

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITINGS AND

DISPOSITIONS 1

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC
SITINGS AND DISPOSITIONS

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September 19, 2023
Start: 10:14 a.m.
Recess: 11:09 a.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - COMMITTEE ROOM, 14TH
FLOOR

B E F O R E: Farrah N. Louis, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Carmen N. De La Rosa
Christopher Marte
Sandy Nurse
Sandra Ung

A P P E A R A N C E S

James Tschikov, Manhattan Planning Team at
Housing Preservation and Development

Chris Cerillo, Executive Director of Ascendent
Neighborhood Development Corporation

Martin Kapell, Principal at Think Architecture

Kate Lemos-McHale, Director of Research at the
Landmarks Preservation Commission

Steven Thompson, Director of Community and
Intergovernmental Affairs at the Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Claudette Brady, Executive Director for Save
Harlem Now

1 SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITINGS AND
DISPOSITIONS

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone
3 check for the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public
4 Sitings and Dispositions recorded in the 14th Floor
5 Committee Room, recorded on September 19, 2023.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and
7 welcome to the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public
8 Sitings and Dispositions.

9 At this time, we ask if you could please
10 phones on vibrate or silent mode. Thank you.

11 Chair, we are ready to begin.

12 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: [GAVEL] Good morning.
13 I am Council Member Farah Louis, Chair of the
14 Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Sitings and
15 Dispositions.

16 This meeting is being held in hybrid
17 format. I am joined by Council Member Ung.

18 Before we begin today's agenda, I will
19 remind members of the public who wish to testify
20 remotely that we ask that you register online, and
21 you may do so now by visiting
22 www.council.nyc.gov/landuse to sign up. If you have
23 already registered but have not signed into Zoom,
24 please do so now and remain signed in until you have
25 testified.

1
2 For anyone wishing to submit testimony on
3 the items being heard today, we ask that you please
4 send it via email to
5 landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov. Please indicate the
6 LU number and project name in the subject line of
7 your email.

8 Today, we will hold public items on six
9 individual landmark designations in various locations
10 of the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens as well as a
11 request for disposition approval for an HPD site in
12 Manhattan.

13 I open the public hearing on LU 266, an
14 HPD request for Article XI disposition approval
15 related to the Share NYC project at 244 East 106th
16 Street in Deputy Speaker Ayala's District. We are
17 joined today by representatives of HPD including
18 James Tschikov.

19 JAMES TSCHIKOV: Close enough.

20 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Close enough? Okay, I
21 apologize. Chris Cirillo along with project architect
22 Martin Kapell. We will also have Melissa Otten
23 (phonetic), Daniel Girard, sorry if I mispronounce
24 your name, Justin Donlen (phonetic), and Marcia
25

2 Bernard who will all be on hand for additional
3 questions as needed.

4 I'll remind anyone wishing to testify
5 remotely, if you have not already done so, you must
6 register online, and you may also do that now by
7 visiting the Council's website at
8 council.nyc.gov/landuse.

9 Counsel, will you please administer the
10 affirmation?

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Panelists, would you
12 please raise your right hand and state your names for
13 the record?

14 MARTIN KAPPELL: Martin Kapell.

15 JAMES TSCHIKOV: James Tschikov.

16 CHRIS CIRILLO: Chris Cirillo.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell
18 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
19 in your testimony before this Subcommittee and in
20 answer to all Council Member questions?

21 MARTIN KAPPELL: I do.

22 JAMES TSCHIKOV: I do.

23 CHRIS CIRILLO: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.
25

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. Application panelists, please begin and please let us know when you are ready to share your presentation and our Staff will display it on the screen.

JAMES TSCHIKOV: You can begin sharing the presentation.

Good morning, Council Members and members of the public, my name is James Tschikov, and I'm with the Manhattan Planning Team here at HPD. Presenting with me today is Chris Cerillo, Executive Director of Ascendent Neighborhood Development, and Martin Kapell, Principal at Think Architecture, and we are joined by our colleagues and partners of the project who will introduce themselves during Q and A.

As part of the ULURP process, we're excited to see here presenting the Share NYC project to the City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Sitings and Dispositions. This project is a result of a Request for Expressions of Interest, RFEI, by HPD in 2018 to explore how shared housing can work across a variety of building types in New York City, and HPD is confident that this project will be a successful pilot to spur future projects. You can go to the next slide.

1
2 The ULURP application was certified on
3 Monday, March 27, 2023. HPD is the applicant, and the
4 development team working with us is comprised of
5 Ascendant Neighborhood Development and the Ali Forney
6 Center. Share NYC will be a new construction 10-story
7 building containing approximately 32 rooming units
8 and one building manger's unit. This proposed project
9 will be developed under HPD's Supportive Housing Loan
10 Program or SHLP, and the units will be affordable to
11 households earning up to 60 percent of AMI. The
12 proposed development will be located 244 East 106th
13 Street on Block 1655 and is part of Lot 29, which is
14 currently privately owned and is vacant. The entire
15 lot used to be a City-owned lot and was conveyed to
16 Ascendant in the mid-'90s for a rehabilitation
17 project and so to facilitate the current project, we
18 propose the following Land Use actions, the
19 acquisition and the disposition of the development
20 site. Next slide.

21 Here's a quick overview for more context
22 of the location. The project will be on East 106th
23 Street between 2nd and 3rd Avenues adjacent to an
24 existing building managed by Ascendant on the western
25 part of the lot.

1
2 Now, I will pass it on to Chris Cirillo
3 who will give us an overview of the project and
4 introduce the development team.

5 CHRIS CIRILLO: We can advance to the next
6 slide, please. Thank you.

7 Good morning, Council Members and members
8 of the public. My name is Chris Cirillo. I am the
9 Executive Director of Ascendent Neighborhood
10 Development Corporation. We are a non-profit
11 affordable housing developer based in East Harlem.
12 We've been serving the community for 35 years. We're
13 very excited to be here with this innovative project
14 before you today.

15 A little bit more about the project
16 itself. What we have proposed for this vacant lot is
17 a new 10-story apartment building that will be built
18 as a community facility, non-profit institution with
19 sleeping accommodations. The building will contain
20 four duplex shared housing units. Each of those four
21 duplexes will have eight rooming units, and so that
22 is a total of 32 units in the building plus on the
23 second floor a building manager's apartment. Our
24 partner on the project is the Ali Forney Center,
25 another non-profit organization that is the leading

1 provider of services for LGBTQ youth in the city. We
2 have partnered with Ali Forney to provide 100 percent
3 supportive housing on this site. The building will
4 serve formerly homeless youth who are referred to the
5 apartments once the building is built through HRA. As
6 James mentioned, the units will be restricted to
7 those individuals earning up to 60 percent of area
8 median income, and it will be financed with a
9 combination of funding from HPD Supportive Housing
10 Loan Program and low-income housing tax credits. The
11 Ali Forney Center will manage the on-site supportive
12 services for the residents of the building. They'll
13 have office space in the building. They'll provide
14 24/7 staffing of the building including security and
15 supportive services to all the residents, and we have
16 a long history of working in East Harlem. We've been
17 serving the community for 35 years. We have a great
18 working relationship with the Community Board and
19 with Deputy Speaker Ayala so we're really excited to
20 bring the project, and we can move on to the next
21 slide.

22
23 As I mentioned, the building will be
24 providing housing that is LGBTQ affirming and will
25 have support services for residents. Each of the four

1 duplex units that I mentioned earlier will have one
2 large shared kitchen and a shared living room space,
3 four accessible bathrooms in each shared duplex, and
4 laundry facilities for the residents. Other building
5 amenities in the overall building will include a
6 gathering space, a community room on the ground
7 floor, which will access an accessible landscaped
8 rear yard for resident use. The individual shared
9 housing units will also have work and study spaces
10 for residents. On the right in this image that's
11 before you are two renderings of the interior of the
12 building. On the top is a rendering of the shared
13 community space on the ground floor, and at the
14 bottom is sort of a section view of one of the duplex
15 units so on the right side there is a double-height
16 space. That's the living room, shared kitchen, and on
17 the left you see two of the rooming units so the
18 building is divided up into these four shared housing
19 units with individual rooming units sharing the
20 amenities within each shared unit.
21

22 At this point, I'm going to turn it over
23 to Martin Kapell from Think Architecture to speak a
24 little bit more about the design and zoning aspects
25 of the building.

1
2 MARTIN KAPPELL: As Chris said, our
3 intention in designing this building was to make a
4 distinctive building, both facing the neighborhood
5 and on the street and also for the residents of the
6 building itself. In terms of the interior of the
7 building, our goal was to create a home-like
8 environment where the residents of the apartment
9 could work together, both in terms of cooking, eating
10 in the living room space, and really form a community
11 within each of the four duplex units in the building.
12 I think we can go to the next slide as well.

13 Also, this building is a highly resilient
14 building. All of the essential building services are
15 not in the cellar but on the ground floor because of
16 flood considerations, and the ground floor has been
17 raised above the designed flood plain to make sure
18 that the building meets all of the resiliency
19 standards that are required. As Chris also said,
20 there's an exterior space which you'll see in the
21 lower lefthand corner which will be available to all
22 members of the community of the building, and it
23 opens from a community space which will be used by
24 residents of the building but also could be used for
25 members of the larger community. Next slide, please..

1
2 These are showing the common spaces
3 within the building. The lobby on the left, which the
4 intention is to enliven that through materials and
5 artwork which can be visible from the street as well,
6 the center image is of the communal kitchen, the
7 large kitchen, big enough to serve the eight
8 residents of each of the apartments, and on the right
9 a study area and a work area where the residents can
10 do schoolwork or whatever other work they need to do
11 overlooking the two-story living. We look at the two-
12 story living room as being a really important
13 architectural feature of the building, both on the
14 inside as it links all of the residents together
15 without the separation of the floor so they can
16 really feel like a community, and also as is
17 expressed on the outside of the building which
18 contributes to the scale of the building on the
19 street and in the neighborhood. Thank you.

20 JAMES TSCHIKOV: All right. That concludes
21 our presentation. We're excited about this project,
22 and we look forward to answering any questions. Thank
23 you.

24 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. Does my
25 Colleague have any questions?

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COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: No.

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Okay. All right. Thank
you. The applicant panel is now excused.

Are there any members of the public who
wish to testify on this item?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: If there's anyone with
us in the room today who would like to testify on
this item, we ask that you please see a Sergeant-at-
Arms to fill out a speaker card.

Okay, it appears we have no one in the
room to testify on this item, and we also do not have
anyone online to testify on this item.

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: All right, this
applicant panel is now excused. Congratulations. This
is a really nice open concept, modernized project.

We will now hold public hearings on six
individual landmark designations in the Districts
represented by Deputy Speaker Ayala and Council
Members Feliz, Abreu, Jordan, and Moya. I now open
the public hearing on the six LU items consisting of
individual landmark designations for the Fire Alarm
Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office; Bronx Opera
House, and Firehouse for Engine Company 88 and Ladder
Company 38, all three of these being located in the

1
2 Bronx, along with 935 St. Nicholas Avenue and the
3 Hotel Cecil and Minton's Playhouse, both of which are
4 located in Manhattan, and the John Birks, aka Dizzy,
5 Gillespie Residence which is located in Queens.

6 We are now joined today by
7 representatives of LPC including Director of Research
8 Kate Lemos-McHale and Director of Community and
9 Intergovernmental Affairs Steven Thompson.

10 As our panelists get situation, I will
11 take this time to read a statement in support on
12 behalf of Deputy Speaker and also one by Council
13 Member Abreu.

14 The statement by Deputy Speaker Ayala. I
15 am proud to support the historic landmark designation
16 of the Bronx Opera House. For over 100 years, the
17 building has been a cultural hub for the Bronx, first
18 featuring Broadway shows in its Subway Circuit years
19 and later serving as a major center for the Bronx
20 growing, innovating, and influential Latin music
21 scene in the 1960s and 1970s. The building was
22 converted about a decade ago into the Opera House
23 Hotel which still operates today. I hope my
24 Colleagues will join me in supporting this
25 designation.

1
2 The next statement from Council Member
3 Abreu. I am in support of this historic landmark
4 designation of the 935 St. Nicholas Avenue building.
5 This building is architecturally significant as an
6 intact neo-Gothic revival style brick, limestone, and
7 terra cotta apartment building. Built in 1915, it is
8 also culturally significant as the mid-20th century
9 home of Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington and Noble Lee
10 Sissle, two pioneers of jazz music who were among the
11 prolific composers, musicians, and bandleaders in
12 American history. Both also contributed to the
13 continuing struggle for racial equality. I hope that
14 my Colleagues will join me in supporting this
15 historic designation.

16 I will remind anyone wishing to testify
17 remotely, if you have not already done so, you must
18 register online, and you may do that now by visiting
19 the Council's website at council.nyc.gov/landuse.

20 Counsel, would you please administer the
21 affirmation?

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Panelists, would you
23 please raise your right hand and state your names for
24 the record?

25 KATE LEMOS-MCHALE: Kate Lemos-McHale.

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STEVEN THOMPSON: Steven Thompson.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this Subcommittee and in answer to all Council Member questions?

KATE LEMOS-MCHALE: I do.

STEVEN THOMPSON: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. You may begin. When you are ready to have your presentation shown on the screen, please say so and our Staff will display it. We are going to invite LPC staff to now share their presentations for all six of the landmark designations, and then we will take public testimony and Subcommittee comment once all the presentations have concluded.

KATE LEMOS-MCHALE: Thank you very much, Chair Louis. We are ready for the presentation.

I'm delighted to be here to present these recent designations. While we're pulling up the presentation, I'll just note that these reflect the Commission's ongoing commitment to ensuring the designation reflect the diversity of our city and the rich heritage of every borough. They were the result

1
2 of LPC-initiated surveys including our work to
3 identify sites significant to Latino and African-
4 American history and culture and our comprehensive
5 survey update of the Bronx, an area among others
6 where we're working to increase landmark
7 designations. Next slide, please.

8 The first two are properties owned by the
9 Fire Department and represent important history and
10 architecture in the Bronx. It's a little hard to see
11 them on this map, but they're the two bold red dots,
12 and one is the Engine Company 88 and Ladder 38
13 Firehouse in Belmont, and the other is the Fire Alarm
14 Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office, which is in
15 Bronx Park. Next, please, and then next again,
16 please.

17 The Engine Company 88/Ladder Company 38
18 Firehouse was constructed in 1908 to serve the
19 growing population of the Belmont neighborhood. It
20 was designed by Herts and Tallant who were known for
21 Broadway theaters and is a rare example of their work
22 in civic architecture. It embraces a more modern
23 design approach as compared to their better-known
24 Broadway theater designs and represents a period
25 before the FDNY developed a more standardized model

1
2 firehouse design when they were designed by
3 individual architects and represent really an array
4 of different styles. The designation received support
5 from the Chief of Ladder Company 38 as well as
6 representatives of the New York Landmark Conservancy,
7 the Historic Districts Council, the Mott Haven
8 Historic District Association, the East Bronx History
9 Forum, and eight individuals. Next, please.

10 The firehouse is located on Belmont
11 Avenue west of Bronx Park and south of Fordham
12 University in an area with few landmarks. It was
13 built in 1908 during a period following consolidation
14 of the five boroughs when the growth of new
15 residential neighborhoods led to an expanded and more
16 widely professionalized firefighting force,
17 necessitating the construction of new firehouses.
18 Next, please.

19 The firm of Herts and Tallant designed
20 the firehouse, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts trained
21 architects had established themselves as theater
22 designers and experts in fireproof design in the
23 early 20th century. Construction was completed in
24 1908, and the firehouse commenced operations in
25 November that year. It was originally divided into

1
2 two separate facilities for each company. Next,
3 please.

4 Soon after it was built, the increased
5 use of mechanized firefighting equipment led to the
6 move away from horse-drawn equipment which was
7 initially inside this building, and these are just
8 two images of very early fire engines and ladder
9 trucks that were associated with the building. After
10 60 years of operating in separate facilities, the two
11 companies merged within the firehouse, and that
12 happened in 1968. As Ladder Company 38 Captain Doug
13 Mitchell testified, in the late 1960s and into the
14 1970s, an epidemic of arson overtook the surrounding
15 neighborhoods, and the FDNY was stretched to its
16 limits. Engine Company 88 and Ladder Company 38 have
17 played an important role in fighting these and other
18 fires throughout their almost 120 years of service.
19 Next, please.

20 The building is an impressive example of
21 early 20th century civic architecture. It's the
22 City's only known example of a firehouse
23 incorporating the prairie style influenced by Frank
24 Lloyd Wright. It's façade is articulated with deeply
25 set windows and a grand (INAUDIBLE) limestone window

1
2 enframement and decorative brickwork. The firehouse
3 retains its original features and details and has
4 very good integrity so it's designation as a landmark
5 recognizes its architectural and its historical
6 significance. Next, please.

7 Now, we'll look at the Fire Alarm
8 Telegraph Bureau, Bronx Central Office, and you could
9 go to the next slide, please.

10 This was constructed in the early 20th
11 century as the Fire Department's Fire Alarm Telegraph
12 Bureau decentralized its operations. It was designed
13 by the notable Brooklyn architect, Frank J. Helmle,
14 and built in 1915. Its intact and highly refined
15 Italian Renaissance Revival style design and
16 prominent siting at the southern edge of Bronx Park
17 led to its striking presence. LPC received public
18 testimony in support of designation from the New York
19 Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts
20 Council, the Mott Haven Historic Districts
21 Association and correspondence in support of
22 designation from 23 individuals including a
23 representative of the East Bronx History Forum, and
24 there was no opposition. Next, please.

1
2 The Bronx Central Office is located in
3 Bronx Park which also includes our designated
4 buildings within the Bronx Zoo. The tax lot that it's
5 located within as you can see here takes up almost
6 half of the park so the landmark site really focuses
7 in on the historic building itself and the front lawn
8 in front of it. Around the building, other more
9 recent buildings and infrastructure have been
10 constructed so that's not within the landmark site.
11 Next, please.

12 This is just a slide showing early
13 watchtower and telegraph equipment, which really
14 evolved through the 19th century from places like,
15 this is a designated watchtower in Marcus Garvey
16 Park, where actual lookouts with a series of bells
17 alerted fire stations to fires. That, of course,
18 modernized first through the telegraph system and now
19 to the very modern system used today. FDNY was formed
20 in 1870, and communications were improved by a fire
21 alarm telegraph system at that time, each connected
22 to a central office in each borough. Next, please.

23 These central offices were capable of
24 directly receiving fire alarms and transmitting the
25 information to the appropriate firehouse. FDNY

1
2 created the Fire Alarm Telegraph Bureau in 1911 and
3 developed a building plan for central offices which
4 would be located within City-owned parks, and so the
5 Bronx Central Office is located within Bronx Park.

6 Next, please.

7 The Italian Renaissance Revival style
8 Bronx Central Office also has a twin in Brooklyn
9 which is designated. They both were designed by the
10 architect, Frank J. Helmle, and feature recessed
11 arcaded (INAUDIBLE), windows with classical
12 surrounds, and topped by deep terra cotta cornices
13 and hipped Spanish tile roof. This building was
14 renovated in the early 2000s, and it retains a high
15 degree of integrity to its original design and is a
16 significant work of civic architecture. Next, please
17 and next again.

18 Now, we'll look at the Bronx Opera House.
19 It was designed by George Keister in 1912 in the
20 Italian Renaissance style. It served as a popular
21 entertainment and social gathering center for nearly
22 50 years. From its early Broadway acts to becoming
23 one of the most significant cultural venues for the
24 City's growing Latin music scene from the 1960s and
25 through the early '80s.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I'm sorry to interrupt, Kate. We're going to just put a brief pause on this presentation and come right back to you.

KATE LEMOS-MCHALE: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Now, we will vote on the HPD item that was just heard, and I'll ask the last opportunity to recognize any of my Colleagues who have questions or remarks. Deputy Speaker Ayala is in support of this project.

Okay, I now call for a vote to approve LU 266 for the Share NYC Article XI disposition application. Counsel, please call the roll.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Louis.

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: I vote aye.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member De La Rosa.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Aye.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Marte.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Aye.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Nurse.

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Aye.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Ung.

COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Aye.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair, LU 266 is
3 adopted by a vote of five in the affirmative, zero in
4 the negative with no abstentions and will be referred
5 to the full Land Use Committee.

6 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you, everyone.

7 KATE LEMOS-MCHALE: Back to Bronx Opera
8 House, as part of this designation, the Commission
9 received public testimony in support of designation
10 from the Historic Districts Council, the New York
11 Landmarks Conservancy, and a representative of both
12 the Mott Haven Historic Districts Association and the
13 Bronx Borough Landmarks Preservation Community. The
14 Commission also received nine letters in support of
15 designation including from the East Bronx History
16 Forum and eight individuals. No testimony was
17 received in opposition, and we're so pleased to have
18 Deputy Speaker Ayala's support today for this
19 designation. We were in touch with her throughout our
20 process.

21 The property owner sensitively restored
22 the building in its conversion to a boutique hotel
23 named the Bronx Opera House and provided a
24 description of their restoration that informed our
25 Designation Report (INAUDIBLE). Next, please.

1
2 The Bronx Opera House is located on East
3 149th Street between Bergen Avenue and Brook Avenue
4 in the South Bronx, and this area, known as the Hub,
5 was the oldest major shopping area of the Bronx.
6 Shown here in a 1921 map, the intersection of 149th
7 Street and 3rd Avenue was also known as 42nd Street
8 and Broadway of the Bronx for much of the 20th
9 century, largely due to the importance of this former
10 theater. Next, please.

11 George M. Cohen, once called the man who
12 owns Broadway, developed the Bronx Opera House in the
13 early 20th century. He was considered the first
14 superstar of American showbusiness by many. He was an
15 actor, dancer, playwright, producer, and famous for
16 many popular songs including Yankee Doodle Dandy and
17 Give My Regards to Broadway. He opened several
18 theaters including the Bronx Opera House as part of
19 what as called the Subway Circuit where Broadway
20 productions were tested in outer boroughs before
21 going on nationwide tours, and these brought major
22 stars to the Bronx Opera House and the South Bronx.
23 Next, please.

24 After World War 2, large numbers of
25 people from Puerto Rico moved to New York, first

1 settling in East Harlem and soon after in the South
2 Bronx. For the Puerto Rican community in the South
3 Bronx, music and dance performances were expressions
4 of their identity and culture. In the 1960s and '70s,
5 the front portion of the Bronx Opera House was one of
6 the most significant artistic centers in the area,
7 home to a succession of Latin music clubs, Club
8 Caravana, the Bronx Casino, and El Cerromar, where
9 the era's major Latin stars came to showcase their
10 distinctive cultural output. Charlie and Eddie
11 Palmieri recorded a live album at the building
12 entitled Pachanga at Club Caravana in 1961, which
13 established its reputation as the home of Pachanga,
14 and newspapers at the time acknowledged it as pivotal
15 to the emergence of the Pachanga dance craze, and for
16 many it is remembered as an important place of social
17 gathering and expression of Latino culture. Next,
18 please.

19
20 The landmark site is the historic front
21 portion of the building facing East 149th Street.
22 This was the primary face of the Bronx Opera House
23 and the former main entrance, lobby, restaurants, and
24 banquet hall where the Latin music clubs were
25 located. It was converted into the Opera House Hotel

1
2 in 2012 by the current property owner, and the
3 sensitive adaptive reuse preserved the historic
4 façade and the building's prominence. Today, the
5 Bronx Opera House retains its public face with its
6 intact and elaborate façade that reflects its
7 historic use as a theater and the cultural
8 significance tied to Latin music and culture so it is
9 significant for both its culture and architecture.
10 Next, please. Next again.

11 The following three are designated, we
12 call them our Jazz Trio. They're designated for their
13 incredible significance to the history of jazz and
14 also the role New York City played in jazz really
15 becoming an American artform and the important
16 African American people who contributed to that and
17 were associated with these buildings. The first is
18 located prominently at the corner of West 157th
19 Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. 935 St. Nicholas
20 Avenue is a distinguished Gothic Revival style
21 apartment building built in 1915. It's
22 architecturally significant as an intact example of
23 the early 20th century residential development of
24 this neighborhood and apartment building design and
25 culturally significant as the long-time home of both

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2 Duke Ellington and Noble Sissle, two pioneers of jazz
3 music who were among the most prolific composers,
4 musicians, and band leaders in American history. The
5 Commission received public testimony and
6 correspondence in support of designation from
7 representatives of Manhattan Community Board 12, the
8 Historic Districts Council, and the New York
9 Landmarks Conservancy. We had no testimony in
10 opposition, and we are delighted to have Council
11 Member Abreu's support today. Next, please.

12 The building is located at the corner of
13 St. Nicholas Avenue and West 157th Street at the
14 south edge of Washington Heights, located a block
15 north of the Hamilton Heights and Sugar Hill Historic
16 Districts. Next, please.

17 Jazz pianist and composer Duke Ellington
18 resided here from 1939 to 1961, a period of over 20
19 years at the height of his prolific career. It's a
20 national historic landmark known as the Duke
21 Ellington Residence. Additional research by LPC staff
22 revealed the Noble Sissle, the noted ragtime jazz
23 musician and music producer, also resided here from
24 1950 to 1972 when he remained a significant and
25 influential figure in the performing arts. Both

1
2 Sissle and Ellington were successful composers and
3 band leaders with national and international
4 prominence. The long association of these two major
5 figures, each for more than 20 years at productive
6 periods in their careers, elevates the cultural
7 significance of the building. Next, please.

8 Born in 1899, Edward Kennedy "Duke"

9 Ellington was one of America's most innovative and
10 prolific jazz orchestra leaders. From the start of
11 his career in New York in 1923 until his death in
12 1974, he composed over 3,000 songs. Having reached
13 mainstream national audiences through live radio
14 shows from the Cotton Club, he moved to an apartment
15 on the fourth floor of 935 St. Nicholas Avenue in
16 1939. That year, his band also took over the entire
17 fourth floor. Over the next two decades while living
18 there, Duke Ellington wrote many songs that have
19 become American jazz standards. He also composed
20 musical suites including *Black, Brown, and Beige*, a
21 portrayal of African American history, and created
22 music for film and television. Among his many honors
23 and accolades, Ellington was on the cover of the *Time*
24 Magazine while he lived in this building and was

1
2 later awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award
3 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Next, please.

4 Noble Lee Sissle was born in 1889 and
5 moved to New York in 1916. During World 1, he was a
6 member of the 369th Regimental Band organized by
7 James Reese Europe, part of the African American
8 regiment known as the Harlem Hellfighters. Sissle and
9 his longtime collaborator, Eubie Blick, opened their
10 first musical, Shuffle Along, in 1921. It was the
11 first successful Broadway musical with an all-black
12 cast and introduced songs like I'm Just Wild About
13 Harry, which was later the campaign song for
14 President Harry Truman. Sissle formed his own
15 orchestra and toured Europe and the United States and
16 appeared in movies and television shows. He founded
17 and was President of the Negro Actors Guild of
18 America, working to eliminate the stereotyping of
19 African Americans in theatrical and cinematic
20 performances. While he lived at 935 St. Nicholas
21 Avenue, he remained an influential figure known as
22 the Unofficial Mayor of Harlem. Next, please.

23 The handsome building features textured
24 brick work and elaborate terra cotta details and is
25 highly intact, reflecting its architectural

1
2 significance and cultural significance when it was
3 home to these two jazz leaders, each for more than 20
4 years, and, therefore, is incredibly culturally
5 significant. Next, please. Next again, please.

6 Now, we go to Queens. This building was
7 home to the legendary jazz trumpeter, John Birks
8 "Dizzy" Gillespie who purchased it as his residence
9 in Corona at the height of his career in 1953 and
10 lived here until 1965. It was his home for the
11 longest period of association in New York City and
12 also held a rehearsal space that became a place of
13 music production and community gathering for his band
14 and the jazz community. It's culturally significant
15 for its strong association with Dizzy Gillespie and
16 his indelible contributions to history and culture.
17 LPC received public testimony in support of
18 designation from the Historic Districts Council and
19 the Corona East Elmhurst Preservation Society and two
20 individuals. Two representatives of the owner spoke
21 in opposition to designation. In addition, the
22 Commission received written testimony in support from
23 Assembly Member Jeffrion Aubry and the New York
24 Landmarks Conservancy. Next, please.

1
2 The landmark site is the building's tax
3 lot located on the corner of 37th Avenue and 106th
4 Street just around the corner from the designated
5 Louis Armstrong house and the newly opened Louis
6 Armstrong Center. Next, please.

7 Dizzy Gillespie was born in 1917 and
8 became one of the most important jazz trumpeters,
9 composers, and band leaders of the 20th century. He
10 is best remembered as a co-founder of the
11 revolutionary style bebop with Charlie Parker whose
12 residence on Avenue B in Manhattan is also a landmark
13 as well as for his contributions to the development
14 of Afro-Cuban jazz. Built on the corner of 106th
15 Street in 1922 as a single-family home, this building
16 was converted to a three-family residence around
17 1940. Due in large part to the lack of racial
18 covenance in most of Corona, Gillespie was able to
19 purchase the building in 1953 and lived here in an
20 apartment with his wife, Lorraine, until 1965. The
21 Gillespies retained ownership of the building until
22 1985, so over 32 years. Dizzy Gillespie died in 1993
23 and is buried in nearby Flushing Cemetery. Though
24 modest, this house retains its original form and
25 Colonial Revival style features with only minor

1 changes since the time Gillespie lived here, mainly
2 limited to window and door replacement. Next, please.

3
4 During the period he lived in Corona,
5 Dizzy Gillespie adopted his significant bent trumpet,
6 composed and rehearsed music in a basement studio in
7 his home, and released or performed on a succession
8 of memorable albums. He reached an international
9 audience as America's first Jazz Ambassador during
10 the Cold War, a U.S. State Department program
11 conceived to promote American culture and democratic
12 values abroad. He appeared at the historic first
13 Newport Jazz Festival in 1954 among many others and
14 won many national and international awards, entering
15 Downbeat Magazine's Hall of Fame in 1960. Next,
16 please.

17 That same year, an article in the New
18 York Daily News commented that Dizzy Gillespie owned
19 an apartment house in Corona Queens and because Dizzy
20 lived there "it's a mighty cool neighborhood." Corona
21 developed into an important African American
22 community, attracting notable jazz musicians
23 including Gillespie and his friend, Louis Armstrong,
24 who settled there in 1943. Dizzy Gillespie's home
25 became a center of the jazz community in Corona with

1 many musicians congregating in his rehearsal studio.
2 He wrote the first version of his autobiography
3 there, and he is shown in this photo from the book
4 with Louis Armstrong, Jimmy McPartland, and Bobby
5 Hackett at his house. The house was designated in
6 recognition, therefore, of its incredible cultural
7 significance. Next, please. Next again.
8

9 Our last designation to present to you
10 this morning is the Hotel Cecil and Minton's
11 Playhouse building in Harlem which was built in 1895
12 to 1896. It gained cultural significance in the mid-
13 20th century when it was home to Minton's Playhouse,
14 a jazz club that flourished for more than three
15 decades. Famous for presenting innovative house
16 bands, star headliners, and informal jam sessions, it
17 was here that the influential jazz style known as
18 bebop took shape in the 1940s, transforming American
19 music. The Commission received public testimony in
20 support of designation from representatives of the
21 owner and the Historic Districts Council and letters
22 of support of designation from New York Landmarks
23 Conservancy and Save Harlem Now. Next, please.

24 Located in Central Harlem, Hotel Cecil
25 and Minton's Playhouse building is a five-story

1 structure at the southeast corner of St. Nicholas
2 Avenue and West 118th Street, and its landmark site
3 is shown here. Next.

4
5 Hotel Cecil was designed in the
6 Renaissance Revival style by Julius F. Munckwicz.
7 Completed in 1896, it was a residential hotel, and it
8 had furnished and unfurnished suites and bachelor
9 apartments. During the era of the Harlem Renaissance,
10 the hotel was slow to welcome black patrons but, by
11 1940, it changed course and was listed in consecutive
12 editions of the Negro Motorists Green Book, a popular
13 guide that identified businesses that were friendly
14 to African American travelers, and visitors included
15 a remarkable and varied list of long- and short-term
16 guests including jazz, gospel, soul, and doo wop
17 performers. Next, please.

18 By 1938, the hotel's first floor dining
19 room was converted to a restaurant and bar named for
20 the owner, saxophonist and union leader Henry Minton.
21 Minton's Playhouse was managed by the big band
22 leader, Teddy Hill, and under his direction it became
23 a popular and influential music venue, often credited
24 as where improvisational jazz style known as bebop
25 was born. Minton's house band featured the legendary

1 pianist Thelonius Monk, and on Monday nights informal
2 jam sessions frequently occurred including such
3 gifted musicians as the trumpeter, Dizzy Gillespie,
4 who described these performances as "seed beds of our
5 new modern style of music." A who's who of jazz would
6 perform at Minton's Playhouse as it continued to be a
7 prominent destination for jazz enthusiasts through
8 the 1960s. Several albums were recorded there
9 including performances led by Tony Scott, Stanley
10 Turrentine, and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis. In 1959, Ralph
11 Ellison described the club as a sanctuary, a shrine
12 and "a rendezvous in which jazzmen have worked out
13 the secrets of their craft." Next, please.

15 The club remained open until 1974 when a
16 fire caused the owner to abandon the building. The
17 Hotel Cecil was rehabilitated with loans from the
18 Department of Housing Preservation and Development in
19 the late 1980s. It's now operated as supportive
20 housing for homeless men and women and is well-
21 preserved. It retains many of its original
22 architectural features including the entrance to
23 Minton's Playhouse and remains today an astounding
24 reflection of New York's role in the development of
25 jazz as an American artform. Thank you.

1

2

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you very much.

3

My Colleagues are not here so.

4

Are there any members of the public that
wish to testify on this?

6

CLAUDETTE BRADY: Yes, I do.

7

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We do have one member
of the public signed in to testify online. I will
remind anyone in the room with us today who wishes to
testify on this item to please see a Sergeant-at-Arms
and fill out a speaker card.

12

I believe that we have Claudette Brady
signed up to testify.

14

CLAUDETTE BRADY: Yes, that's correct.

15

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: You may begin.

16

CLAUDETTE BRADY: I am Claudette Brady. I
am the Executive Director for Save Harlem Now, and I
wish to testify on both Hotel Cecil and Minton's
Playhouse and also 935th St. Nicholas. Do I just do
both at the same time?

21

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

22

CLAUDETTE BRADY: Okay, all right. My
first will be LPC 2671, Hotel Cecil and Minton's
Playhouse. Save Harlem Now is pleased to express our
support for the designation of the Hotel Cecil and

25

1
2 Minton's Playhouse as New York landmark. The building
3 is known throughout the world to those with deeper
4 interest and appreciation of jazz as the home of
5 bebop, a new form of jazz which was created and fine-
6 tuned at Minton's and spread throughout the country
7 in the '40s and '50s. Bebop is Harlem's contribution
8 to jazz, and it is most appropriate that this place
9 where it was created, Minton's Playhouse, will be
10 preserved as a designated landmark. Minton's
11 Playhouse, on the easternmost side of West 118th
12 Street, was located in what was once the formal
13 dining room of the hotel above it. The hotel and club
14 entrance on West 118th Street was considered the
15 front façade. The jazz club and its musicians
16 flourished at Minton's Playhouse in the late 1930s
17 and 1940s. These musicians included trumpeter John
18 "Dizzy" Gillespie. Some historians say that
19 Gillespie's vision of what would later come to be
20 called bebop throughout the musical world came to him
21 while jamming at Minton's where the same musicians
22 often jammed together. Minton's Playhouse continues
23 to be mentioned in jazz histories and exhibitions
24 around the world. The majority of the building's area
25 was dedicated to commercial spaces on the street

1 level of West 118th Street and along St. Nicholas
2 Avenue. The prominence of Hotel Cecil above attracted
3 black visitors and musicians alike. When renovation
4 work was began on the building in 1986 after many
5 years of being locked up and abandoned, Minton's
6 Playhouse still contained a few relics from its
7 important musical past including an intact Minton's
8 Playhouse neon sign on West 118th Street and a 36-
9 foot long oak bar inside the club space, both
10 currently stored in Washington, D.C. museums. The
11 first floor of the building currently contains
12 commercial uses including a restaurant that at the
13 corner, first floor, called Minton's Playhouse moved
14 from its original location and the Cecil Restaurant.
15 The old Hotel Cecil space above was renovated and
16 repurposed as housing for formerly homeless men in
17 1985. Save Harlem Now strongly supports the
18 designation of this important architectural and
19 historical landmark which recognizes the building's
20 importance to the community, the city, and the
21 musical world beyond.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you.

24 CLAUDETTE BRADY: Thank you.
25

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: You have a minute for
the next one.

CLAUDETTE BRADY: Yes. I'm sorry?

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: That's all of it or
you had one more?

CLAUDETTE BRADY: No, I have St. Nicholas
as well.

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: All right, go ahead.

CLAUDETTE BRADY: Okay. Save Harlem Now is
delighted to support the designation of 935 St.
Nicholas Avenue as an individual landmark. Built in
1915, this handsome multi-family residence is a
Harlem gem. With its elegant terra cotta entrance,
stylized brick and terra cotta façade, (INAUDIBLE)
fire escapes punctuated by pediments and ornate
finials, it is one of many distinctive buildings
along St. Nicholas Avenue. In addition to its
architectural character, the building's significance
stems from its relationship to two prominent tenants.
Between 1938 and 1961, prolific jazz pianist,
composer, and band leader Edward Kennedy "Duke"
Ellington lived in Apartment 4A. During part of that
period between 1959 and 1972, ragtime musician and
music producer Noble Lee Sissle resided at another

1
2 apartment. There is scarce documentation about how
3 often these two prominent African American pioneers
4 of jazz crossed paths along the hallways of 935 St.
5 Nicholas, but their relationship to the building is
6 well-documented. In 1940, Duke Ellington wrote Harlem
7 Air Shaft, a song he later acknowledged was inspired
8 by his life in the building. The 1976 designation to
9 the National Registry of Historic Places as a
10 National Historic Landmark highlights the building's
11 association with Mr. Ellington. During his tenure at
12 935 St. Nicholas wrote many articles for Harlem
13 newspapers and hosted a show on the local New York
14 radio station, WMGM. His insights on Harlem life and
15 culture made him known as the Unofficial Mayor of
16 Harlem. It is encouraging that the LPC designation
17 does justice to the building by linking it also to
18 Mr. Sissle, a glaring omission noticeable at the
19 National Registry designation. Save Harlem Now
20 unequivocally supports the designation of this unique
21 architectural and cultural landmark as individual New
22 York City landmarks. We encourage the Landmarks
23 Preservation to continue exploring Harlem's past and
24 significance through its brick and mortar
25 architectural merits as the tangible remnants of the

unprecedented past. We can't wait to continue to work
with LPC on speedy designation of other properties in
Harlem. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON LOUIS: Thank you. Being that
there are no questions for either panels, you both
are excused.

There being no other members of the
public who wish to testify on LUs numbers 267 through
272, the public hearings on these six individual
landmark designations are closed.

That concludes today's business. I would
like to thank the members of the public, my
Colleagues, Subcommittee Counsel, Land Use Staff, and
the Sergeant-at-Arms for today's participation.

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 September 23, 2023