

March 6, 2019

Testimony before the New York City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses regarding LU 0356-2019: Park Terrace West – West 217th Street Historic District

Good afternoon Chair Adams and Subcommittee Members, I am Kate Lemos McHale, Director of Research at the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). Thank you for the opportunity to present the Park Terrace West-West 217th Street Historic District, which was designated on December 11, 2018. Located in Inwood near the northern tip of Manhattan, the district consists of a picturesque enclave of fifteen early 20th-century Tudor and Colonial Revival style houses. It's appealing character and historic significance is created by its uniform scale, architectural styles, and consistency of building materials, combined with an emphasis on landscaped gardens and making provisions for the automobile.

The district was identified as part of the Commission's work in Inwood, including surveys of the neighborhood in 2008 and again more recently in conjunction with the recent rezoning, to identify opportunities for historic preservation.

At LPC's Public Hearing on November 20, eight people spoke in favor of the designation as proposed, including representatives of Manhattan Community Board 12, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, Park Terrace Block Association, property owners within the proposed district, and residents of Inwood. The Commission also received letters in support of the district from United States Congressman Adriano Espaillat, the office of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Moving Forward Unidos, Inwood Preservation, Inwood Owners Coalition, and four letters from property owners on Park Terrace West and West 217th Street, and several property owners from the Inwood neighborhood. The Commission received no testimony or letters in opposition to the proposed designation.

The historic district extends along the north side of West 217th Street and along Park Terrace West as shown here. It is a cohesive grouping of two-story brick houses that is surrounded by early-20th century apartment buildings and nearby parks. More commonly seen in other boroughs, these free-standing and semi-detached houses reflect the time period when they were built, using land that had been part of a large estate at the northernmost tip of Manhattan.

Inwood's topography has played an important role in the history of the area, and in the development and physical character of the Park Terrace West-West 217th Street Historic District. Shown in this 1836 Topographical map, Inwood's hills were the location of Revolutionary War forts, its valleys and plateaus were farmed, quarried, and later became vast estates, and Kingsbridge Road (now Broadway) ran diagonally through the center linking it to lower Manhattan.

Inwood was historically known as Tubby Hook until 1864. Initially the land on which the historic district was developed was part of the Isaac and Michael Dyckman farm. In 1851 it was divided and a 26-acre parcel was sold to John Ferris Seaman and his wife Ann Drake-Seaman. The city began to develop around the edges of these vast estates in the late-19th century.

Upon Ann Drake-Seaman's death in 1878, the property was left to a nephew Lawrence Drake. Drake divided the bulk of the property into lots which were sold to developers. This 1900 map shows these properties, and the streets that were laid out on the Seaman-Drake estate property. The Seaman-Drake estate mansion, shown in the lower block on the map and in the photo on the left, remained until 1938.

In 1906 the extension of the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) subway lines spurred the initial residential development of the area. Further development was spurred by the subsequent opening of the IND subway line in 1920. Additionally, the creation of two neighborhood parks, Isham Park, a gift from Julia Isham-Taylor in 1911, and Inwood Hill Park, created by the city in 1916, provided public amenities that drew developers and residents to the area.

The historic district was developed with detached and semi-detached houses in the 1920s and 30s, as larger apartment buildings were being constructed elsewhere in the neighborhood. By 1934, as you can see on this map, most of the houses had been built in the historic district; the Seaman-Drake mansion was the last portion of the original estate to be developed. Because of the development history of the former Seaman-Drake estate, the historic district developed differently than other parts of Inwood, on streets that were not part of the original urban grid plan of the area. The small

scale and almost suburban quality of this enclave is rare in Manhattan.

The historic district consists of houses along the block of West 217th Street and the northern section of Park Terrace West where the two streets intersect. Designed in both the Colonial Revival (1921-25) and the Tudor Revival styles (1933-35), the historic district shows a high level of integrity with minor alterations including replacement of windows and minor changes to facade materials such as residing dormers or removing decorative half timbering. The picturesque streetscapes possess a special character and sense of place defined by the houses' uniform scale, use of similar period styles and materials, and similar setbacks from the street with gardens, accentuating the topography.

The earliest buildings in the historic district are these residences along Park Terrace West, constructed in 1921, designed by architects Landsiedel & Moore. Colonial Revival in overall appearance, they also include Craftsman style features including the textured and patterned multi-colored brick and the horizontal emphasis created by the roof overhang and projecting full-width porch roof.

Farther north along Park Terrace West, these houses were constructed a few years later between 1924 and 1925, designed by architect Abraham H. Zacharius as two-family houses. They also exhibit a strong Colonial Revival reference with Craftsman details including textured and patterned multi-colored brick and random stone accents, Arts and Crafts style doors and decorative tile at the entries.

The houses along West 217th Street were designed by Benjamin F. V. Driesler, Louis Kurtz, and C.G. de Neergaard. Constructed between 1933 and 1935, they were all developed by the construction firm Kessler & Sayetta, as speculative properties. The Tudor Revival style is evident in their steep gables, half-timbering, prominent chimneys, and turret-enclosed entries. Several of the houses mirror each other across the driveway.

Influenced by the early-20th century modern car culture, all of these houses were built with garages either in the basement or as separate buildings in the rear of the lot. The houses are set back from the street with gardens, retaining walls, and pathways that are influenced by the topography. Unusual for Manhattan, this small historic district reflects the popularity of many suburban qualities along with convenient access to Manhattan. This part of Inwood was advertised at the time development as "country living in the City."

The Park Terrace West-West 217th Street historic district is a picturesque enclave of residential architecture that illustrates the popularity of revivalist styles used for residential developments in the 1920s and 30s. It retains a high level of integrity and exhibits a strong sense of place. LPC urges the Council to uphold this designation, which had broad stakeholder support. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Lemos McHale

Address: London City

I represent: Administration

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

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Date: MARCH 6

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Name: DAVID THORN

Address: 537 W 217 ST

I represent: PARK TERRACE NORTH BLOCK ASSOC.

Address: 537 W 217 ST.

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