

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND  
MARITIME USES

November 1, 2018  
Start: 11:06 a.m.  
Recess: 11:24 a.m.

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

B E F O R E: ADRIENNE E. ADAMS  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
INEZ D. BARRON  
PETER A. KOO  
I. DANEEK MILLER  
MARK TREYGER

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

2

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

Kate Lemos McHale  
Director of Research at the Landmarks  
Preservation Commission

Erik Horvat  
Director of Real Estate at the Olayan America  
group

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COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Good morning, welcome to this meeting of the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses. I'm Council Member Adrienne Adams, the Chair of this Subcommittee. Today we, we will be holding a public hearing on LU 218, the designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission of 550 Madison Avenue, the former AT&T headquarters as a landmark. The former AT&T corporate headquarters building is a 37-story postmodern style skyscraper located at 550 Madison Avenue in Council Member Powers' district. At the June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018 hearing held by LPC, 31 people spoke in favor of the designation including representatives of the owner, New York City Council Member Keith Powers, Manhattan Community Board Five, Association for a Better New York and Construction Trades Council for New York (157) Historic Districts Council, Landmarks Conservancy, Municipal Art Society, New York Building Congress, Real Estate Board of New York, Society for the Architecture of the City and 32 BJ SEIU. Among the speakers, 25 testified that the designation shall... should allow flexibility to redesign the AT&T

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COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

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MARITIME USES

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corporate headquarters building. I now call on LPC to  
testify on the designation. When ready.

KATE LEMOS MCHALE: Good morning Chair  
Adams. I'll be right with you... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Good morning Kate.

[off mic dialogue]

KATE LEMOS MCHALE: Okay, sorry for that  
delay...

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: That's fine, before  
you begin Counsel will swear you in.

KATE LEMOS MCHALE: Okay.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Please raise your right  
hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole  
truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony  
before this committee and to answer to all Council  
Member questions?

KATE LEMOS MCHALE: I do.

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you, you may  
begin.

KATE LEMOS MCHALE: Thank you and thank  
you for the opportunity to present this recent  
designation. I am Kate Lemos McHale, Director of  
Research at the Landmarks Preservation Commission and  
I'm joined by Ali Rasoulinejad to talk about 550

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 Madison. 550 Madison Avenue is located in Midtown  
3 Manhattan on the west side of Madison Avenue between  
4 55<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Streets. It was designed by  
5 Johnson/Burgee architects, in association with  
6 Simmons Architects in 1978 and completed in 1984.  
7 Clad with pinkish grey granite and crowned by a  
8 colossal pediment, it is an icon in the skyline and  
9 of Postmodern architecture and marked a turning point  
10 in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture. Philip  
11 Johnson was a significant figure in 20<sup>th</sup> century  
12 American architecture. He began his career as a  
13 curator at the Museum of Modern Art in the early  
14 1930s where he introduced European modernism to a  
15 wider American audience and he later designed such  
16 notable modern works as the Glass House in New  
17 Canaan, Connecticut and the former Four Seasons  
18 Restaurant in the Seagram Building. In partnership  
19 with John Burgee in the 1970s and 80s, he worked on  
20 many large corporate commissions and with the design  
21 of the AT&T building ushered in the era of  
22 postmodernism. AT&T's new corporate headquarters was  
23 the first postmodern skyscraper. It was a significant  
24 part of a broad cultural critique of modernism  
25 beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s that led

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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1  
2 architects to react against the doctrines of  
3 modernism and the international style. Icons of the  
4 style include such works as shown here Charles  
5 Moore's Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans, Michael  
6 Graves' Portland Building in Oregon and the AT&T  
7 Building in New York City. Johnson and Burgee  
8 conceived the design for AT&T's new headquarters as a  
9 statement building in the spirit of Manhattan's  
10 classic skyscrapers, which John Burgee described as  
11 solid with a recognizable top. Clad entirely in  
12 pinkish grey granite to evoke an earlier time, it  
13 stood out against the many midcentury... 20<sup>th</sup> century  
14 skyscrapers with glass curtain walls, like the  
15 Seagram Building purchased... pictured on the left. The  
16 building's façade has a classical tripartite  
17 configuration that rises without setbacks to a  
18 colossal broken pediment. The base features a 110-  
19 foot-tall entrance arch flanked by groups of flat  
20 arches that originally opened to public arcades  
21 beneath the tower. AT&T did not want retail on  
22 Madison Avenue; instead, retail was included along a  
23 covered pedestrian space connecting 55<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup>  
24 Streets behind the tower. These connected, unenclosed  
25 public spaces generated bonus square footage that

2 allowed the architects to make the tower taller and  
3 more visible on the skyline. Architectural critics  
4 and historians have ascribed sources to the  
5 building's design such as the Pazzi Chapel in  
6 Florence, Chippendale style furniture and our own  
7 Municipal Building, but no single work or historic  
8 period of architecture seems to have influenced the  
9 design. From the moment the design was revealed in  
10 1978, the AT&T Building generated widespread media  
11 attention and a range of critical responses, gaining  
12 significance in architectural discourse and even  
13 popular culture. Paul Goldberger called it  
14 postmodernism's major monument, while Ada Louise  
15 Huxtable confessed, confessed to having mixed  
16 feelings about the building, which she described as a  
17 pedestrian pastiche pulled together by painstaking  
18 polished details. In January 1979, Johnson appeared  
19 triumphant on the cover on cover of Time Magazine,  
20 raising a model of the building in the air, the same  
21 year he became the first recipient of the Pritzker  
22 Architecture Prize. In 1982, New York Magazine  
23 devoted a two-part article to the building's  
24 construction, saying it brought back craftsmanship not  
25 seen since the days of the great pre-war buildings.

2 And today, a model of the building is visible behind  
3 Jimmy Fallon's right shoulder on the Tonight Show  
4 every night. Less than a decade after opening the  
5 building the building was leased to Sony USA in 1991  
6 and the public spaces at the base were substantially  
7 modified by Gwathmey Siegel and Associates in 1992 to  
8 '94. The open arcades in the base were converted to  
9 retail space and the covered pedestrian space at the  
10 rear of the building was enclosed with a glass  
11 curtain wall at both ends. The alterations remained  
12 with the approval of the City Planning Commission and  
13 remain under its jurisdiction. AT&T sold the building  
14 to Sony in 2002 and since 2016 it has been owned by  
15 the Olayan Group. The landmark site consists of the  
16 tower, a four-story annex at the rear of the build...  
17 of the site and the covered pedestrian space between  
18 them. located at the rear of the site, the separate  
19 annex building is a simple structure containing  
20 loading, parking and service functions as well as  
21 retail and exhibition spaces. The public passageway  
22 between the annex and the tower originally contained  
23 retail kiosks and offered, offered visual and  
24 physical connections through the block. Our research  
25 indicated that the primary focus and intent of the

1 design was the tower and its prominence on Madison  
2 Avenue and in the skyline and the annex at the rear  
3 of the site was secondary. The designation report  
4 identifies the tower as having primary significance  
5 within the landmark site which is shown here. And as  
6 you summarized at our public hearing 31 people vote..  
7 spoke in favor of designation, many speaking about  
8 hoping that it would have flexibility for public  
9 spaces at the rear of the site. And to conclude,  
10 although it continues to arouse varied opinions this  
11 extraordinary tower is one of Philip Johnson's and  
12 New York City's most, most recognized skyscrapers,  
13 included in numerous surveys on the history of  
14 American architecture. The former AT&T corporate  
15 headquarters Building is known internationally as an  
16 important postmodern work and as a turning point in  
17 the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture and the LPC  
18 urges the committee to uphold this designation. Thank  
19 you.  
20

21 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you very much  
22 for your testimony. As I previously stated I think  
23 that this is another home run for LPC, so I do  
24 congratulate you and the team for putting this on the  
25 board for us. This is a part of my past stomping

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

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MARITIME USES

ground, old stomping ground, midtown Manhattan so it has a special place in my heart, I love the building and I thank you for the presentation.

KATE LEMOS MCHALE: Great, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you. I am going to read a letter by Council Member Powers in support of the designation. Dear Chair Adams, I write in support of the passage of the former AT&T Building at 550 Madison Avenue in my district as a historical landmark. In doing so, I join with Manhattan Community Board Five, the Municipal Arts Society and numerous other advocates to say that this historic and influential building must be celebrated and preserved. Since 1984, 550 Madison Avenue has been celebrated as a revolutionary postmodern high-rise skyscraper redefining the architectural movement of its time. Rightfully designating this 37-story building as a landmark will ensure the preservation of its cultural and historical significance and secure its place among the great architectural staples of New York City. The former AT&T Building represents a unique combination of old and new representing the historical significance of midtown as a booming epicenter of business while introducing

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

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MARITIME USES

an innovative modern style in its time. New York City is renowned as a site of architectural history and cultural richness. The protection of historical architecture like five... 550 Madison Avenue is critical in preserving our legacy of cutting-edge design and innovative work. I sincerely support the advocates and groups that understand the significance of this architectural landmark, I ask that you support landmark designation for 550 Madison Avenue as a legacy to the cultural and develop... developmental heritage of our city. Thank you for your consideration and with any further questions please contact my office, regards Keith Powers, Council Member. Thank you very much for your testimony. I now call on Erik Horvat, please step up. Just press the button and state your name for the record.

ERIK HORVAT: Hello, how are you?

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: There we are.

ERIK HORVAT: Thank you, appreciate your help. Thank you for the opportunity... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Please, please state your name for... [cross-talk]

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND  
MARITIME USES

ERIK HORVAT: Oh, my name is Erik Horvat,  
I'm with the Olayan Group.

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Okay, thank you, you  
may proceed.

ERIK HORVAT: Thank you for the  
opportunity to address the Council today. My name is,  
is Erik Horvat as I stated and I'm here on behalf of  
the 550 Madison ownership and management team which  
includes the Olayan Group, Chelsfield and RXR.  
Together this team is a team with deep experience,  
knowledge, and expertise and, and successfully and  
sensitively preserving and redeveloping historic  
properties while adapting them to meet the needs of  
modern tenants, in New York and around the world. We  
treasure historic buildings and have a clear  
intention of owning this building as a long-term  
asset. On behalf of the entire team, I'm proud to  
confirm our strong support for the designation of 550  
Madison's iconic office tower as an individual  
landmark. 550 Madison has a significant place in New  
York's architectural heritage. It's a symbol of  
postmodern movement and has been a recognizable part  
of the city's skyline for more than 30 years. Since  
acquiring the building, the 550-management team, team

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

1  
2 has taken its role as stewards of this important  
3 building seriously. We have stepped away from the  
4 design renderings that were made public a few months  
5 ago and we have met with dozens of stakeholders and  
6 assembled a world class professional team to breathe  
7 new life into the building and restore its place as a  
8 commercial destination in East Midtown. Delivering on  
9 the promise of the East... of the East Midtown  
10 rezoning, our plans for 550 Madison are to revitalize  
11 world class office space, while exploring the  
12 opportunity to nearly double the public open space at  
13 the site. Our approach is straightforward; to  
14 preserve and enhance the fundamental architecture,  
15 architectural values of Johnson/Burgee's original  
16 design intent, to provide generous open-air public  
17 space, remove the clutter of latter alterations and  
18 dignify the tower by improving its connection to the  
19 streets and the neighborhood.. and the city  
20 neighborhood. All of that being said, the tower is  
21 not without its challenges. The reality is that it  
22 was designed for single tenant occupancy with a  
23 capacity of just 800 people. This is one of the  
24 reasons it was previously in danger of being  
25 converted to residential condominium use. The only

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 viable way to achieve our goal of preserving it as a  
3 class A commercial destination is by making smart and  
4 sensitive modifications that will ensure the  
5 property's viability as a modern multi-tenant office  
6 building. This will greatly increase its capacity to  
7 about 3,000 office workers. These additional jobs  
8 will have a positive ripple effect on the economy of  
9 East Midtown and the wider city itself. It will also  
10 become a sustainable model for historical  
11 preservation with the aspiration of LEED Gold  
12 certification. With your confirmation of the  
13 individual landmark designation, we look forward to  
14 completing plans for the building that strike a  
15 balance, respecting 550 Madison's importance while  
16 addressing his... these challenges. In the coming  
17 months, we expect to begin to engage with the public,  
18 the Landmarks Preservation Commissioner and the City  
19 Planning Commission on this new design, a process  
20 we're eager to begin. We are very excited about the  
21 future of 550 Madison and are happy to reiterate,  
22 reiterate again the ownership's strong support for  
23 this designation. Thank you for your time and  
24 consideration.

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND  
MARITIME USES

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2 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you much for  
3 your testimony today and thank you for your  
4 involvement with the process, how long have you been  
5 involved with the process personally?

6 ERIK HORVAT: I'm very new to Olayan, I  
7 have been with the firm for three weeks prior to this  
8 I was involved with another project which was one  
9 Chase Manhattan Plaza now 28 Liberty and also a  
10 landmark process in a similar respectful project we  
11 went through.

12 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Uh-huh and will you  
13 be... this is... will you be around to see this process  
14 through?

15 ERIK HORVAT: My word.

16 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Okay, thank you very  
17 much for your testimony... [cross-talk]

18 ERIK HORVAT: Thank you so much... [cross-  
19 talk]

20 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: ...I appreciate that.  
21 Are there any more members of the public who wish to  
22 testify in this matter? Okay, seeing none the hearing  
23 on LU 218 is now closed and the item will be laid  
24 over. LU 231, the Bronx Animal Shelter is laid over  
25 until November 5<sup>th</sup>. This concludes our public hearing

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

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MARITIME USES

for today. I'd like to thank the members of the  
public, my colleagues, council and Land Use staff for  
attending today's hearing. This meeting is hereby  
adjourned.

[gavel]

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

November 15, 2018