

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & MARITIME USE

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December 14, 2010
Start: 11:25am
Recess: 11:45am

HELD AT: Committee Rm - 14th Floor
City Hall

B E F O R E:
BRAD LANDER
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Maria Del Carmen Arroyo
Margaret Chin
Daniel J. Halloran III
Rosie Mendez
Jumaane D. Williams

A P P E A R A N C E S

Jenny Fernandez
Director of Intergovernmental & Community Relations
Landmarks Preservation Commission

Vera Sung
Representative of owner
Loew's Canal Street Theatre

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CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Good morning.

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COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Good

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morning.

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CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Nice to see

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you. All right. No, that's good. Good morning,

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I'm Brad Lander, the Chair of the Council's Land

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Use Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and

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Maritime Uses, we're very happy to be here today

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for our last Subcommittee hearing of 2010. We've

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got a great project to close the year out with.

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We're joined by Council Member Halloran, who's

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here first, Council Member Williams, Council

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Member Arroyo and Council Member Chin, who's not a

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member of our Committee, but whose district this

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project is in. The sole item on our calendar for

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today is the Loew's Canal Street Theatre, which

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must have some numbers somewhere, Land Use #272,

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and we'll invite Jenny Fernandez from the

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Landmarks Preservation Commission to come up and

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present the project to us.

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MS. FERNANDEZ: Thank you, Chair

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Lander and members of the Committee. My name is

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Jenny Fernandez, Director of Intergovernmental and

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Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation

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2 Commission. I'm here today to testify on the
3 Commission's designation of the Loew's Canal
4 Street Theatre in Manhattan. On June 22nd, 2010
5 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a
6 public hearing on the proposed designation of the
7 Loew's Canal Street Theatre. Seven people spoke
8 in favor of designation, including the owner of
9 the property, Council Member Margaret Chin, and a
10 representative of the historic district's council.
11 An additional statement in support of designation
12 was also entered into the record at the hearing.
13 There were no speakers in opposition to
14 designation. On September 14th, 2010 the
15 Commission voted to designate the building a New
16 York City individual landmark. The Loew's Canal
17 Street Theatre at 31 Canal Street on Manhattan's
18 Lower East Side was constructed as a neighborhood
19 movie house in 1926-27 at the beginning of what is
20 generally regarded as the golden age of cinema.
21 It was commissioned by Loew's Inc., which was one
22 of the so-called "Big Five" within the Hollywood
23 studio system, and was designed by the nationally-
24 known firm of Thomas W. Lamb Inc. The emergence
25 of the motion picture industry coincided closely

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2 with the growth of the Lower East Side as the
3 city's most prominent immigrant district. The
4 earliest experiment in the medium began in the
5 1870's, and the first commercial exhibitions took
6 place in the 1890's, right as hundreds of
7 thousands of newcomers, many of Jewish faith, were
8 settling in the area. By the early 20th century,
9 the neighborhood could claim the nation's densest
10 concentration of both human population and movie
11 houses. Marcus Loew, the founder of the theater
12 chain, was born to immigrant parents on the Lower
13 East Side and became involved in film exhibition
14 during its earliest days as a peepshow novelty.
15 From the earliest days of cinema, the Lower East
16 Side contained one of the highest concentrations
17 of motion picture theaters in the country. The
18 Loew's Canal Street Theatre was one of several
19 large movie houses constructed in the neighborhood
20 during the 20's as the national chain competed
21 against the smaller M&S circuit for the control of
22 the local market. Of these theaters, the Loew's
23 Canal Street Theatre was one of the largest and
24 most architecturally distinguished, with an
25 exuberant terra cotta façade facing bustling Canal

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2 Street. It is also certainly the best preserved.
3 The Commission urges you to affirm this
4 designation.

5 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Thank you very
6 much. We were going to ask for a demonstration
7 here. Council Member Chin, we have the owner
8 here, and she's ... or a representative of the
9 owner, and she's going to testify in just a
10 minute, but if you would like to make some remarks
11 or ask a question of Ms. Fernandez.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you.
13 Thank you, Chair. It's really great that it
14 finally comes to this point, and I just wanted to
15 thank the owner for their support, Mr. Sung, and
16 also for the Landmark Commission. It's such a
17 treasure in our community, and hopefully in the
18 future we can work with the owner to really turn
19 this back into a great performing arts center.
20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Are there
22 questions from the Committee? And again as I
23 said, we have a representative of the owner who is
24 going to testify in just a moment, so. You can
25 tell that we're a little, you know, we have the

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2 holiday ... All right, great, thank you, Ms.

3 Fernandez, thank you very much for your ... do you

4 have something else to add?

5 MS. FERNANDEZ: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Please.

7 MS. FERNANDEZ: I just wanted to

8 say that we want to thank the owner, of course,

9 for working with us tirelessly over a long span, a

10 period of time. As we arrive at this point, and

11 of course the Commission is very excited that it

12 is at this point, we thank you very much, of

13 course, for the support of Council Member Chin in

14 this effort as well.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay, thank

16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Thank you, and

18 thanks for your year of work with us. All right,

19 so I will now call up Vera Sung, who's a

20 representative of Thomas Sung, the owner of the

21 property. If you can make sure that the light is

22 off, which is counterintuitive, that will mean

23 that your mic is on.

24 MS. SUNG: Oh.

25 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: And then state

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your name.

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MS. SUNG: Okay.

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CHAIRPERSON LANDER: For the

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record, and.

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MS. SUNG: Good morning, my name is

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Vera Sung. In answer to your question, Council

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Member, I don't think we're going to be doing

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peepshows. So, okay, honorable City Council

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members, thank you for agreeing to postpone the

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meeting on this matter till today. My father,

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Thomas Sun, who is the owner of 31 Canal Street,

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really wanted to be here to give his testimony,

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but he's actually for health reasons, he has to

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stay home. So I'm going to deliver to you his

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testimony, which I believe you have a written

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statement in front of you. I'm just going to read

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that into the record. Approximately a year ago we

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were informed by the Landmarks Preservation

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Commission that our building at 31 Canal Street

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was being considered for landmark designation.

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Our family has actually owned this building for

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more than 30 years, and it has been largely vacant

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since its acquisition. Therefore the cost to

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carry the property has been substantial.

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2 Naturally we were concerned that the landmark
3 designation would reduce the value of our
4 investment because of the restrictions. However,
5 with the information and assistance from the very
6 able staff of the Landmarks Preservation
7 Commission, we learned about the historical value
8 of our building, and the need to preserve the
9 façade. We have since cooperated fully with the
10 Commission. Knowing the growth of the Chinese-
11 American population, the transformation of the
12 downtown community and the Lower East Side, and
13 the lack of suitable facilities for the performing
14 arts downtown, we hope to restore the building as
15 a performing arts center to enrich the cultural
16 and ethnic diversity of this city. Development of
17 the project will entail substantial loss of
18 economic benefit to us, but the social value to be
19 gained by all will be even more substantial. As
20 the project proceeds we will need to see private
21 and public funding, and the cooperation of other
22 city agencies. We hope that we will have your
23 support. I actually serve as a member of
24 Community Board #1 and I am a long-time resident
25 of the South Street Seaport. My sister Jill lives

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2 in Tribeca, my other sister lives in Battery Park
3 City, so we all are residents of downtown, and we
4 all actually have a keen interest in seeing this
5 project to its fruition. So thank you for all
6 your kind attention, and happy holidays. And any
7 questions, I'll see if I can answer, but all the
8 ideas are in my father's head at this point.

9 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: First let me
10 say thank you for being here today, and to you and
11 your family, you know, the kind of stewardship
12 that, you know, looks to take care of a building
13 like this. Of course, you know, wants to know
14 what something like this means, but the fact that
15 you worked with the LPC and, you know, coming
16 before us today to talk about the goals of
17 renovating it and having it being a cultural and
18 performing arts center, but also are open to
19 landmarking, is really great, and we thank you for
20 it.

21 MS. SUNG: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Are there any
23 questions from ... you have a question?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yes. Thank
25 you. I just wanted Ms. Sung to share some of your

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2 family history, and also that in Chinatown right
3 now we have no theater. But there are many, many
4 cultural groups, opera groups that love to
5 perform, and love to really show off their talent
6 and their skills, and in our community there's no
7 place to do it. So we're really looking forward
8 to this project. But maybe you could share your
9 family background, your grandmother.

10 MS. SUNG: Oh yes.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: To make it a
12 little bit more interesting.

13 MS. SUNG: I was just ... my
14 grandmother actually was an opera singer, so ... on
15 my mother's side, so she's a musician. So she
16 performed western opera, Madame Butterfly, so in
17 our family, you know, we have a true interest in
18 the performing arts. And that's where it comes
19 from as well too. So, western, eastern, opera,
20 all different, you know, things.

21 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Okay, thank
22 you.

23 MS. SUNG: Okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Christian
25 Hylton, our counsel, reminds me that, you know,

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2 there's two other, you know, Loew's theaters,
3 Loew's Paradise in the Bronx, and Loew's Kings in
4 Brooklyn, where there are efforts underway. I
5 guess the one in the Bronx has actually been
6 renovated, and designated. I don't think we've
7 designated Kings in Brooklyn, but there's a
8 substantial effort underway that the borough
9 president and EDC and others are trying to kind of
10 bring it back. So, wonderful to have this going
11 on, thank you very much.

12 MS. SUNG: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: All right, we
14 have no one else signed up to testify, so unless
15 someone speaks right now, we'll go ahead and close
16 the public hearing on this project and move
17 forward to a vote. I'll ask Christian to call the
18 roll. The Chair recommends a vote of aye.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL HYLTON: Chair
20 Lander.

21 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Aye.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL HYLTON: Council
23 Member Arroyo.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I hope your
25 dad gets better soon, and congratulations. I vote

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2 aye.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL HYLTON: Council
Member Williams.

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COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Aye.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL HYLTON: Council
Member Halloran.

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COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN III:

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Permission to explain my vote?

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CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Of course.

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COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN III:

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First, let me commend the LPC for looking at a

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theater and its possible renovation. I hope that

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the funding and the assistance will be there from

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the government in order to make this a plausible

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package. I also congratulate the family who have

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made a very difficult decision to, in a way,

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sacrifice their economic rights to their property

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in the interests of the community. I think that's

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commendable, and I'm glad to see it's being done

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voluntarily. Please continue to press your

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Council member and to the Council itself, to make

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sure that money is available for you to do these

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things. And in turn we will get the arm put on

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us. So congratulations and of course I'll vote

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aye.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL HYLTON: By a vote of four in the affirmative and none in negative, no abstentions, LU 272 is approved and referred to the full Land Use Committee.

CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Thanks very much, we'll hold the vote open for ten minutes. Thanks very much, this meeting of the Committee is adjourned.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL HYLTON: Council Member Mendez

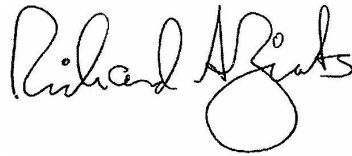
COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: I vote aye.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL HYLTON: The vote now stands five in the affirmative, none in the negative, no abstentions.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: The meeting is now adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Richard A. Ziats, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature _____

Date December 15, 2010