

**TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY
COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES
ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE
CROWN HEIGHTS NORTH HISTORIC DISTRICT, BROOKLYN
July 23, 2007**

Good morning Councilmembers. My name is Diane Jackier, Director of External Affairs for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Crown Heights North Historic District in Brooklyn.

On September 19, 2006, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation. Twenty-eight people spoke in favor, including Council Member Al Vann, Council Member Letitia James, Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, a representative of the Crown Heights Neighborhood Association, Brooklyn Community Boards 3 and 8, the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, the Society for the Architecture of the City, the Historic Districts Council, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, and the Municipal Art Society. Four people spoke in opposition. The Commission also received several letters and e-mails in support of designation. On April 24, 2007, the Commission voted to designate Crown Heights North a New York City historic district.

Comprising more than 470 buildings, the Crown Heights North Historic District includes single- and two-family row houses, freestanding residences, apartment houses, churches, and institutional buildings in a variety of styles, constructed, for the most part, from the 1870s to the 1920s. Although the Crown Heights name did not come into use until the early twentieth century, the district is located within what is, today, Crown Heights' northwestern portion, an area of Brooklyn roughly bounded by Atlantic Avenue and Eastern Parkway on the north and south, and by Bedford and Albany Avenues on the west and east.

Crown Heights North is located just southeast of the important crossroads of what was once known as Bedford Corners, where the village of Bedford's population – including the Lefferts family, a slaveholding family that was one of the areas' major landowners – was centered. In 1854, the heirs of "Judge" Leffert Lefferts Jr. auctioned off most of the property that would become Crown Heights North. The area remained fairly rural until the 1850s when new transportation links were built, including rail and ferry lines and, in 1883, the Brooklyn Bridge. Between 1888 and 1893, hundreds of exceptionally fine freestanding and attached row houses were constructed in the area, and many of them remain remarkably intact today. Among these are the wood-framed Greek Revival/Italianate George B. and Susan Elkins House at 1375 Dean Street and the c. 1870 High Victorian Gothic Dean Sage house at the northeast corner of St. Mark's and Brooklyn Avenues. In addition, rows of speculative houses were built along Dean Street in a variety of architectural styles that were popular in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth

century, including the Italianate, neo-Grec, Queen Anne, as well as the Romanesque, Renaissance, Colonial, Mediterranean, Medieval, and Tudor Revival styles. Around the turn of the century, as the area was becoming one of Brooklyn's most desirable residential neighborhoods, four-story flats buildings were built, joining the Bedfordshire and Imperial Apartments near Grant Square, which were designed by Montrose Morris, one of the finest architects active in Brooklyn during the late nineteenth century. The opening of the IRT subway line along Eastern Parkway in 1920 kicked off a final wave of residential development in Crown Heights North, as many free-standing mansions were demolished and replaced by six-story elevator apartment houses, such as the Tudor Revival style St. Mark's Garden Apartments designed by William Hohauser (completed in 1924), and the Art Deco apartment house at 907-933 Prospect Place designed by Matthew Del Gaudio (completed in 1936).

Because little architectural development has occurred in the area since the 1930s, this neighborhood retains some of Brooklyn's finest and most exquisitely detailed buildings that showcase the work of architects who played an important role in Brooklyn's development, including Montrose Morris, George P. Chappell, Albert E. White, Amzi Hill and Axel Hedman. Over the past fifty years, the area has become home to a substantial Caribbean- and African-American community.

Today, over a century after the major architectural development of Crown Heights North began, much of the area's historic character remains unchanged, and buildings of unusual distinctiveness create a unique sense of place, reflecting the innovative quality and beauty of Brooklyn's late nineteenth and early twentieth century architecture.

The Commission urges you to affirm the designation.

ALBERT VANN
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July 19, 2007

To: Councilmember Jessica Lappin, Chairperson Sub-Committees on Landmarks, Public Siting & Maritime Uses, and Members of Subcommittees

From: Councilmember Albert Vann

Crown Heights North Phase 1 Historic District is a first step in preserving the unique architectural jewels of this very special area. Crown Heights North deserves to be designated in its entirety- this phase one and the remaining three phases. The first phase is the right step in the right direction- highlighting the integral beauty of Crown Heights North and its distinct sense of place.

Preserving these jewels as links to our past, as well as attractions to tourists and an anchor for small businesses is economically invigorating for the community, the borough and the City as a whole. Designating this segment of Crown Heights North will quickly stabilize the community and prevent out-of-context development. I refer to the kind of development that commonly serves to displace the long-time residents by replacing lovely brownstones on tree-lined streets with high-rise, glass-clad, high rent condos.

Today's hearing is the community's opportunity to keep a piece of our glorious history. I am in full support of the landmark designation, and I congratulate all parties involved for their diligence, sensitivity and expertise.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Albert Vann".
Albert Vann

7.23.07 Council Affirmation Hearing on Crown Heights North Historic District Phase One

Good morning Councilmembers, friends & neighbors,

I am Ethel Tyus, an incorporator and board member and General Counsel for Crown Heights North Association. I am here this morning to support the Council's designation of Crown Heights North Phase One as a Historic District.

In Brooklyn, historic preservation is a balancing act between the need for low and moderate income housing and the need to preserve the architectural jewels erected in a bygone era. Current residents enjoy a sense of place unique to Crown Heights North with its extraordinary neo-Grec, Romanesque, and Queen Anne style row houses. As a neighbor to the area to be designated today, I can attest to the quality of the workmanship used in constructing these buildings which deserve preservation.

The benefits of designation have been documented by the City's Independent Budget Office which concluded that property values in Historic Districts generally increased more rapidly and hold more stable than property not so designated. The owners in Phase One have come to recognize that.

Crown Heights North Association is sensitive to the needs of the community's residents for affordable housing and is working with governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private philanthropists to create and maintain such housing for current and new owners and tenants within the context of historic preservation. Without landmarking, the architectural composition of the buildings in the area will bow to the pressures of high-rent for-profit development and that development will NOT result in affordable housing.

We have previously provided the Landmarks Preservation Commission with five photos showing current out-of-character development occurring in the area. Thank you for your time.