 you for your testimony and I will ask the first panel  
23 to come up. Simeon Bankoff, Andrea Goldwyn and  
24 Marcell Negret. [background comments, pause] I know  
25

1 you guys are reticence. Introduce yourself for  
2 purposes of recording this, and you may begin.

3  
4 ANDREA GOLDWYN: Okay. Good day, Council  
5 Members. I'm Andrea Goldwyn speaking for the New  
6 York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy is  
7 pleased to support designation of the Harlem Branch  
8 of the YMCA as an individual landmark for its  
9 architectural and cultural significance. The Harlem  
10 YMCA was built to serve the African-American  
11 community. The architect, John F. Jackson had  
12 designed over 70 YMCA projects in the early 20th  
13 Century. For this site, he designed a six-story  
14 Renaissance Palazzo style building having buff brick  
15 (sic) with austere details and a dramatic bracketed  
16 cornice. The building features a tall brick base,  
17 topped by a wide one-stone belt course with the  
18 inscribed words Young Men's Christian Association.  
19 Today, the overall massing and details of the  
20 building are well preserved. By the 1920s, Harlem's  
21 African-American population was growing and so were  
22 the neighborhood cultural and artistic institutions.  
23 The YMCA was a venue for lectures, political  
24 meetings, dramatic and musical performances as well  
25 as educational courses. Among the notable

1 individuals associated with the Harlem YMCA, were  
2 writers Claude McKay, John Hendrik Clarke, Langston  
3 Hughes and Ralph Ellison, notable organizations that  
4 regularly met in the building included the National  
5 Coordinating Committee on Civil Rights, the New York  
6 Chapter of the Negro Technical Association and the  
7 Harlem Writers Workshop. The Y as so popular  
8 especially during the period of the Harlem  
9 Renaissance that a second larger facility was built  
10 directly across the street to provide more space.  
11 Both buildings have been referred as the Harlem YMCA.  
12 The later building is an individual landmark, but  
13 this earlier one is where it all—where it all began.  
14 Based on its fine architecture, and the cultural  
15 history and link to the flourishing of New York's  
16 African-American social and intellectual community,  
17 the Conservancy supports designation of the original  
18 Harlem YMCA as an individual landmark. Thank you.

20 SIMEON BANKOFF: Thank you. Good  
21 morning, Council people. This Simeon Bankoff,  
22 Executive Director of the Historic Districts Council.  
23 First of all, let me say congratulations and welcome  
24 back to Council Member Perkins. It's a pleasure to  
25 see you again, sir, and thank you so much for your

1 support of this important community landmark. The  
2 Historic Districts Council is in very strong support  
3 of the original Harlem YMCA. I'm going to just quote  
4 a little bit, which is this Council, not this  
5 particular Council, but the City Council back in  
6 April-April of 1965, which was 52 years ago said it  
7 is the sense of this Council that the standing of the  
8 city as a worldwide tourist center, a world capital  
9 of business, culture and government cannot be  
10 maintained or enhanced by disregarding the historical  
11 and architectural heritage of the city, and by  
12 countenancing the destruction of such cultural  
13 assets. We are very fortunate that the destruction  
14 of this wonder building is not on the docket although  
15 when future panels will come and talk about concerns  
16 and who is resident there. But, I'm also about to  
17 take just a few minutes just talk about the other  
18 build-the other properties that are in front of this  
19 committee that we talked about two weeks ago that  
20 very briefly. We feel that they were all very  
21 meritorious that we're seeing as-as-as-as Council-as  
22 Council Member Palma said. This is the last of the  
23 landmarks of the backlog 95, which was set-motoned  
24 by this Council. The Landmarks Commission actually  
25

1 only moved forward to 28% of those properties to move  
2 them forward, and they're all we feel extraordinary  
3 meritorious and we hope that the Council supports all  
4 of them. Thank you.

5  
6 MARCEL NEGRET: Hello. My name is Marcel  
7 Negret. I'm a Project Manager for the Municipal Art  
8 Society of New York. 181 West 135th Street is now  
9 part of the Harlem YMCA Complex and was first built  
10 for African-American New Yorkers who moved to the  
11 Harlem area in the early 20th Century. The branch  
12 was the focus of Harlem's social and intellectual  
13 life, housing theatrical event, lectures and classes.  
14 Writers Claude McKay, Manson Hughes, John Henry Clark  
15 and Ralph Eisen were all associated with the branch.  
16 The National Coordinating Committee on Civil Rights,  
17 Harlem Writers Workshop and the New York Chapter of  
18 the Negro KinCo Association all had their  
19 headquarters here. They YMCA was partially funded by  
20 Julius Rosenwald, and he is one of the group of  
21 YMCA's and rose schools for African-Americans funded  
22 by the philanthro-philanthropists. 135th Street was  
23 the focus of the Harlem Renaissance. The YMCA along  
24 with the 100-with the 135th Street branch of the New  
25 York Public Library across the street now the

1 Schomburg designated New York City landmark drew  
2 people to the block and provided space for meetings  
3 and discussions. The branch became so popular that  
4 they YMCA built a new branch across the street at 180  
5 West 135th Street designated by James C. McKenzie and  
6 building in 1931. This also a designated individual  
7 landmark. The building is a six-story buff brick  
8 Neo-Renaissance Palazzo with limestone trim. The  
9 largely intact façade is broken up into a dentalated  
10 (sic) ground floor cornice and loaded (sic) limestone  
11 cornice at the fifth story and is topped by a-by a  
12 muddy lion's cornice. The alternating arch and  
13 rectangular windows are characteristic of the style  
14 as it is a history (sic) of ornament. The architect  
15 John F. Jackson was noted YMCA architect and  
16 designed—designed more than 70 of the buildings in  
17 the Northeast, US and Canada. Trained in Buffalo he  
18 moved to New York City in 1901 and practiced for 40  
19 years as John F. Jackson Architect and with-and with  
20 Jackson and Rosencranz and others. Jackson's other  
21 New York City YMCA buildings include the Bedford,  
22 Prospect Park, Highland Park, and Seaman's branch  
23 buildings in Brooklyn. He designed the central  
24 branch in Rochester, New York in 1919, the Bergen  
25

1 Avenue branch in Jersey City 1924, and branches in  
2 Watertown, New York, Montreal and Winnipeg. Jackson  
3 designed the Downtown Community House of Lower  
4 Manhattan in 1925 as well as homes, churches and  
5 public buildings the Sea (sic) Mansion Home for the  
6 Aged at 440 East 89th Street in 1929. The Boys Club  
7 of New York at 321 East 111th Street and the Calvary  
8 Baptist Church in Westfield, New Jersey. The YMCA  
9 building is a fine early 20th Century Neo-Renaissance  
10 style institutional building designed by a prominent  
11 YMCA architect. Although a tangible reminder of our  
12 history of segregation the building has major  
13 cultural significance [coughing] in Black literacy  
14 and social history and is thus worthy of individual  
15 landmark designa-designation. This designation on  
16 West 135th Street will add to the celebration of the  
17 Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movement.  
18 Thank you so much for your time.

19  
20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you so much for  
21 your testimony and for your strong advocacy. I will  
22 now call the next panel up. Leslie Jill Hanson, Lisa  
23 B. Jones, and Saveria (sp?) Crestfield. [pause]

24 JILL HANSON: [off mic] Hi, I'm--

25 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Press the--the button.

1  
2 JILL HANSON: Okay, great. Hi, Jill  
3 Hanson. I'm here representing Save Harlem Now, and  
4 this the first time testifying so I may be a little  
5 nervous. [laughs] Excuse. I have --

6 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: [off mic] It's okay.

7 JILL HANSON: Okay. So, the colored  
8 branch of the Harlem Young Men's Christian  
9 Association, built during the first World War, was  
10 among the strategies implemented establish a black  
11 promised land within the very confines of America's  
12 greatest city. Initially, President Wilson forbade  
13 Blacks from fighting, but with the implementation of  
14 a draft, depleting factories of white workers, New  
15 York manufacturers found willing Black replacements  
16 readily recruit--recruited from the south and the  
17 Caribbean. The ensuing Great Migration both swelled  
18 Harlem's population and sealed its fate as the Black  
19 Mecca. From nearly the beginning, African-Americans  
20 were involved in the social uplift movement of the  
21 YMCA. Ironically, black membership in the Y was most  
22 string--stringently restricted. Blacks were segregated  
23 from whites in separate branches. In 1853, Anthony  
24 Bowen, a United States Patent Office worker, Earnest  
25 Wave organized the first colored YMCA. Its housing

1 component was particularly appealing to unmarried  
2 men. In this way, Harlem's colored Y was to become  
3 the first Harlem home of some of the men who became  
4 its most celebrated citizens. In his new book, Race  
5 and Real Estate, Kevin McGruder explains, "The Black  
6 YMCA momentous move from Midtown to Uptown was  
7 resisted by YMCA's decision makers." They were  
8 hesitant to place a Black organization on a  
9 predominantly white block and even relenting urged a  
10 two-structure as opposed to the six-floor building  
11 that built. Thanks to the Black Building Committee's  
12 enterprise, a total of \$375,000 was raised including  
13 a \$25,000 contribution from Julius Rose-Rosenwald  
14 doubling the budget recommended. Opened on Armistice  
15 Day, November 11, 1919, its facilities included a  
16 swimming pool, a lecture hall, and a gymnasium making  
17 it the most modern and largest colored YMCA. All too  
18 soon, the Harlem Y was woefully outgrown. Its  
19 successor, a tower built across the street gives a  
20 good indication of just how much Harlem grew. By  
21 rights, encompassing the nearby one-time homes of A.  
22 Phillip Randolph and his wife the novelist Nella  
23 Larson, Paul Robeson and many other notables. All of  
24 135th Street, Black Harlem's original main street  
25

ought to be curb and historic district, but short of  
that, the long neglected and still threatened—and  
still threatened, the Harlem's original Y must be  
preserved as New York City landmark. Thank you.

[coughing]

SAVERIA ASHBERRY CRESTFIELD: [off mic]

Good afternoon. [on mic] Good afternoon. I'm Saveria  
Asberry Crestfield (sp?) and I'm the President of the  
Mount Morris Park Community Improvement Association,  
and I also live in the neighborhood. The YMCA located  
at 181 West 135th Street between Adam Clayton Powell  
and Malcolm X Boulevard is important to the cultural  
history of Harlem. It became a focal point of the  
neighborhood in the 1920s as Harlem evolved into the  
center of New York's African-American community  
seeking new economic and artistic opportunities.  
This is the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance, and  
musicians, writers and artists converged on Harlem  
living and working together and they developed a  
thriving artistic scene. [background comments]  
People like Paul Robeson, Dr. George Washington  
Carver, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay just to name  
a few, strolled the halls of the YMCA and left their  
mark. The Harlem YMCA played a critical role during

1 segregation when Blacks were barred from other YMCAs,  
2 and has historically acted as an educational and  
3 cultural center where people meet to exchange to  
4 political views of the importance over the years.  
5 Even now, the Jackie Robinson Youth Center is  
6 churning out the new leaders of today with their  
7 Black Achievers in Industry Award Corporate  
8 Scholarship program to supplement the education of  
9 our future leaders. My daughter, who attended  
10 several summer programs at the center, was a  
11 recipient of the—of this scholarship for here four-  
12 years at Vanderbilt, and she is currently working for  
13 Deloitte as a consultant in Virginia. So looking  
14 back and moving forward, I see the preservation of  
15 the YMCA as an integral part of history that has been  
16 and will continue to be shared throughout the years.  
17 [pause][coughing]

18  
19 LISA B. JONES: Good afternoon. My name  
20 is Lisa B. Jones and I'm the Tenant Association  
21 President and resident of the YMCA. I just want to  
22 thank you all on a very level. You know us as a  
23 cult. (sic) What I've—what I thought I knew and what  
24 I've learned today when you've been a resident of a  
25 building and you have been fighting for said building

1 for the years, I'm overwhelmed, and I just want to  
2 say thank you to every one, and again, thank you  
3 Council Member Perkins. I'm used to calling Senator  
4 Perkins, and I've been in your office many times, and  
5 I will even be so more after this so--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER PERKINS: Welcome.

8 LISA B. JONES: Thank you. I can't add  
9 any more historic facts. There's none for me to  
10 create. I'm sure there's more, but I couldn't do a  
11 better job of what has been stated before me. What I  
12 can tell is that in short, the resident part of the  
13 YMCA, there are 24 apartments, 23 are usable. If you  
14 have--ever have the opportunity to go through our  
15 building, you would see and feel the historic  
16 representation. Unfortunately, you would also see,  
17 feel and at times smell what has not happened, and  
18 why we need this designation. This building  
19 unfortunately has been subject to great neglect by  
20 ownership and now property management. If people had  
21 half the compassion and just the practical knowledge  
22 of knowing what a legacy it is--the Harlem YMCA is  
23 referred to as the living room of the Harlem  
24 Renaissance, and there is no feeling or action that  
25 is being held up now. Our ownership is in flux.

1 Without this des-designation and without that level  
2 of partnership, we can't say where our building would  
3 be. There's no note of this in terms of ownership,  
4 and clearly not in property management. It's-it's-  
5 it's-it's sad to say, but I invite you to take a  
6 tour, and I would be available to make that happen.  
7 So to say that this is important is probably one of  
8 the biggest understatements. We're a hardworking  
9 building. We have seniors. We have kids that have  
10 been raised in the building. You know, when you go  
11 into the elevate and you see the metal bar in the  
12 elevator, I remember when the kid's feet dangled and  
13 now they're in college and having their families. So  
14 it makes me feel older than dirt, but it definitely,  
15 you feel this this pride in this community, and it's  
16 hard to stay in this community, and that's separate  
17 conversation, but is related to the conversation that  
18 we're having today. We are also under the resident  
19 aspect we are an HDFC. We are called Reverend CT  
20 Walker HDFC. We have never has the opportunity for  
21 ownership. Never. So, we skipped through many steps,  
22 the management at the City Development Corporation.  
23 There was never the opportunity to own. So with this  
24 designation, you've given us new life, and on your  
25

1 date of flight. Myself I am part of the community.  
2 I've worked in the community for many years. You  
3 know, currently as a disabled person I'm battling  
4 Lupus and Cancer. So this type of fight is very  
5 important, and I can't imagine losing this. Even if I  
6 didn't live in the YMCA, one more building like this  
7 lost. It means a lot, and it's—I can't—I can't tell  
8 you what an understatement it is to have more not  
9 less of this type of preservation in Harlem. You  
10 know we have Schomburg, which is a national historic  
11 landmark, and that, as you mentioned that whole  
12 corridor is important. As you know, that Harlem as a  
13 whole needs more not less in terms of this type of  
14 designation. You know, as tenants we live everyday  
15 with that sense of, you know, yes this a very old  
16 building so there are inherent issues when it a  
17 particularly old building. With this designation  
18 that makes it very clear to whatever owner, whatever  
19 property management company is in that this is not a  
20 Band-Aid solution. You have to be responsible, and  
21 you have to respect regardless of the lure of-of  
22 money and real estate, what this building represents.  
23 I came on Access-A-Ride today. I had the honor of  
24 sitting next to a 97-old woman, who when I told what  
25

1  
2 I was doing today, she's oh, Harlem yeah, I used to  
3 go dancing down there. I'm trying to get, you know,  
4 anti-aging secrets and help from here, and she's  
5 telling what a great time in her youth she had at the  
6 YMCA, and that's the first thing when I tell people  
7 that I live in that. The other thing unfortunately  
8 is they now think it was some very ill-kept shelter  
9 because of the level of neglect. So that's the kind  
10 of partnership we're looking to have. So that's why  
11 I'm so touched and so grateful that this designation  
12 can move forward and thank you Councilman for giving  
13 that recommendation. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you, Lisa, Jill  
15 and for—for your testimony. I will now ask if there  
16 are any other members of the public who wish to  
17 testify that have not filled out a slip. Seeing  
18 none, the public hearing on LU-LU 579-579 is now  
19 closed. LU 579, 580, 581 and 582 are being—are laid  
20 over. Thank you, members of the public. My  
21 colleagues in the Council and Land Use Staff. This  
22 meeting is now adjourned. [gavel]

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND  
MARITIME USES

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 31, 2017