TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE DUMBO HISTORIC DISTRICT, BROOKLYN
April 1, 2008

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 DUMBO Historic District in Brooklyn.

On October 30, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation. Thirty-five people spoke in favor, including Councilmember David Yassky, Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, and representatives of State Senator Martin Connor, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, Two Trees Management Company, the DUMBO BID, Brooklyn Community Board 2, the DUMBO Neighborhood Association, the Fulton Ferry Landing Association, the Brooklyn Heights Association, the Vinegar Hill Neighborhood Association, the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, the Municipal Arts Society, the Historic Districts Council, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, and several area residents. Several people testified in support of designation while asking that the city support improvements to the area's infrastructure. One owner representative spoke in favor of designation, but requested modifications to the building descriptions. Another owner representative spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission also received many letters, postcards and emails in support, including those from State Assemblymember Joan Millman, District Leader Jo Anne Simon, City Councilmember Tony Avella, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Women's City Club. On December 18, 2007, the Commission voted to designate DUMBO a New York City historic district.

Consisting of 91 buildings, the DUMBO Historic District contains one of the finest collections of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century industrial architecture in New York City. These buildings illustrate the history of industrial design beginning with pre-Civil War brick counting houses, extending through the second half of the nineteenth century and first years of the twentieth century, when most factories were built with massive wooden columns and beams, and brick facades, into the early twentieth century, when new technologies, including the use of steel and, most prominently, reinforced concrete, became popular for factory construction. Although the fact is sometimes forgotten today, Brooklyn was the fourth largest manufacturing center in the country by 1880, and much of this industry was located along the East River waterfront, where transportation of raw materials and finished goods was especially convenient.

Prominent manufacturing businesses located in DUMBO included the Arbuckle Brothers, refiner and packager of sugar and coffee, and, under the Charles William Stores name, purveyor of a vast array of dry goods; Robert Gair, manufacturer of paper boxes; the Hanan & Son Shoe Company; the Kirkman & Son soap company; the John W. Masury & Son paint works; the Jones Brothers/Grand Union grocery business; the E. W. Bliss machine works; and the Brillo steel wool firm. These firms employed thousands of local workers, many of them immigrants who flooded into Brooklyn's working-class neighborhoods in the second half of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century.

The district consists of a series of distinctive industrial streetscapes heightened by the presence of streets and several sidewalks paved in granite Belgian blocks. In addition, there is a network of train tracks laid out in the early twentieth century by the Jay Street Connecting Railroad that runs along the streets and, in some cases, extends into individual buildings. Although little industry is still active in the district, as many buildings have been converted for residential or office use, the buildings remain remarkably intact. These structures testify to the quality of industrial design in New York and to the importance of Brooklyn as a major American manufacturing center.

The Commission urges you to affirm the designation.

DNA
DUMBO NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

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Christine C. Quinn, Speaker
Jessica S Lappin, Chair
City Council, City Hall
New York, New York
Tuesday, April 01, 2008

It is a pleasure for me to be at this City Council hearing for the proposed DUMBO Historic District. My name is Doreen Gallo. I am an artist and pioneer live/work resident of the DUMBO community, a founding member of the DUMBO Neighborhood Association, Vice President and Chair of DNA's Historic Preservation Committee.

It's now or never. The time to landmark DUMBO is now. For the economic, architectural, historic and aesthetic merits that landmarking bestows upon the city at large, there is no other option. Though there may be a few naysayers- property owners who don't want change-who want to retain the status quo Wild West mentality that has destroyed so much of DUMBO already, the wisdom of the public-at-large has spoken. Please preserve the unique sense of place found only in this formerly industrial waterfront locale.

In recognition of DUMBO's historical significance, the DUMBO Industrial District was placed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in September 2000. Only New York City Landmark designation will ensure that DUMBO's historic buildings are not torn down as development accelerates on the Brooklyn Waterfront. Since the time of our National Register listing we have lost buildings of historic importance on Bridge Street, Water Street, Front Street, York Street, Plymouth Street, John Street and Adams Street. The National Trust has placed the DUMBO Industrial District as part of the Industrial Brooklyn Waterfront on their 2007 list of the 11 most endangered sites in America.

To the naysayers who complain that landmarking will issue economic hardship: look at DUMBO's sister neighborhoods across the river. How much is residential and commercial property worth in Tribeca and Soho? To the naysayers who seek short term gain: would you prefer junk bonds or blue chip? To the naysayers who don't want change: landmarking is your future.

It is a change for the better, proven over and over again throughout the five boroughs of this great metropolis. There is no accident that the primary destination neighborhoods of New York City are either historic districts or ethnic enclaves. When DUMBO is honored with historic district designation, the film and tourist industries will breathe a huge sigh of relief, as will the families that have invested livelihoods into settling here, as will the remaining artists who first discovered the raw beauty of this gritty gem they coined DUMBO in honor of the majestic and hard-working bridge that towers above.

What was DUMBO's Penn Station? Was it our first developer in DUMBO, the Jehovah Witnesses, blew up blocks of buildings, privatized public streets and led the way for piecemeal development? Was it the Department Of Transportation occupation of Down Under the Manhattan Anchorage or when they paved over the pristine Belgian block piazza at the Manhattan Anchorage in 1985? Was it when Time Warner Cable dissected the length of the perfectly Belgian blocked Water Street in 1987? Was it when the second largest undeveloped block in New York was created in 1991, by razing everything in one fell swoop, including PS 7, which had recently been listed on the National Register and was known for its most infamous student, Al Capone? Now up-zoned.... Was it when the new owner of the historic Borax soap building painted the historically patina brick building a garish palette of powder blue, taxicab yellow, and lavender? Was it the 100 Jay Street up-zoning that gave us two architecturally non-contextual tall towers that have dwarfed the Manhattan Anchorage, and robbed the public of that amazing view coming off the BQE of our Manhattan Bridge and public waterfront? (Needless to say we welcome our new neighbors). Was it last year's loss of the iconic Brillo building? (205 Water Street). Was it this summer, continual stop work orders issued where developers were ripping up the Belgian block and bluestone side walks, either without permits or with DOT permits for "fixing" their sidewalks? The list goes on and on, unfortunately, and is still going on.

The regularity with which DUMBO is celebrated in film, fashion, and music video shoots is testament to its value as a place to be preserved and restored. But one doesn't need this powerful economic evidence to be convinced. Just take a look. Hopefully, DUMBO will be there tomorrow.

DNA heartily thanks our Councilmember David Yassky, U.S. Representative Nydia Velazquez, Professor Andrew Dolkart, our dear friend Otis Pearsall, Vicki Weiner, Simeon Bankoff and the Historic Districts Council, Lisa Kersavage and Municipal Art Society, Kathy Howe and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, the Preservation League of New York State, our Community Board 2, Urban Planner Paul Graziano, for providing us with a comprehensive zoning plan for the Old Brooklyn District and the preservation community at large. Thank you to the Landmark Preservation Commission for recognizing DUMBO as the 90th Historic District. Please preserve DUMBO. I urge you to designate the DUMBO Historic District today.

HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

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Statement of the Historic Districts Council
Regarding the Designation of the proposed DUMBO Historic District
April 1, 2008

The Historic Districts Council is the citywide advocate for New York's historic neighborhoods. HDC is especially pleased to have this opportunity to support the designation of DUMBO as a New York City historic district, as we have been working closely with this community to preserve its architectural character since 1997. In 1999, HDC procured the grant from the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts which sponsored the successful nomination of the area to the National Register of Historic Places the following year.

DUMBO was and is one of the most visually distinct neighborhoods in New York City. The combination of the massive warehouses, Belgian block streets and breath-taking harbor views combined with the looming presence of the Manhattan Bridge creates a visual atmosphere that is so rich that it transcends into the mythic. This is why the film industry and the fashion industry seem to have permanent encampments in the neighborhood.

Although successful, that designation failed to protect the historic and architectural character of the area. We had hoped that since the majority of the buildings were commercial, more owners would take advantage of the tax benefits available for rehabilitative work and preservation of the neighborhood would be stimulated. This unfortunately did not happen and we have watched with dismay over the past seven years as this remarkable neighborhood's historic structures have been mutilated and demolished. Development pressure is so fierce in this neighborhood that, at the LPC deliberation on this district, we hesitated to point out specific buildings that lay outside the then-proposed for possible landmarks consideration. Frankly, we weren't entirely positive that they were still there – it had gotten that bad. HDC was disappointed that certain vacant lots on the boundary were not included in the designation; odds are they won't be vacant for long and we feel that the inevitable development would benefit from Landmarks oversight, as the existing buildings within the district do. The concern over including vacant sites within historic districts is a perennial one, and perhaps philosophical in nature. Regardless, it is an important pint and one meriting notice and discussion.

All that being said, HDC reiterates its strong support for the designation of the DUMBO historic district and urges the Council to affirm this worthy landmark designation.

To the City Council:

My name is Karen Johnson and I have lived in Dumbo for seven years. I am the current president of the Dumbo Neighborhood Association – and I am the owner of the Jay Street Bar.

In both roles, I hear many reasons why people who live, work and own in our community want landmark protection. They all add up to one thing: to protect our quality of life.

Landmark protection can help prevent the kind of out of scale construction that would shadow our light, obscure our views, render parks and the waterfront inaccessible, and eradicate our history.

It will moderate the rush to build luxury residences, and the consequent loss of existing affordable space needed by this neighborhood's artists and craftspeople.

It will nurture adaptive reuse and preserve our architectural heritage for now and for future generations.

It will ensure respectful deference to the Brooklyn Bridge.

It will preserve the unique qualities that bring visitors; cultural events, artists and filmmakers back again and again. Dumbo will continue to be a destination for all, bringing life to our streets and business to our local merchants.

Landmark Designation will preserve what made us move here and keep this distinct place from morphing into "everywhere else."

As for me, my Jay Street business is in the part of Dumbo east of the Manhattan Bridge: 10 blocks of remaining and largely unspoiled 19th Century industrial structures.

We were helpless three years ago when two hugely inappropriate residential towers were built and without landmark protection there was nothing we could do to stop it. If we continue without designation this precedent will be followed and our neighborhood will vanish.

We hope this will not happen. Dumbo is a unique place well worth saving. We urge the Council to approve designation. For this you will earn our gratitude and that of generations to come.

Thank you,
Karen Johnson April 1 2008

Testimony of Milton Herder , April 1, 2008
to the New York City Council Committee on Landmarks, Public Siting & Maritime Uses Jessica S. Lappin, Chair, in support of Landmark protection for DUMBO

In spite of academic studies that show that communities prosper and properties values increase in landmarked neighborhhoods, some people still believe that historic landmark protection and "development" are mutually exclusive. There is overwhelming evidence to the contrary right there on the cobble-stone streets of DUMBO. For proof, I point to the ten-block enclave east of the Manhattan Bridge—an area scarred by recent demolitions, but still possessing a largely unspoiled collection of brick-and-timber 19th-century workshop and factory buildings.

This area is currently undergoing a vigorous commercial renaissance.

Five months ago a vote by the LPC gave DUMBO temporary, de facto protection. During this transitional period, builders had to get LPC review and approval of any proposed façade changes. In that short time, nine new ventures have opened: three art, photography and cultural bookstores and galleries, a high-end purveyor of Japanese collectibles and art, a furniture and home décor store, two pet-care and grooming services, a cookware store and a hand-craft service that personalizes "hoodie" pullovers. In addition, a bicycle repair and sales store has relocated there, and other ground floor locations appear to be in transition. This week an application to convert a three-story building into jewel of a music theatre, and add two residential stories, was approved. By any measure, the area is booming. Obviously, development and historic preservation can co-exist. More than that: it seems likely that these ventures were attracted to the area <u>because</u> of its distinctive character.

It might be countered that many of these businesses have opened in buildings operated by Two Trees, a developer long distinguished by its respectful renovation and good taste, even in the decade when DUMBO was not legally protected; thus implying that landmarks will be preserved even without designation. Perhaps so; if all developers were like the Walentas family, we might not need regulation. And if all drivers were careful we wouldn't need traffic laws and speed limits. Unfortunately there are reckless drivers and reckless developers; and we do need protection.

Thank you.