

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON RULES,
PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS

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June 11, 2014
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E:
BRAD S. LANDER
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Inez E. Dickens
Daniel R. Garodnick
Ydanis A. Rodriguez
Margaret S. Chin
Deborah L. Rose
Jumaane D. Williams
Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.
Mark Levine
Vincent M. Ignizio
Melissa Mark-Viverito

2 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Good morning.

3 Welcome to the New York City Council's Committee on
4 Rules, Privileges, and Elections. I'm Brad Lander,
5 Chair of the Committee. Before we get started, let
6 me introduce the members who are with us her this
7 morning. We have Minority Leader Vinny Ignizio from
8 Staten Island; Margaret Chin from Manhattan; Debbie
9 Rose from Staten Island; Rafael Espinal from
10 Brooklyn; Mark Levine, and Garodnick, and Ydanis
11 Rodriguez all from Manhattan. Good morning. We'll
12 be joined by several other members of the Rules
13 Committee later today. I also want to acknowledge
14 the Committee's Attorney Amatia Booth, and thank the
15 staff members of the Committee, the Council's
16 Investigative Unit, Chuck Davis, Deandra Johnson, and
17 Diana Arriaga [sp?] for their work in preparing the
18 materials that we have. We're also joined by Council
19 Member David Greenfield from Brooklyn. Thank you
20 joining us.

21 In a letter dated May 19, 2014, Mayor
22 Bill de Blasio formally submitted the name of
23 Meenakshi Srinivasan to the Council for our advice
24 and consent regarding her appointment to the
25 Landmarks Preservation Commission, and I'm here that

2 Ms. -- pleased that Srinivasan is here with us this
3 morning. We, after that submission on May 23rd, we
4 had a very thorough hearing in this Committee next
5 door with Srinivasan reviewing the materials that
6 were prepared our staff. And reviewing her statement
7 and asking quite a lot of questions about the LPC and
8 her qualifications. I learned this morning, I'm
9 pleased to report that her parents, and much of her
10 family in India where she was for some time between
11 that hearing and now watched our hearing. So the
12 live streaming and webcasting of Council hearings not
13 only helps New Yorkers have a better transparency in
14 our government, it enables family members all around
15 the world to take nahas [sp?], as we say, pride in
16 their children's accomplishments. While this is
17 first and foremost about getting a great person to
18 lead Landmarks Preservation Commission, the ongoing
19 story of New York, which is people from all around
20 the world coming here, and making good, and rising up
21 to take real leadership. And their parents being
22 proud of them is also a good part of the story. And
23 we're glad that our webcasting the hearings helped in
24 that regard.

2 Today, the Council will consider whether
3 to give its advice and consent to Ms. Srinivasan's
4 appointment through a vote on the attached M67
5 Message, which is in your packets. Ms. Srinivasan is
6 a resident of Manhattan, and if we give our advice
7 and consent, she'll be appointed to the Landmark
8 Preservation Commission. And subsequently designated
9 by the Mayor as Chair filling the vacancy, and
10 serving the remainder of a three-year term, which is
11 set to expire on June 28, 2016. Pursuant to the New
12 York City Charter, Section 3020, The New York City
13 Landmarks Preservation Commission, known as the LPC,
14 is responsible for establishing and regulating
15 Landmark, portions of landmark sites, interior
16 landmarks, scenic landmarks, and historic districts.
17 The LPC also regulates alterations to designated
18 buildings. The LPC consists of 11 members. We must
19 include at least three architects, one historian
20 qualified in the field, one city planner or landscape
21 architect, and one realtor, and it must include at
22 least one resident of each of the five boroughs. The
23 Mayor appoints the members of the LPC with our advice
24 and consent. When taking those requirements into
25 account, the Mayor may consult with the Fine Arts

2 Federation or other similar organizations in the
3 course of making the appointments. Members are
4 appointed for staggered three-year terms, and each
5 member serves as a commissioner until his or her
6 successor is appointed, and approved by the Council.
7 And as mentioned earlier, the Mayor also designates
8 one of the LPC members to serve as Chair, and another
9 member to serve as Vice Chair. The members serve
10 without compensation, but are reimbursed for
11 necessary expenses. The Chair, who also leads the
12 LPC staff, is a salaried position, and the current
13 salary is \$192,198. I won't go through the process
14 again by which Landmarks are reviewed, considered,
15 evaluated, designated and brought through the City
16 Planning Commission and the Council. We talked about
17 those at the hearing, and we had Chair Koo, who
18 chairs the Landmarks Subcommittee on Landmarks,
19 Public Siting, and Maritime Uses here as well. And
20 he expressed his enthusiastic support for Ms.
21 Srinivasan.

22 [Pause]

23 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: So, we went through
24 at that hearing all of the various issues around
25 designation, around regulation, and around the

2 Hardship Appeals Panel. Members have the opportunity
3 to ask a great many questions. We do have Ms.
4 Srinivasan here today. So we're not planning to
5 reopen the public hearing, but if there are members
6 who in the intervening amount of time had questions,
7 we can make available time to do that. So, I see
8 that Council Member Ignizio has a question. But
9 before that, does mean we need to not only welcome
10 Ms. Srinivasan, but swear her in. So, let me ask her
11 to first be sworn in and then we can continue this.
12 Oh, you don't have a question?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZO: No.

14 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Okay, great, so if
15 any -- if people don't have questions, we've got a
16 very thorough hearing, then we won't reopen the
17 public hearing and we don't need to swear Ms.
18 Srinivasan in. If people have statements they'd like
19 to make before we move to the vote, then I'll first
20 recognize Council Member Ignizio.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Thank you very
22 much, and I went through your extensive resume, and
23 welcome you upon your consent from this Council. I
24 just wanted to convey where I am in this process. I
25 am not what you'd call the biggest fan of the

2 landmarking process. I think sometimes the Landmark
3 Preservation Commission doesn't appreciate that there
4 are owners behind these buildings that put their life
5 savings into these buildings. And I just wanted to
6 convey and speak for them, if I can that, as I said,
7 there are people who have spent their lives investing
8 in their homes only to having a partner in government
9 that ultimately is sometimes a bad partner. I
10 believe what we should do in the city is to work on
11 some kind of process where through the Property Tax
12 Codes in this city that we encourage an owner to want
13 to be a part of landmarking.

14 But I don't think landmarking should be
15 thrust upon any owner. That's just my opinion. I
16 vote that way every time, and just to give you an
17 example. Two cases in my district: One where the
18 process was, for lack of a better word, bastardized
19 in that on Amberley Road in my district Mayor
20 Bloomberg came in. There was a gentleman who
21 unbelievably spray-painted his building red and green
22 and all these different colors to basically thumb his
23 nose at the community. In response, Mayor Bloomberg
24 came out and said that he would landmark this as a
25 punishment, if you will. And this was several years

2 ago. I think it was in 2005. I thought it was an
3 egregious end run landmarking process, and something
4 we should not have done.

5 But today, ladies and gentlemen, that
6 building remains vacant. There's a cycling fence
7 around it, and it's falling into disrepair. So it
8 was of no benefit to the community. It is an eyesore
9 now in the middle of the block, and ultimately, there
10 has been no benefit there. Likewise on Sinaian,
11 [sic] Avenue as well. So I just think and I want to
12 encourage you to remember there is more than one side
13 of the landmarking debate. Very often people are
14 come to you as the pretty committee and saying, This
15 house looks beautiful. So let's landmark. I had
16 that case with your predecessor where they wanted to
17 landmark a home Arthur Kill, which burned down, and
18 was rebuilt with new materials in the 1980s and they
19 wanted to landmark it.

20 I went to the Chair and said you are
21 wrong. The Commission is wrong. This is not a
22 landmark, an originally installed building. This is
23 a new one, which was made to look like the old one
24 with new materials. I just wanted to convey to my
25 colleagues that there's more than one side of the

2 landmarking debate, and I hope that this new
3 Landmarking Preservation Commission takes heed of
4 that. And when they are making these
5 recommendations, they acknowledge there are people
6 whose life's work is invested in the buildings that
7 you -- the City is coming in and saying that they are
8 now partnering. Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: All right. Thank
10 you, Council Member, and I will just reflect. I was
11 going to say a little something before, but I think
12 this is a helpful setup. You know, just speaking
13 personally, I thought at the hearing that we had that
14 Srinivasan gave a very thoughtful set of answers to a
15 good set of questions from a wide range of points of
16 view. I thought there's no doubt, and we saw this
17 when we did the Taxi and Limousine Commission as
18 well. It's certainly true in Landmarking that
19 people's passion for preserving the character of
20 what's great about New York and its neighborhoods,
21 and some of its old buildings and helping us make
22 that happen.

23 There were the needs and concerns of the
24 owners of those buildings, both before and after
25 designation, and their rights to be heard. And have

2 a process that they can count on and its fair, and to
3 balance that range of interests thoughtfully. That
4 is what we're looking for in an LPC Chair. I
5 appreciate your point of view on all of the members,
6 and I certainly felt like from the answers, the
7 materials, from her background, and from all the
8 answers that we got, that we, you know, if we approve
9 her -- and I urge members to do so. I certainly plan
10 to vote for her. Getting someone new who has not
11 just a real strong professional experience in all the
12 relevant technical matters, but has shown herself to
13 be fair, balanced, a good listener, and somebody who
14 arbitrates amongst constituencies. So I think it's a
15 valuable set of points. Council Member Greenfield
16 followed by Council Member Rose.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Thank you,
18 Mr. Chair, and I appreciate the time. I just wanted
19 to -- I just wanted to share my thoughts as well. As
20 many of you know, of course, as the Chair of the Land
21 Use Committee of the City Council that has oversight
22 over Landmarks, and has to ultimately approve
23 landmarks, I have been a somewhat vocal critic of the
24 landmarking process to date. Specifically, by the
25 over-landmarking of Manhattan where we're over 27%.

2 The concerns that I have, and I think, I know it was
3 said before, but I think our Minority Leader
4 expressed it certainly in an interesting way as the
5 ... I think he called it the Pre-House Commission.
6 Sometimes the logic as to why certain buildings and
7 landmarks is not obviously evident in terms of what
8 we would think as the objective criteria. I think
9 one of the issues that we've discussed is that folks
10 have used the landmark process as a back door to
11 achieve other goals typically to prevent folks from
12 developing in the communities, and keeping other
13 people they may not want out of their communities.

14 And finally, my concern as I've raised
15 with the calendaring process where we have 70 items
16 from the '90s and before including 20 from the 1960s
17 that have been calendared. I think it's important,
18 of course, to make the distinction that was, of
19 course, under the old leadership of the Landmarks
20 Preservation Commission. And we made that point
21 because Landmarks is a small agency that despite its
22 size has a disproportionate influence over the City
23 of New York especially as it relates to development
24 and other issues. And especially now as we look to
25

2 create and preserve 200,000 units of affordable
3 housing in New York City.

4 That being said, I did want to add that
5 I'm actually very proud to support Meenakshi's
6 nomination today. I believe that she's exceptionally
7 qualified for this position. I think that her work,
8 her prior work not just her experience at City
9 Planning, but also her many years as the Chair of the
10 Board of Standards and Appeals. Many of us that have
11 appeared before her have seen the way she's run that
12 agency. She does it in a diligent and fair and
13 professional manner. I will note just an interesting
14 point, because I don't think it's super confidential
15 from the confidential briefing that we have over
16 here.

17 Which is that I believe in the ten years
18 that she has been at the Board of Standards and
19 Appeals, and they have something like 36 public and
20 36 private meetings a year, she's never missed a
21 single meeting. Which I think is just an incredible
22 testament to her diligence and her professionalism
23 and her character. I think her experience is
24 perfectly aligned with the work of the Landmark
25 Preservation Commission. I've had the opportunity to

2 chat with her, and to meet with her and to speak
3 about many of these issues. And I feel that she is
4 committed, in fact, to bringing reform and leadership
5 to the Landmark Preservation Commission. And so I
6 enthusiastically support her nomination today. Thank
7 you, Mr. Chairman.

8 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Thank you, Council
9 Member Greenfield. Council Member Rose.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Thank you Chair and
11 good morning. I would just hope that a concern that
12 I've heard resoundingly in my district is from owners
13 who are ambivalent about landmarking, and the major
14 reason being of the cost to make repairs or to
15 preserve the exteriors of their buildings, and the
16 cost that's attributed to that. So, I would hope
17 that one of your priorities would be to look at the
18 funding sources that you have, and to aggressively
19 come back. And make it a budget item where -- that
20 you have a reasonable amount of money approved that
21 people could utilize and pull from to help with the
22 required -- the requirements of maintaining a
23 landmarked home. The cost is often prohibitive. You
24 do have some things in place, but I do think that the
25 amount of money that you have available to make

2 available to homeowners is not significant. It's not
3 nearly enough, and I would hope that one of your
4 priorities would be to see about enlarging that part.
5 So thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: And I'm pleased
7 we've been joined by the Speaker, who's a member of
8 this Committee as well. Any other -- are there other
9 members who have comments and statements they'd like
10 to make for the record before we vote? I will flag
11 that Council Member Williams, who is a member of this
12 committee and is on his way, just asked that I
13 mention on the record both his hopes that the Jackie
14 Robinson House and the South Midwood Sections of his
15 neighborhood be considered going forward for
16 designation and evaluation and designation. So I'm
17 putting that on the record as well. Hello to Ms.
18 Srinivasan. So thanks.

19 [Pause]

20 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: All right. So I
21 think we're ready to proceed. I'm sorry.

22 [Pause]

23 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Super. So I'll just
24 flag for the members, you know we had a -- and for
25 those who have just joined, we had an extensive

2 public hearing where we asked a lot of questions, got
3 a lot of answers. And the statements that were just
4 made were the statements of members prior to vote.

5 So we're not going to reopen the public hearing this
6 morning. Folks can look forward to that testimony or
7 still go watch it on the web. Wonderful. All right,
8 well thanks to the members for those statements.

9 Thanks to the Speaker for joining us, and with seeing
10 no further comments, we will now take the vote on the
11 Message pursuant to M67 regarding Ms. Meenakshi
12 Srinivasan's appoint to the Landmarks Preservation
13 Commission.

14 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: William Martin,
15 Committee Clerk. Committee on Rules, Privileges, and
16 Elections. Council Member Lander.

17 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Enthusiastically
18 Aye.

19 CLERK: Garodnick.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK:
21 Congratulations. Aye.

22 CLERK: Rodriguez.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Aye.

24 CLERK: Chin.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Aye.

2 CLERK: Rose.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Permission to
4 explain my vote.

5 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: Granted.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: I just want to say
7 that, you know, I'm really pleased with your breadth
8 of knowledge and your experience at BSA, and the fact
9 that you successfully streamlined some processes, and
10 made the system a little more user friend. I know
11 that we'll see those same qualities brought over to
12 Landmarks. I'm looking forward to working with you,
13 and I unequivocally vote aye to your appointment.
14 Thank you.

15 CLERK: Espinal.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ESPINAL: Aye.

17 CLERK: Levine.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Congratulations,
19 Ms. Srinivasan. I look forward to working with you,
20 and I vote aye.

21 CLERK: Ignizio.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: I want to add to
23 the comments of my colleague Debbie Rose. My hope is
24 that we can look at 74-711 [sic] and derelict
25 landmarks that are in disrepair because of the

2 inability for any economic incentive on behalf of the
3 owner. So I know your experience at BSA will help
4 you with that, and I'm happy to work with you the
5 best we can. And I vote aye.

6 CLERK: Speaker Mark-Viverito.

7 SPEAKER MARK-VIVERITO: I will be voting
8 aye. Congratulations, and I know that there is a lot
9 of work that we need to do with Landmarks
10 Preservation, and I really would hope... I know that
11 you've heard from my colleagues. It seems like we're
12 going to have a productive working relationship with
13 a lot of revisions. And looking at ways that things
14 can be done differently, I think is obviously in
15 order. But with that, I'll vote ayes.

16 CLERK: By a vote of nine in the
17 affirmative, zero in the negative, and no abstentions
18 the item is adopted. Members, please sign the
19 Committee Report. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON LANDER: That will be
21 referred to the Council for a vote at our full Stated
22 Meeting, and we'll hold the vote open for 15 members
23 for other members. Thank you very much.

24 CLERK: Council Member Williams.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Aye. First,
3 I'd like to make a statement. Many of these issues
4 I've spoken to with a candidate previously. And I
5 was happy to engage her on it. Two issues just
6 bringing them up on the chair. Two issues specific
7 to my district, the Jackie Robinson House, which I'm
8 hoping she'll really take heed. And to our second
9 request, I don't think the full story was taken to --
10 was given weight when the decision was made to deny.
11 And also Southmere[sp?] which was part of the
12 Victorian Flatbush quote. That should be landmarked
13 as taking way too many years. I hope she'll push
14 that forward, and just whereas the landmarking
15 process in general I think definitely needs to be
16 reworked, rehashed in terms of community input, in
17 terms of owner information when they're purchasing
18 it, and just the expediency, which they choose which
19 ones to landmark and which ones not to landmark, and
20 the timeframe to make those decisions.

21 And two competing interests. One, south
22 of Eastern Parkway in Brookwood, doesn't usually get
23 much respect in terms of things that need to get
24 landmarked. And then I say competing because there
25 are some communities I think they are overly

2 landmarked, and they're looking at it in terms of
3 issues that we brought to that community. And I hope
4 that she can deal with both of those competing issues
5 as well as I've been hearing problems with possible
6 building of affordable housing on landmark sites.
7 And I'd like to get more research on that. But with
8 that said, I vote aye. Thank you.

9 CLERK: The current vote in Rules is now
10 at ten in the affirmative.

11 [Pause]

12 CLERK: Council Member Dickens.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Aye.

14 CLERK: The final vote in the Committee
15 on Rules is now at 11 in the affirmative, zero in the
16 negative and no abstentions.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER: This hearing of the
18 Rules Committee of June 11th is hereby closed --
19 adjourned.

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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 June 13, 2014