

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE BELL TELEPHONE LABORATORIES COMPLEX (including the former Western Electric Company and Hook's Steam-powered Factory Buildings) (now WESTBETH ARTISTS' HOUSING) IN MANHATTAN.**

**January 24, 2012**

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Bell Telephone Laboratories Complex (now Westbeth Artists' Housing) in Manhattan.

On January 12, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Bell Telephone Laboratories Complex (including the former Western Electric Company and Hook's Steam-powered Factory Buildings) (now Westbeth Artists' Housing). Thirteen people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of State Senator Thomas K. Duane, State Assembly Member Deborah J. Glick, City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer, Manhattan Community Board 2, Westbeth Center for the Arts, Westbeth Board of Directors, Westbeth Artists' Residents Council, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, and Historic Districts Council. In addition, the Commission received numerous communications in support of designation. On October 25, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the complex a New York City individual landmark.

The Bell Telephone Laboratories Complex of buildings, occupying an entire city block in Manhattan's Far West Village, is highly significant as the site of one of the world's most prestigious telecommunications research organizations, and later, as the first and largest publically and privately-funded artists' housing project in the United States, as well as a pioneering large-scale industrial rehabilitation project. The oldest structure is the vernacular Italianate style Hook's Steam-powered Factory Building (c. 1860) at 445-453 West Street, one of the few extant 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial buildings along the Hudson River waterfront, which housed a number of significant manufacturers over the decades. The Western Electric Co. built an office and factory building for telephone-related equipment (1896-1903). After 1913, the building ceased as a manufacturing plant and was largely the headquarters of Western Electric's Engineering Department. In 1925, it became Bell Telephone Laboratories for research and development for both the American Telegraph & Telephone Co. and Western Electric Co.

Research work that resulted in many significant innovations and inventions was conducted here. After Bell Labs vacated the property in 1966, Roger L. Stevens, first chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, conceived of the complex as a pilot project of subsidized, affordable studio living quarters for artists, which was substantially supported and inaugurated by the J.M. Kaplan Fund. It was converted in 1968-70 into Westbeth Artists' Housing, the first major work by architect Richard Meier, with 383 residential and work studio units, as well as gallery, performance, and commercial spaces, and a park. Westbeth Artists' Housing continues to occupy the site.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE  
THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING  
AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE GRAND CONCOURSE  
HISTORIC DISTRICT IN THE BRONX.**

**January 23, 2012**

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Grand Concourse Historic District in the Bronx.

On June 22, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Grand Concourse Historic District. Ten people spoke in favor of designation, including a representative for Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Bronx Borough Historian Lloyd Ultan, representatives of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance, and the Municipal Arts Society, two representatives of the Historic Districts Council, and three other speakers. There were two speakers in opposition to the proposed designation, including an owner of several buildings. The record was kept open following the hearing. Letters in support of designation were received from the Executive Director of the Bronx Museum of the Arts, President of the Friends of Terra Cotta/New York State, and a partner with the firm DADRAS Architects. Emails in support of designation were received from a representative of the Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance, two residents, and ten other persons (including some former neighborhood residents). On October 25 2011, the Grand Concourse was designated a New York City historic district.

The Grand Concourse Historic District consists of 78 properties located along, or on the streets adjacent to, a one-mile stretch of the Grand Concourse between East 153<sup>rd</sup> and 167<sup>th</sup> Streets. In addition to 61 apartment houses, constructed between 1917 and 1959, the historic district also contains two parks and several public institutions, including the Bronx County Courthouse and Andrew Freedman Home, both designated New York City individual landmarks.

The "Grand Boulevard and Concourse," later shortened to the Grand Concourse, was conceived in 1891 as a means of supplying a link between the park systems of Manhattan and the sparsely settled region of the Bronx. At the time of its completion in 1909, the boulevard featured bicycle paths and pedestrian sidewalks in addition to a central vehicular speedway. In 1924, the boulevard was extended south from East 161<sup>st</sup> Street to East 138<sup>th</sup> Street, and the roadway soon became the major north-south artery of the West Bronx.

Prompted by the Tenement House law of 1901, which mandated more fire protection, light, and air, thereby making it unprofitable to build multi-family dwellings on small lots, the five- and six-story apartment house became the dominant building type along the Grand Concourse, and within the borough as a whole. Nearly half of the apartment houses within the historic district were built during the first period of development, between 1922 and 1931. The buildings of this era typically reflected the fashions of Manhattan, characterized by revivalist architectural styles such as Tudor, Renaissance, and Colonial Revival. The largely brick and terra-cotta buildings were evocative of faraway places and featured decorative elements such as corner towers, faux half-timbering, elaborate brickwork, and classically decorated main entry porticos.

A second wave of development was precipitated by the 1933 opening of the northern leg of the IND Subway, which provided much improved access to the Garment District and other parts of Manhattan's West Side. Once again influenced by Manhattan tastes, Art Deco and Moderne became the residential styles of choice for the Bronx – as evidenced in the 27 apartments within the historic district constructed between 1935 and 1945. The Art Deco and Moderne style buildings of the historic district, which utilized materials including terra cotta, cast stone, beige brick, and mosaic tile, are typically found in small clusters interspersed among the apartment houses of the earlier boom. Emery Roth, one of New York City's most renown apartment house architects, is credited with the design of the striking Art Deco-style apartment house at 888 Grand Concourse.

Several of the apartment houses within the historic district are representative of the garden apartment, an innovative housing form that took shape in the late 1910s and 1920s. The type was characterized by low-rise apartment buildings on large lots organized around an interior and/or exterior courtyard. The Thomas Garden Apartments (840 Grand Concourse) was designed in 1926-28 by Andrew Jackson Thomas. Credited as the innovator of the garden apartment, Thomas had already made a name for himself designing garden apartments in Jackson Heights, Queens when John D. Rockefeller hired him to design Thomas Garden.

For nearly half a century, having a residential address on, or in proximity to, the Grand Concourse was a strong indicator of success. By the late 1950s/early 1960s, however, the Bronx had entered into a period of profound transformation and economic downturn. In the late 1980s, the Bronx began to resurge and by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Grand Concourse had become home to a vibrant mix of working- and middle

class residents, including immigrants from the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa. Due to the solid construction of the buildings within the historic district, they survived largely unscathed through decades of neglect, retaining the architectural details and distinctive character that first attracted residents to them in the 1920s and 1930s. The boulevard remains as the backbone of the great apartment houses, grand civic structures, and bucolic parks of the historic district, and an important visual element that contributes to the district's powerful sense of place.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF ST. CASIMIR'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH (later THE PAUL ROBESON THEATER) IN BROOKLYN.**

**January 24, 2012**

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Church (later The Paul Robeson Theater) in Brooklyn.

On June 28, 2011, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Church (later The Paul Robeson Theater) in Brooklyn. Three people spoke in favor of the designation including representatives of the Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, and the Victorian Society New York. A motion was approved to leave the record open for 30 days; no further comments were received. The Commission received a letter of support from Councilmember Letitia James. On October 25, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the building a New York City individual landmark.

The Rundbogenstil building at 40 Greene Avenue, originally named the Church of the Redeemer, was erected c. 1864 for the Fourth Universalist Society. In 1870 Temple Israel, one of Brooklyn's first Reform congregations, purchased the structure and converted it into a synagogue. Having outgrown the building after 20 years, Temple Israel sold it to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn in 1890. The brownstone-fronted building, described in 1870 as being "modest as to size, ornaments and decorations" was enlarged with the addition of an apse and steeple before its dedication as the new home of St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Church, a parish founded in 1875 to tend to the spiritual needs of Brooklyn's Polish population. St. Casimir's occupied the church on Greene Avenue until 1980 when it was merged with Our Lady of Czestochowa another Polish parish. That year, Dr. Josephine English, an African American physician and community activist, purchased the building and converted it into The Paul Robeson Theatre to provide the community with greater access to the arts. This early Brooklyn church building is a significant example of the Rundbogenstil and an important reflection of the borough's rich religious and cultural history.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

# FOR THE RECORD

Statement before the NY City Council Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses

Good morning/afternoon Councilmembers. My name is Barbara Ann Rogers, and I am a licensed real estate broker here in Brooklyn. I am also a Broker "A" member of REBNY, meaning that I pay annually the highest level of dues collected from its residential real estate broker and agent members. I am here today to speak in support of the designation of the Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District.

REBNY is a valuable trade organization for real estate professionals in NYC, providing its members with important and wide-ranging ethical and educational support. It does not, however, speak for me or for many of my colleagues, including those on the board of the LPC who originally unanimously approved this designation, and I am hurt by its knee-jerk anti-landmarking position, clearly fueled by pressure from the building owner/developer members of the organization (who together pay less than half of all dues collected yet outnumber residential brokers on REBNY's board of directors by 10 to one<sup>1</sup>) and am angered to see my recently-increased dues payments used on this venture without the organization's inquiring as to its members' actual feelings on the subject.

The Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District contains many buildings of inarguable architectural significance, including 75 Livingston St., originally the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce Building; The Temple Bar Building, at 44 Court St.; and the Franklin Building, at 186 Remsen St., which, though altered, remains a specimen of the earliest period of office building construction in this area. As an ensemble these structures represent an important reminder of the time when Brooklyn was an important business and financial center and a survey of commercial architectural styles from the latter third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 1920s.

The vast majority of residential sales with which I have been associated in my career have occurred in the historic districts of Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Cobble Hill, Prospect Lefferts Gardens (where I live), and, most recently, Brooklyn Heights. I have also sold properties in non-designated areas of most of these neighborhoods and others, including Park Slope, Carroll Gardens, and Bedford-Stuyvesant. I can state unequivocally that properties in historic district trade at a premium vis-à-vis those in unprotected areas. This is due in part to the architectural significance of these structures but also due to the guarantee, for example, that the beautiful view from the sixth floor apartment is not going to be obscured one day by a developer's hastily-erected and uninspiring condo built to capitalize on Brooklyn's recently-rediscovered cachet.

On a personal note, I have lived in Brooklyn since 1981, beginning in Brooklyn Heights, and have often marveled at the beauty and grace of these buildings along Court and surrounding streets, cheering them on in their survival when Brooklyn was a less-noticed "outer borough." Who knew that our borough's rediscovered popularity would threaten them more than the neglect of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

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<sup>1</sup> *The Real Deal*, "Reassessing REBNY," Nov. 30, 2011

I urge the City Council not to yield to the pressure from real estate developers and their allies and uphold the designation of the ~~Brooklyn~~ <sup>Brooklyn Hall</sup> Skyscraper Historic District in its entirety. Due to developer machinations we have lost many landmark-worthy structures considered for designation, including the Old Dutch Mustard factory in Williamsburg, today replaced with residential condos, and the Ward Baking Company Building in Prospect Heights, one of the largest terra cotta structures ever built in New York City, viciously and hastily demolished to prevent all attempts at landmarking it, replaced today (and for the foreseeable future) by a blacktop parking lot and "staging area" for the unmitigated insult to the City Council and the ULURP process that is Atlantic Yards.

Please do not let another beautiful vista and reminder of Brooklyn's proud history be wrenched from us under pressure from developers seeking only to enrich themselves at the expense of the area's current residents and businesses.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and care in your voting.

Barbara Ann Rogers, Licensed Real Estate Broker

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**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE  
THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND  
MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB IN  
MANHATTAN.**

**January 24, 2012**

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Union League Club in Manhattan.

On November 17, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Union League Club. Two people spoke in support of designation, including representatives of New York State Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried and the Historic Districts Council. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission has received a letter supporting designation from a representative of the owner. On October 25, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the building a New York City individual landmark.

Built in 1929-31, the Union League is a fine example of a neo Classical style clubhouse, combining elements that recall the architecture of 18<sup>th</sup> century England and the American colonies. This style was especially popular with public institutions in the late 1920s. A continuous projecting cornice divides the nine-story structure into two distinct sections that reflect the interior program. The massive lower floors house the primary social spaces, such as the dining rooms, billiard room and library, and the U-shaped upper floors contain more than sixty bedrooms. Located at the southwest corner of Park Avenue and 37<sup>th</sup> Street in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan, the Park Avenue entrance was intended for member's wives and daughters who had their own dining facilities and lounge on the fourth floor. The Union League was one of the first clubs in New York City to welcome women and this entrance is crowned by a decorative lintel displaying a relief with four female faces.

The Union League was founded in 1863. Members promised "absolute and unqualified" loyalty to the United States and the Republican Party. During the Civil War, the club organized the first black regiment in New York State and later played a significant role in establishing the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1881, after occupying former residences on Union, and then Madison Square, the club moved to Fifth Avenue and 39<sup>th</sup> Street where a clubhouse was built on leased property. The current site was assembled by J.P. "Jack" Morgan and his brother-in-law Herbert L. Satterlee, who later served as president of the Union League.

These prominent families shared a strong interest in the maintaining the neighborhood's residential character and sold the property with precise covenants limiting the structure's height and massing. Since opening in February 1931, there have been few significant changes to the exterior. The Union League continues to operate the building as a private club.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.



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TESTIMONY OF THE  
GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
REGARDING THE CITY COUNCIL HEARING ON THE LANDMARKING OF  
WESTBETH

463 West St (aka 445-465 West St; 173-169 Bank St; 51-57 Bethune St; 734-754 Washington St)  
Borough of Manhattan  
January 24, 2012

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify before you today. The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation strongly supports upholding the designation of Westbeth as a New York City Landmark.

For 75 years, Westbeth was home to the Bell Telephone Laboratories, a world center for groundbreaking sound communication innovations. Technological breakthroughs by the company on-site were numerous, and included the invention of the transatlantic telephone, digital computer, satellite communications, and devices that would bring sound to television and movies. Viewed separately, the five buildings that make up the complex represent evolving styles in industrial architecture between 1861 and 1929; viewed together, they are an impressive, monumental whole. The preserved High Line elevated railway runs directly through the complex, forming a literal link to the Far West Village's industrial history.

The significance of the conversion of the Bell Laboratories to artists' residences, on both the local and national levels, cannot be underestimated. As the first large-scale conversion of an industrial building for residential use, the first subsidized housing for artists in the United States and the largest government-subsidized artists' colony in the world, the Westbeth project was award-winning in its day and served as a model for similar conversions all over the country, when the notion of adaptive reuse was still in its infancy. It was also the first significant design of Richard Meier, who today is internationally renowned as one of the most prominent architects in the world. Meier's design preserved the exterior integrity of the complex, which today appears much as it did when it housed the Bell Laboratories, while adding distinctly modern balconies and other touches to the interior as part of its adaptive reuse.

In New York City, the conversion of Westbeth made legitimate the residing of artists in post-industrial spaces, and prompted the establishment of new laws that legalized live/work conversions as had thus far only been occurring illegally in neighborhoods like SoHo. This would have a major and lasting effect on post-industrial neighborhoods all over the city, especially the Far West Village, in which Westbeth was the first of many residential conversions.

In December 2009, the National Park Service accepted GVSHP's nomination to designate the entire Westbeth complex a National Historic Landmark. Since the conversion project is less than 50 years old, it was necessary for the complex to have been found extraordinarily significant in order for it to achieve National Register listing.

We were pleased when the Landmarks Preservation Commission officially designated Westbeth a New York City Landmark last fall, a decision that was supported by the City Planning Commission. We strongly urge the Committee today to vote in support of the designation of Westbeth as a New York City Landmark.

Thank you.



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TESTIMONY OF BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN DIAZ  
TO THE CITY COUNCIL SUB COMMITTEE  
ON LANDMARKS AND MARITIME USES  
IN FAVOR OF DESIGNATION OF  
THE GRAND CONCOURSE HISTORIC DISTRICT

January 24, 2012

Last year, I applauded the designation of a Grand Concourse Historic District by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, and now I urge its approval by the New York City Council.

Designation as a New York City Historic District will complement the Grand Concourse's already established listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In the future, I hope to see this historic district extended to match the more extensive national register boundaries.

This Grand Concourse Historic District is significantly intact and contains many notable examples of art deco and other classic apartment houses. As I mentioned in my testimony to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the threats to buildings on the Grand Concourse, are in the details. Poorly done renovations and building management with short vision are carving away at the inherent value of this illustrious built environment. As an historic district, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission can guard against ill conceived and undesirable solutions that threaten proper maintenance of these buildings.

The area of the new district has been richly added to with the new Yankee Stadium and Gateway Center. The City itself has invested greatly in the area with infrastructure improvements including improvements to both the concourse roadway and park system. The lower Grand Concourse has also been re-zoned to create a vibrant, mixed-use, mixed-income community with new housing, waterfront open space, and an array of retail services.

Its status as an historic district is the finishing touch to the revival of the entire area and I urge its support. Thank you for your consideration.

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE  
THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND  
MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF 29 COTTAGE PLACE ON STATEN  
ISLAND.**

**January 24, 2012**

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of 29 Cottage Place on Staten Island.

On August 10, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 29 Cottage Place House. A total of six speakers, including the owner and two representatives of the Preservation League of Staten Island, spoke in favor of the designation. Former City Council member Kenneth C. Mitchell and State Senator Diane Savino sent letters in support of the designation. There were no speakers or letters in opposition to the designation. On October 25, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the building a New York City individual landmark.

One of the few surviving saltbox houses on Staten Island's North Shore, this modest two-story Greek Revival frame cottage with later Craftsman details is a significant reminder of Staten Island's vernacular architectural traditions. Built around 1848 for farmer Abraham L. Merrell, the house was leased to tenants until 1918. Its occupants included carpenters and boatmen who were likely employed in Port Richmond's thriving maritime industries. Three bays wide, two bays deep, 29 Cottage Place is capped by an asymmetrical gabled roof with a short pitch in front and longer slope at the rear. Known as a saltbox roof in New England and a catslide roof in the South, such roofs were a fairly common feature of colonial and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century houses but do not survive in great numbers on Staten Island and are becoming increasingly rare. Despite some recent changes, 29 Cottage Place is a significant reminder of Port Richmond's and Staten Island's vernacular heritage and a visible link to the rich history of the Port Richmond community.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 548 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/24/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jenny Fernandez

Address: 1 Centre St. 9th Flr.

I represent: LPC

Address: SI MA

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. LU 549 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/24/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Simeon Bankoff

Address: 232 E 11 Street

I represent: Hist Dist. Council

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 549 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: JAN 24, 2012

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DANIEL DONOVAN

Address: 851 GRAND CONCOURSE BX NY 10451

I represent: BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN DIAZ

Address: 851 GRAND CONCOURSE

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 551 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 1/24/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sheryl Woodruff

Address: 232 East 11th Street 10003

I represent: Greenwich Village Society for Historic Pres.

Address: 237 East 11th Street 10003

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. 20125191

in favor  in opposition

Date: January 24th 2012

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHN FOXELL

Address: 29 COTTAGE PLACE Staten Island N.Y.

I represent: MYSELF

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms