

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND
MARITIME USES

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July 17, 2018
Start: 12:02 p.m.
Recess: 12:24 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: ADRIENNE E. ADAMS
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

INEZ D. BARRON
PETER A. KOO
I. DANEEK MILLER
MARK TREYGER
CHAIM M. DEUTSCH

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Lisa Kersavage
Director of Special Projects and Strategic
Planning at the Landmarks Preservation Commission
LPC

Barbara Zay
Manager of Preservation and Research at the
Historic Districts Council

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND
MARITIME USES

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[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Good afternoon and welcome to this meeting of the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses. I'm Council Member Adrienne Adams, the Chair of the Subcommittee. We're joined today by Council Members Barron and Treyger. Today we will... we will be hearing LU 154, the landmark preservation commission's designation of the Coney Island Riegelmann Boardwalk in Brooklyn as a scenic landmark. The designation consists of the Boardwalk extending from West 37th Street in Coney Island to Brighton 15th Street in Brighton Beach including the beach front Boardwalk, it's structure and walkway, comfort stations, railings, benches and lighting fixtures, steps and ramps to the beach, Steeplechase Pier and the beach beneath the Boardwalk extending from the North landside edge of the Boardwalk southerly approximately 100 feet into the beach or oceanside. The Coney Island Boardwalk is in Council Member Treyger's district. Representatives of the Landmarks Preservation Commission will testify on this item followed by testimony by the public. I now open the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

1 MARITIME USES 4

2 public hearings on LU 154 and call on Lisa Kersavage
3 from LPC. Counsel please swear in the panel.

4 COMMITTEE CLERK: Do you affirm to tell
5 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
6 in your testimony before this Subcommittee in
7 response to all Council Member questions?

8 LISA KERSAVAGE: I do.

9 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: You may begin.

10 LISA KERSAVAGE: Okay, great. Good
11 afternoon Chair Adams and Subcommittee members. I am
12 Lisa Kersavage, Director of Special Projects and
13 Strategic Planning at the Landmarks Preservation
14 Commission and I'm here to present the recent
15 designation of the Coney Island Riegelmann Boardwalk
16 by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Coney
17 Island's Boardwalk is one of the best-known
18 waterfront promenades in the world. The 2.7-mile
19 boardwalk has given people of all economic and social
20 backgrounds free access to the beach and seaside
21 since 1923. It is a significant destination onto
22 itself and the embodiment of Coney Island's
23 democratic spirit. The landmark site incorporates the
24 entire length of the 2.7-mile boardwalk including
25 Steeplechase Pier... [coughs] excuse me... boardwalk

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2 comfort stations, ramps and stairs to the beach,
3 railings, benches and light fixtures. It also
4 includes the sand beneath the boardwalk resulting in
5 approximately a 100-foot-wide corridor along the
6 length of the boardwalk. On May 15th, 2018 the LPC
7 voted to designate Coney Island to Riegelmann
8 Boardwalk as a scenic landmark following a public
9 hearing held on April 17th, 2018. At the public
10 hearing and in written testimony 12 people supported
11 the designation including City Council Member Mark
12 Treyger, Council Member Deutsch, New York State
13 Assembly Member Steven Cymbrowitz, New York
14 Department of Parks and Recreation Commissioner
15 Mitchell Silver, Alliance for Coney Island, Coney
16 Brighton Boardwalk Alliance, Historic Districts
17 Council, Landmarks Conservancy and the Society for
18 the Architecture of the City. There were no speakers
19 opposed to the designation. There are only ten scenic
20 landmarks in New York City, three of which are in
21 Brooklyn; Prospect Park, Eastern Parkway and Ocean
22 Parkway. These all were designed by Frederick Law
23 Olmsted or in some cases with Calvert Vaux and built
24 between 1866 and 1875. Ocean Parkway, the first road
25 of it's kind in the United States was intended to

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 extend from the Southern entrance of Prospect Park to
3 the sea. The proposed designation of the Coney Island
4 Boardwalk... or excuse me, the designation of the Coney
5 Island Boardwalk would culminate this procession of
6 19th century scenic landmarks extending from Prospect
7 Park to the Atlantic Ocean and add a decidedly 20th
8 century culturally significant scenic landmark to
9 this important collection and LPC would regulate this
10 scenic landmark just as it does the other ten. Coney,
11 Coney Island has been a summer time destination for
12 nearly two centuries named by the Dutch settlers for
13 the rabbits and... that reportedly flourished among the
14 dunes, the first hotels opened in the 1820's. By the
15 start of the 20th century there were numerous hotels,
16 bath houses and saloons as well as a popular
17 amusement district that included Dream Land, Luna
18 Park and Steeplechase Park. Prior to construction of
19 the boardwalk most of Brooklyn's waterfront was
20 privately owned, not only did businesses charge
21 admission fees to use the beach but in many places
22 the sand had begun to wash away leaving only a, a
23 sliver of shoreline. Coney Island's Boardwalk is
24 named for Brooklyn Borough President Edward J.
25 Riegelmann who played a major role in it's creation

1 and is seen at left driving the first stake. Part of
2 an ambitious plan to rejuvenate Coney Island and the
3 ocean beach, the approximately 80-foot-wide boardwalk
4 was designed by engineer Philip P. Farley. Farley
5 described the boardwalk as an elevated highway, it
6 consisted of a plank deck supported by reinforced
7 concrete piles and girders. Construction of the
8 boardwalk began in 1922 in conjunction with a major
9 expansion of the beach. Similar to other scenic
10 landmarks like Central Park, Coney Island Beach was
11 designed and engineered to create a semblance of a
12 natural landscape for the public to enjoy. In these
13 photos from that year you can see the jetties before
14 the sand was filled in and people enjoying the sand
15 as the boardwalk is being built. The first section
16 between Ocean Parkway and West 37th Street formally
17 opened on May 15th, 1923. Two years later the
18 boardwalk was extended 4,000 feet East to Coney
19 Island Avenue. The new beach and boardwalk for the
20 first time in New York City allow people of all
21 economic and social backgrounds full, free public
22 access to the beach. The boardwalk became a
23 thoroughfare connecting the amusements, concessions
24 and the beach and as Coney Island's new Main Street
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was a popular attraction onto itself. Control of the boardwalk was transferred to New York City Parks Department in 1938. Under Commission Robert Moses a 3,800-foot section between Ocean Parkway and Stillwell Avenue was straightened and moved almost 300 feet inland. The reconstruction of the boardwalk began in January 1940 and was completed five months later in May 1940. As part of the project the beach was also expanded and replenished, the following year, 1941, the boardwalk as... was extended an additional 1,500 feet East to Brighton 15th Street establishing its current length of 2.7 miles. These incredible 1940 photographs from the Parks Department archive illustrate what has been described in a 1923 guide book as the most densely crowded and most democratic of New York City's seaside playgrounds. Evident in these photographs and as remains the case today, the boardwalk is unrivaled among New York City's waterfront attractions for its size and its popularity and one of the city's most iconic public spaces. The boardwalk is featured prominently in popular culture throughout the history from paintings to films as you can see in these photos in addition to annual events such as the Mermaid Parade and

1 smaller cultural events that take place on the
2 boardwalk throughout the summer. The boardwalk
3 connects physically and historically to several other
4 individual landmarks in Coney Island including the
5 Wonder Wheel, the Cyclone, the Parachute Jump and
6 Childs Restaurant. Since the 1920's changes have been
7 made to the boardwalk and beach largely in response
8 to the coastal environment at the edge of the
9 Atlantic Ocean. The scenic landmark designation seeks
10 to recognize that the boardwalk must continue to meet
11 city, state and federal goals and requirements for
12 resiliency and safety within a coastal flood zone.
13 Changes since the original construction are part of
14 the boardwalks history as a publicly accessible
15 seaside structure and did not diminish its cultural
16 significance. As you can see in this slide the level
17 of the beach has been raised substantially from its
18 original elevation and along the length of the
19 boardwalk its relationship to the beach has changed
20 since the original construction. The walkway's
21 planking and paving have been replaced many times in
22 this seaside location and no historic fabric remains.
23 In addition, light fixtures, seating and comfort
24 stations have changed over time. The Coney Island
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 Riegelmann Boardwalk was, was designated as a scenic
3 landmark in recognition of it's cultural and social
4 significance. The boardwalk has given all New Yorkers
5 and visitors free access to the beach and seaside for
6 almost a century and it is one of the best-known
7 boardwalks in the world, it remains an iconic place,
8 a significant feature of the beach front landscape
9 and the embodiment of Coney Island's egalitarian
10 spirit. Given the significance of the Coney Island
11 Boardwalk we recommend that the city council uphold
12 this designation. And I want to quickly conclude by
13 saying that this designation would not have been
14 possible without the administration including Mayor
15 De Blasio and Commissioner Silver and I'd
16 particularly like to thank Council Members Treyger
17 and Council Members Deutsch and the Coney Island
18 community for the overwhelming support throughout
19 this designation process. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you very much.
21 We've been joined by Council Members Deutsch and
22 Miller. The Chair will now recognize Council Member
23 Treyger to offer his remarks.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you so
25 much Chair Adams. I just say waited, waited a long

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2 time for this day to happen. I want to certainly
3 extend my thanks to LPC, I, I do want to thank the
4 Mayor for honoring his commitment to making sure this
5 happens one day, that day is... that... has, has arrived.
6 I want to thank my colleague, Councilman Deutsch
7 who's been with me on this effort from day one and
8 his office and I truly appreciate that. I want to
9 thank the thousands of residents who signed
10 petitions, who organized to make sure that this
11 treasure receives its rightful status as a... as a city
12 landmark. I want to thank all the supporters from all
13 over the country and the world who were shocked to
14 learn that this was not already a, a New York City
15 landmark. This, this means a lot to our community
16 for, for a number of reasons. During the last
17 administration there were proposed significant
18 changes to the boardwalk and the public felt very
19 strongly about the material and I'll be clear that
20 this designation does not fully resolve the material
21 issue as far as wood versus concrete, but it does do
22 some significant things. Number one, it is now a
23 landmark which means that any future significant
24 changes to the boardwalk will have to go through
25 added public scrutiny and the public will have more

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 say than it did before. So, there's added protections
3 to the boardwalk. Number two, which I think is also
4 very important, it's now an accountability tool for
5 the New York City Parks Department because just like
6 we expect the city to maintain Central Park, Park and
7 Prospect Park, it now needs to do a better job of
8 maintaining the Coney Island Boardwalk which still
9 needs help with maintenance, I'm sure my colleague
10 Chaim (?) Deutsch will... would agree. And it's now
11 noted in our history as a... as a... as a landmark as it
12 should be because this was a structure that was
13 created at a significant turning point in the 20th
14 century. Just to remind my colleagues, this area was
15 not always accessible to the public. before the
16 boardwalk's construction, before the turn of the 20th
17 century this was... this property was privately owned,
18 and this area was segregated where people of color
19 could not use certain restrooms, Jews could not stay
20 at certain hotels. So, when the, the city purchased
21 this land and the city invested to help construct the
22 boardwalk it was a turning point for the City of New
23 York, for this neighborhood it is a symbol of
24 integration, a symbol that regardless of where you're
25 from, the color of your skin, how much money you

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2 have, the faith you believe in, you're welcome here
3 in Coney Island and Brighton Beach, you're welcome to
4 enjoy this beautiful public treasure. And I'm also
5 proud to report that to my colleagues, this effort
6 was done without the work of a lobbyist, there was no
7 conservancy, we don't have the ability to raise
8 millions of dollars like certain neighborhoods in the
9 city to preserve our history, we did this the old-
10 fashioned way, the grassroots way, knocked on doors,
11 signed petitions, got people involved in the process.
12 So, I'm very... and, and that's very symbolic of what
13 this... what this structure stands for and so I just
14 want to thank also the City Council, all of my
15 colleagues. We received unanimous support from the
16 City Council. So, I want to thank all of my
17 colleagues on this Council, I want to thank this
18 committee, I want to thank the Speaker, I want to
19 thank the former Speaker as well who was very
20 supportive and so this is a very proud day for the
21 Coney Island Brighton Beach community and I
22 respectfully ask my colleagues to support this
23 designation. Thank you so much Chair for your time.

24 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you very much
25 Council Member Treyger. I also grew up anticipating

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 going to Coney Island on many weekends, a little girl
3 from Queens and was always totally excited by the
4 notion to get to Coney Island, you couldn't pull me
5 away from certain parts of Coney Island. Nathan's has
6 always been a particular favorite of ours as the fun
7 house and we could just go on and on and on. I'm
8 really excited about this designation and I do
9 congratulate you and Council Member Deutsch on
10 bringing this to us. It's, it's overdue in my
11 estimation and we truly do celebrate this
12 designation. Thank you very much. Are there any
13 questions for the panel at this time? Okay, I see
14 that we have Miss Barbara Zay, would you like to step
15 up and testify? Thank you.

16 BARBARA ZAY: Thank you. Oh, yes there
17 you go, thank you. Good afternoon Council Members. My
18 name is Barbara Zay, I'm representing the Historic
19 Districts Council. The Coney Island Boardwalk is
20 arguably the most famous boardwalk on earth and an
21 obvious landmark. The Historic Districts Council
22 strongly supports its designation as a New York City
23 scenic landmark since by any measure an accounting of
24 New York City landmarks which does not include the
25 boardwalk would be entirely incomplete. We applaud

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 its designation and thank Council Member Mark Treyger
3 for being such a strong champion for this long-sought
4 honor. We can all learn a lot from the City Council's
5 leadership on this issue and are heartened by the
6 Council's support for this action which caused the
7 LPC to reconsider its position on this property. We
8 deeply hope that properties such as the Walt Whitman
9 House on Ryerson Street in Brooklyn, the poet's last,
10 last remaining New York City residence which a number
11 of Council Members have supported for landmark status
12 will also be reconsidered by the LPC. HDC does have
13 concerns about protective power of the scenic
14 landmark designation as it applies to the Riegelmann
15 Boardwalk. As we understand it current administrative
16 interpretations of the landmarks commission policing
17 power abrogate almost all authority the agency might
18 exercise over the property. All future changes to the
19 actual boardwalk and style, material or even form
20 will be reviewed in an advisory capacity without
21 public testimony to help guide the Commissioner's
22 advice. The public will have the opportunity to weigh
23 in about existing buildings that fall within the
24 bounds of the scenic landmark but that was the case
25 previously when the public design commission had sole

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2 design review over the property. Issues of the
3 historic context of this public property, the very
4 boards of the boardwalk still fall under the binding
5 authority of the public design commission and are
6 ultimately controlled by the Parks Department, the
7 very agency which replaced them with concrete in the
8 first place. We urge the City Council to use every
9 tool in it's considerable arsenal to ensure the
10 boardwalk is returned to a more appropriate material.
11 Please make the Coney Island Boardwalk wood again,
12 thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you for your
14 testimony. Are there any more members of the public
15 who wish to testify at this time? Seeing none I now
16 close the public hearing on this item. I will now
17 call for a vote in accordance with the
18 recommendations of the local Council Member to
19 approve LU 154, the designation of the Coney Island
20 Boardwalk as a scenic landmark. Council please call
21 the roll.

22 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Adams?

23 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: I vote aye.

24 COMMITTEE CLERK: Barron?

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

1 MARITIME USES 17

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Permission to
3 explain my vote?

4 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Granted.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you. I just
6 wanted to call attention to the fact that we need to
7 make sure that as the history is presented in the
8 written form that the Landmarks Commission include
9 all of the aspects of the history of any areas or
10 buildings and properties that we are considering. I
11 want to thank Council Member Treyger for highlighting
12 the fact that yes, there was a period of time during
13 which this area was racially and religiously
14 segregated and not allowed people to participate, I
15 think it's important that we include it in the
16 written history and I want to thank my colleague for
17 making mention of that in his comments and I vote
18 aye.

19 COMMITTEE CLERK: Miller?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Permission to
21 explain my vote please?

22 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Granted.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Thank you so
24 much. And my colleague Barron certainly articulated
25 what were also my concerns and as usual the Council

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 Member from Coney Island does his homework and, and
3 the historical reference is so important but it also
4 demonstrates the very, very important work of this
5 committee and how we must preserve the integrity of
6 communities and that is the value of this city in
7 itself and like our Chair and my esteemed colleague
8 alumni from Horizon Halls and, and I think that we
9 spent countless, countless hours in, in Coney Island,
10 in fact my best friend and next door neighbor his
11 father owned a luncheonette over on Surf and we... I, I
12 think we only worked for money to ride the cyclone
13 and I, I think I hold the record for riding the
14 cyclone but with, with that being said this is such
15 an important part of the fabric of New York City and
16 I am very proud of the work that is being done that
17 we maintain the fabric and the integrity of
18 neighborhoods as we see these transitions happen
19 throughout the city and so I... with that I proudly
20 vote aye.

21 COMMITTEE CLERK: Treyger?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: I wanted
23 permission just to briefly explain my vote. I, I want
24 to thank my colleagues for, for their unwavering
25 support, for their understanding of, of what this

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

MARITIME USES

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2 means to our community and just to echo the remarks
3 of, of folks I certainly would want this to remain a,
4 a wooden boardwalk, that's... it was built that way, it
5 was not built to be a sidewalk and that... and that
6 fight will continue but I do believe that it deserves
7 it's rightful place to be known as a New York City
8 landmark. We didn't have many landmarks in this part
9 of town and when you see the other landmarks in the
10 city, city of New York it's very interesting where
11 they're located and where this was not a part of that
12 fabric. I'm proud to say that now we are on the
13 levels of Central Park and Prospect Park, I'm very
14 proud of that because we have a lot of rich history
15 here too and we have more work to do but this is a
16 good day and I proudly vote yes, thank you.

17 COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of four in
18 the affirmative, zero in the negative, with zero
19 abstentions the item is recommended for approval to
20 the full Land Use Committee.

21 CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you Council. I
22 will now call on Council Member Deutsch.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you Chair.
24 So, I can't vote, I'm not on this committee so... but I
25 just want to congratulate my colleague, Council

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND

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MARITIME USES

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Member Mark Treyger and this has been like a good couple of years since this came up and we've been fighting to landmark this.. the boardwalk so I want to thank Mayor De Blasio and the Landmark Commission and I just want to finish off by saying that Borough President Riegelmann is definitely smiling down to us right now knowing that the boardwalk is being landmarked so thank you all.

CHAIRPERSON ADAMS: Thank you Council

Member and at this time I do thank the members of the public, my colleagues, Council and Land Use staff for attending today's hearing, 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

July 30, 2018