

DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL SPRING 2006 VOL. XX NO. 1

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LOST: A SENSE OF VALUES

The following letter was sent to The New York Times in response to news that the Landmarks Preservation Commission had approved demolition of the Purchase Building in Brooklyn because it interfered with sightlines in a planned waterfront park there. The author is Beverly Moss Spatt, Ph.D., chair of the commission 1974-78. She is a member of the board of directors of the Historic Districts Council.

HAS THE LANDMARKS COMMISSION lost its sense of mission? On February 21 the commission voted to demolish its own landmark, the Purchase Building in the Fulton Ferry Historic District. In 1977 it had been unanimously approved by the commission, of which I was then chair.

The present commission refused even to hear 2 Columbus Circle. City Hall refused to intervene. It was not enough that neighborhood citizens and local, state and national preservation organizations coalesced to pressure for preservation. No one in city government seemed to be listening. Has New York City lost its sense of place?

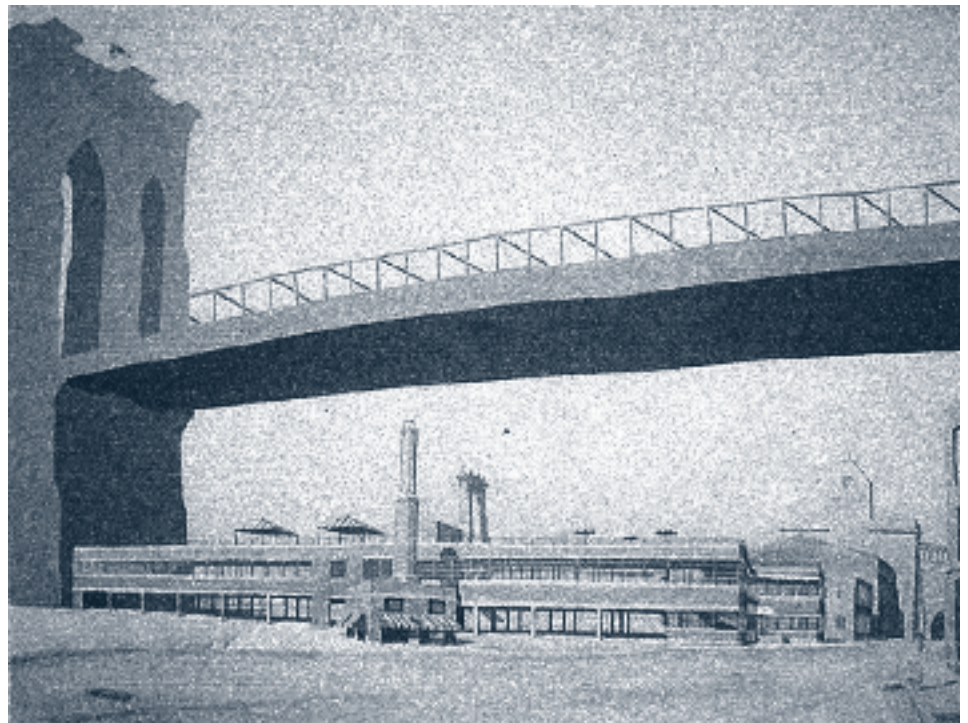
A living city must have a sense of place, acknowledge its history without being frozen in time and continue its vigorous growth without consuming itself for the sake of progress. A living city shows that it has a past, a future and a present.

Before Mayor Robert Wagner signed the Landmarks Law into effect on April 19, 1965, buildings were lost because they were considered old and obsolete or unfashionable, or because the land appeared to be too valuable to retain them. That law and its public support engendered a profound change of attitude that prevailed until very recently, when it has been called into question. We ought to know better. Look at where we are. We know we have been profligate with our natural resources. Lack of

affordable housing on the one hand and excessive office and high-end residential development on the other show how inappropriate our development priorities have become. The high standards of living we have achieved do not guarantee a

broadly beneficial urban environment. That requires a lifelong effort involving laws, enforcement, education and understanding.

The purpose of preservation is to stay our escaping sense of continuity and provide witness to progress and change. It is not just architecture and style that matter, but what they tell us of the social, cultural and humanistic qualities belonging to the people, places and periods of the city. Preservation fosters an understanding of historical continuity. Its purpose is not to freeze history but to encourage and enrich humanism. Living among historic buildings helps root people to their



NICHOLAS EVANS-CATO

Nicholas Evans-Cato, an artist living in Vinegar Hill and a preservation activist, presented this rendering as a proposal for the reuse of the landmarked Purchase Building to planners of the Brooklyn Bridge waterfront park. They never publicly considered it. The building faces demolition.

neighborhoods and city. It introduces new generations and immigrants to the diversity of urban livelihood from which a commitment to the city can be made, grow and adapt in response to emerging needs. It is the tissue that binds us together as much as it does one period of history to the next.

Within our crowded streets are thousands of human interactions; our landmarks emerge as community touchstones that impart a unifying sense of place to New York's complicated physical and social matrix. There is beauty throughout New York City. Together we can preserve it. ■

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

AT THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL'S annual Preservation Conference in March, participants were left with a great deal to think about. One theme was whether historic preservation was a tool for enhancing our communities or an end in itself. Even our panelists disagreed. For example, on the panel "Race and Preservation," the moderator, Michael

Henry Adams, expressed his belief in the intrinsic value of preserving significant structures. We are preserving, he noted, the architecture of Harlem throughout its history and not just the culture of its current dwellers. Another member of the panel, former Harlem Councilmember Bill Perkins, saw the value of preservation as bettering the community through economic develop-



P. DECKER

David Goldfarb, speaking at the reception, welcomed people to the conference weekend.

ment and enriched housing stock—in other words, as a means to an end.

I am of the school that sees historic preservation as part of the arsenal of tools for improving our city and its communities. As I walked from my house this morning, I waved to the neighborhood shopkeepers; it was irrelevant whether they were in 19th century shops or behind the plate glass of 20th century store windows. What was important was that they were still there and not replaced by a three-story parking garage.

As the conference keynote speaker Robert Fishman pointed out, the struggle between the followers of Robert Moses and those of Jane Jacobs is not just a battle between highways and brownstones, but a fight for the future direction of our urban spaces, a struggle to see whether our vision for cities is broad enough to include a sense of place.

During one of HDC's pre-conference lectures at the Manhattan branch

of Pratt Institute, two economists and a planner looked at the studies done to date on the economics of historic designation and came to the same conclusion: that we cannot predict the impact of landmark designation on property values, racial composition, longevity of ownership, or a host of other outcomes. It put to bed the notion that designation causes gentrification, but it also told us that we do not know what factors lead to changes in our communities. If we did, we'd all be rich from investing in the next SoHo or Tribeca.

So what is there that we all do know and can agree upon? I would suggest it is that preservation plays a key role in "smart growth." We can never stop a dynamic urban area from growing and changing. What we can do is to channel that growth in a way that will preserve and enhance our established communities. We need not just protect neighborhoods across all economic strata; we need to provide housing and workplaces in distinct and unique communities where city dwellers can not only live productive lives but enjoy the heritage of their neighborhoods and their city's art, culture and architecture as well.

HDC welcomes your thoughts on these topics, and we look forward to seeing you at our future programs and events.

—David Goldfarb

HDC CONFERENCE TACKLES MAJOR ISSUES

THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL took on core issues at its 12th Annual Preservation Conference, titled "Place, Race, Money & Art: The Economics and Demographics of Historic Preservation" and held on March 3-5. And it delivered on those themes, beginning with the kickoff reception at the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York when Ned Kaufman, co-chair of Pratt Institute's historic preservation program, urged the 125 guests to think about the largest issues confronting society today—global warming, genocide and natural disasters—in the context of preservation. Mr. Kaufman went on to recommend that preservation be considered on the grandest scale possible, the

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NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE
HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

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THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL IS THE
CITYWIDE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK'S DESIGNATED
HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND FOR NEIGHBORHOODS
MERITING PRESERVATION. THE COUNCIL IS
DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THE INTEGRITY OF
NEW YORK CITY'S LANDMARKS LAW AND TO
FURTHERING THE PRESERVATION ETHIC.

preservation of humanity itself.

More than 200 people attended the following day's program at Columbia University. Keynote speaker Robert Fishman, a specialist in urban history, policy and planning who teaches at the University of Michigan, explained how historic preservation evolved from an "admirable irrelevancy [in cities] caught in a riptide of destruction" to a key element of a "new urbanism." He noted that concurrent with the birth of the preservation movement in the 1950's and '60's, urban issues became political, citing specifically the battle of Washington Square in which community activists fended off Robert Moses' plans for a roadway through the park. To overturn Moses' "ruthless" attitude toward the past, Dr. Fishman cited Shirley Hayes, a neighborhood mother of four, who created the force behind the vision of a preserved Greenwich Village, enlisting Jane Jacobs and others who had the "intellectual wherewithal to argue why Moses was wrong." Through their efforts, Dr. Fishman said, Washington Square Park was preserved and emerged as a symbol of unity and diversity, part of an energetic experience that delivered the city from a "rolling wave of abandonment and sprawl" in the 1970's.

Following his speech, the morning panel dealt with "The Real Economics of Historic Preservation." Getting right to the bottom line, Carol Clark, a planner and professor of preservation planning, addressed whether historic preservation affects property values. She cited a New York City Independent Budget Office study that showed houses in historic districts sold at higher prices than those in nearby neighborhoods. The study was limited to residential properties. Of commercial properties, she said, the Real Estate Board of New York maintains that designation reduces value, but owners of individual landmarks say it increases a building's prestige and, therefore, its marketability. Moreover, Ms. Clark and other panelists said, development in historic districts has been robust, citing Manhattan's Tribeca Historic Districts in particular.

Concerning gentrification, Ms. Clark said many factors contribute to it, including the economy, crime reductions, immigration and public investment in affordable housing. Displacement is not a simple issue, she said, although nothing

points to landmark designation as a reason for it. The city is now in the midst of a \$7.5 billion affordable-housing program, the largest in history, Ms. Clark said.

Fellow panelist Greg O'Connell, a developer working in Red Hook, Brooklyn, confessed that "sometimes fiscal crises are a blessing." During one in the



P. DECKER

About 125 people attended the party held at the General Society for Mechanics and Tradesmen in Manhattan on the evening before the conference.

1980's when plans were underway to flatten the Red Hook waterfront and the area had a 20 percent unemployment rate, he bought the Beard Street Warehouse and other properties. Since then he has transformed the waterfront into a center where artists and small businesses, carpenters, glass blowers, importers, bakeries and other small manufacturers thrive. He said his developments have helped create more than 100 new businesses with 1,200 employees and little turnover. Paradoxically, he said, his efforts to increase the value of the neighborhood have resulted in increased taxes for him.

Roberta Brandes Gratz, journalist, urban critic and a commissioner of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, observed that Mr. O'Connell was an "accidental preservationist," creating new enterprises, new jobs and new economic development—a phrase often

misused to refer to projects such as stadiums, high-rise buildings and shopping malls because such projects are primarily real estate deals. "Economic development is a process, not an end product," she stated, urging planners to look at communities holistically and to promote economic development along with preservation and public health, an attitude that was reiterated many times during the conference. "Real estate is not economic development unless it's part of a process," she said, noting that because of the designation of the SoHo Cast Iron Historic District in Manhattan, the real estate industry is now making a fortune on buildings they would have torn down. In conclusion, she noted that to achieve economic development, the city should "invest in public schools and transportation; the rest will take care of itself."

The afternoon panel, "Race and Preservation," was led by historian and activist Michael Henry Adams, an advocate for increased landmark designation in Harlem. He charged that African-American communities were overlooked by LPC and that it wasn't true they don't care about their neighborhood or don't get involved. "They do get involved," he said, "they just get outvoted," adding that some black leaders, former Mayor David Dinkins among them, contend that historic preservation impedes economic development. To that comment someone in a later panel responded, "Everyone didn't sit at the lunch counter; it took a few leaders."

Politics does play a role in determining what is worthy, commented former City Councilmember Bill Perkins. "Public policy is driving development, and historic preservation is the last thing on the mind of the government." Citing the failure of St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Harlem to get LPC consideration (see also page 5), he said that many people in Harlem feel historic preservation is a cover for displacement; he recalled the practices of the 1970's when "urban renewal" meant "Negro removal." Further, he noted that the Harlem community recognizes a need for some development, referring specifically to current expansion plans by Columbia University, but that preservation should be part of any development plans.

Clement Price, professor of history at Rutgers University in Newark, noticed



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

Discussing how race and preservation interact were, from left, Clement Price, professor of history at Rutgers University; former City Councilmember Bill Perkins; Tom Angotti, professor of planning and urban affairs at Hunter College; and moderator Michael Henry Adams, author and historian.

a “new colorized history” as taking center stage, one that includes communities of blacks, browns, poor whites and ethnic succession—more people of all races wanting to know their history; for example, the Jewish, Italian and Irish former residents of Newark who left after the 1967 riots and are now returning to see where they came from. Mr. Adams concurred, noting that heritage tourism is the top growth area in the tourism industry and hoping it will have a meaningful impact on Harlem.

Tom Angotti, professor of planning and urban affairs at Hunter College, agreed with earlier speakers that preservation and economic development should be seen as one. He cited the work of Joan Maynard of Weeksville in Brooklyn to link community, culture and preservation and turn that African-American enclave into a spiritual, economic and political entity.

The day’s final panel, “Artists and Neighborhoods,” began when Doreen Gallo, an artist and civic activist from

Brooklyn’s DUMBO, referred to “artists-as-entrepreneurs” working with nonprofits and businesses to create valuable communities. Jenny Dixon, director of the Noguchi Museum, added that “artists have been one of the city’s cheapest development tools” in neighborhoods such as Harlem, Brooklyn’s Bushwick and the South Bronx. Subsequent development in these and other formerly affordable neighborhoods has raised her concerns about “preserving the emerging artists as a species.”

Robert Rosenberg, a lawyer, real estate developer and former New York City housing commissioner, spoke of the arts as economic drivers and cited a study that claims there are 300,000 creative workers in New York City. That may be the case, said artist and community activist Nicholas Evans-Cato, who is on the HDC board of advisers, but “artists are, by and large, not interested in the preservation of their community.” He spoke of his years-long efforts in Brooklyn’s Vinegar Hill to galvanize artists around the issue of neighborhood preservation, only to be met with indifference. Ms. Dixon noted that this was not always the case and that developers now value artists as a function of enlightened self-interest.

Sculptor and planner Stephen Goldsmith agreed—he is a former director of planning for Salt Lake City—saying artists should see themselves as “artist-planners” or “creators” with a range of community-building tools and that art



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Jessica Lappin, chair of the City Council landmarks subcommittee, greets Andrew Dolkart, architectural historian, as Jane Swanson, her chief of staff, and Chris Collins of the Board of Standards and Appeals look on.



P. DECKER

Nicholas Evans-Cato and Doreen Gallo, participants in the “Artists and Neighborhoods” panel, are shown here at the pre-conference party going over some of the points they wanted to cover the next afternoon.



GREG LEWIS

Sunday's walking tour took these visitors to Greenpoint. In the background is the Greenpoint Terminal Market, six largely vacant industrial buildings.

should not be a silo in which an artist could isolate himself or herself.

On Sunday, March 5, about 75 conferencegoers participated in walking tours of neighborhoods of The Bronx, Chelsea, Crown Heights North, Williamsburg, Gansevoort Market and Long Island City to see how preservation interacts with rapidly changing areas.

Presentations and synopses of panels are available on the conference blog at www.hdc.org, where the public is invited to post comments. ■

PLEASE JOIN US

16th Annual Preservation Party
and Seventh Annual Grassroots
Preservation Awards

Thursday, May 11, 2006, 6 p.m.
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery
Garden and Parish Hall

East 10th Street & Second Avenue
St. Marks Historic District
Manhattan

\$25 per person, \$15 Friends of HDC
payable at the door.
Cash, check, credit cards accepted.

DOOMSDAY CLOSES IN ON HOUSES OF WORSHIP

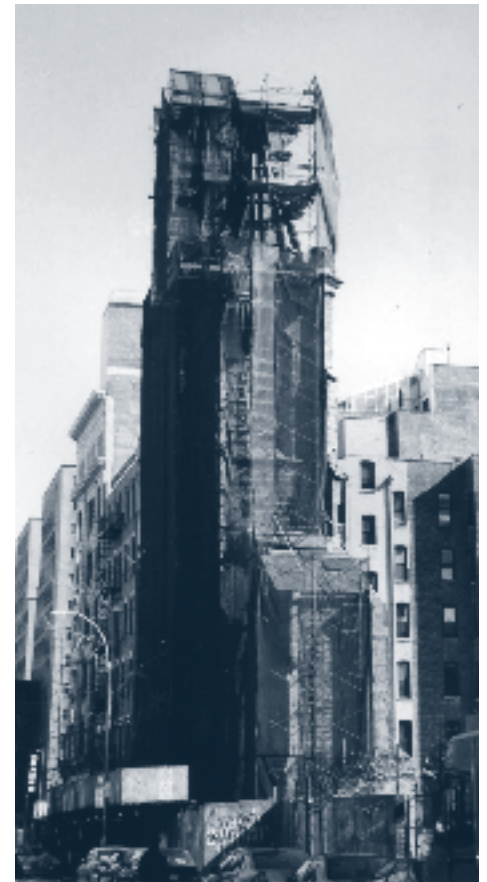
HOUSES OF WORSHIP are in jeopardy as never before, and if you want to see a vivid example, walk along East 12th Street between Third and Fourth Avenues in Manhattan. There in midblock, shrouded in black netting, looms the 1847 facade of St. Ann's Armenian Catholic Cathedral—only the facade. The rest of it, the French Gothic sanctuary designed by Napoleon Le Brun in the 1870's, the cathedral where New York Governor Al Smith once worshiped, has been obliterated. It is hard to believe that this destruction was intentional and not the result of some vengeful act of God.

Closures of religious buildings are widespread—in 2003 the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed “urban houses of worship, nationwide” on its list of most-endangered historic places. Houses of worship of all denominations across the country are threatened and for many of the same reasons, dwindling and shifting populations of worshipers being chief among them. But closures of Roman Catholic churches are more numerous and dramatic, the reasons for them more sensational, the buildings more prominent and elaborate—and so the emphasis gravitates to a discussion of Catholic churches as representing the crucible of change. According to the Index of Leading Catholic Indicators, an independent statistical analysis of trends in Catholicism since the 1960's, 25 percent of practicing Catholics attended Sunday Mass regularly in 2002, while in 1965 about 65 to 75 percent did. The number of priests declined steeply, too: across the country 23 percent fewer men entered the priesthood in 2002 than in 1965, leaving nearly 3,000 churches without leaders. On top of everything else, the Roman Catholic Church has accrued more than \$1 billion in legal and related expenses stemming from accusations of sex abuse in the priesthood. All these pressures on the church finances have resulted in only one idea—close the churches.

Locally, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, which oversees Manhattan, Staten Island and The Bronx as well as counties north of the city, has been surveying and evaluating parishes to determine which of them should be consolidated, redeveloped, or closed; and it

has recommended that some 36 be closed. In consideration of shifting demographics, it also recommended that new parishes in the northern part of the archdiocese be created, but this still leaves magnificent church buildings in Manhattan and elsewhere in the lurch.

St. Ann's is not the only Manhattan casualty. In 2001 Cardinal Egan ordered the 1849 Church of St. Brigid closed because of cracks in the back wall. The



P. BAREAU

Only the facade and the steeple of St. Ann's Armenian Catholic Cathedral are left standing. Before demolition, the archdiocese removed some historic artifacts to a warehouse, including marble altars and the organ.

church, at East 8th Street and Avenue B, is under scaffolding now in preparation for demolition. In August 2003 the archdiocese closed St. Thomas the Apostle in Harlem, a beautiful 1907 church designed by Thomas Poole—the archdiocese claimed the building needed \$5 to \$8 million in repairs and that besides, the congregation was reduced to one-fifth of its capacity. A year later, in September 2004, the Landmarks Preservation



HARLEM PRESERVATION FOUNDATION



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

The archdiocese closed the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle of Harlem in August 2003, claiming the building needed extensive repairs and slating it for demolition. A lawsuit has been filed to block the action.

Interior details of St. Thomas shown behind scaffolding. This church is considered by many to have some of the most beautiful interior features in the city, and numerous supporters are trying to save it.

Commission heard pleas to designate St. Thomas while considering two other Upper Manhattan churches not threatened with closure. Dozens of speakers, including Congressman Charles Rangel and then-City Councilmember Bill Perkins, urged its preservation; and LPC Chair Robert Tierney said he would discuss it with the archdiocese, but it seems nothing ever came of it. St. Thomas is certainly worthy—it has been found eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, and the Preservation League of New York State named it in 2005 as one of “Seven to Save,” its annual list of endangered historic sites in New York State.

No one argues that Catholic churches are not worth saving on their aesthetic and architectural merits alone. Master architects designed them, including Richard Upjohn, James Renwick and the firm of Heins & LaFarge. They possess stunning features such as stained-glass windows, Guastavino tile work, elaborate steeples and impressive columns. Their styles range from Gothic, Romanesque and Greek Revival to Art Deco. Taken as a whole, religious buildings make up a significant part of the historic fabric of New York City and tell stories of its development.

Solving this problem would seem to require more money and bigger constituencies than exist. True, parishioners have come out to try to save St. Thomas. Led by Harlem writer and preservationist Michael Henry Adams, they gathered every Wednesday for several months

in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Midtown Manhattan, Cardinal Egan’s headquarters, and chanted, “Save St. Thomas!” Some also met in front of St. Thomas’s locked doors on Sundays to pray. And still others filed a lawsuit with the State Supreme Court to block demolition. As of this writing, all of it has been to no avail: St. Thomas has not been calendared for a hearing by LPC, and plans for its demolition and replacement with senior housing are still in the works.

The threat to churches does not end with closures; many more are jeopardized by neglect. Maintenance costs money, and fund-raising is difficult. Most government sources cannot provide grants directly to religious organizations because of laws separating church and state. And as the Historic Districts Council’s colleague organization, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, pointed out in a 2004 issue of its publication *Common Bond*, sometimes individuals who may support the restoration of a church are reluctant to donate because they do not want their money used to support the church’s religious activities.

In response to church closures and neglect, many preservation groups are looking for ways to save them. HDC has joined a task force of neighborhood and preservation groups working with the conservancy to document and research all Roman Catholic churches in Manhattan. This task force is augmenting the technical and financial assistance offered by the conservancy’s Sacred Sites program by reaching

out to communities and government officials to encourage reuse of these buildings, emphasize their significance and talk about possible alternatives to their closure.

In an ideal world the threatened institutions would find the means to keep their doors open and preserve the original and intended use of their structures. But many houses of worship in New York are already abandoned and vacant, and sympathetic adaptive reuse may well be the only alternative to losing the buildings altogether. Some have already been converted to other uses that retained their architectural integrity: the 1905 Greek Revival former synagogue at 242 East 7th Street in Manhattan was converted into residential loft spaces in the mid-1980’s and still has its architectural details, its columns, arched windows and pediment.

If this crisis continues, more and more of these historic sites quite possibly will succumb to the same fate as St. Ann’s on East 12th Street, which was sold in 2005 to a Brooklyn-based developer for \$15 million. He plans to build a New York University dormitory there that will be the tallest building in the East Village. The fragment remaining may be incorporated into the facade of the dorm, dwarfed by the new building’s 26 stories.

Unless new and innovative methods to save these buildings are developed, their loss and replacement would seem inevitable, and that would have a devastating effect on the city’s architectural heritage. ■

IS MOYNIHAN'S DREAM OF A NEW PENNSYLVANIA STATION BEGINNING TO TURN INTO A CIVIC NIGHTMARE?

THE JAMES A. FARLEY POST OFFICE ON Eighth Avenue between West 31st and 33rd Streets is now shrouded in scaffolding, just in time for its future to grow clouded. The 1913 landmark serving as New York City's General Post Office was designed by McKim, Mead & White and is now undergoing facade restoration. It is slated for a billion-dollar transformation into a transit hub called Moynihan Station that will house facilities for the Long Island Rail Road and New Jersey Transit. The GPO is moving elsewhere.

The project, spearheaded by the late U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, has been slogging through financial and bureaucratic thickets since the mid-1990's. But there's a new twist to the tale that hardly anyone involved is allowed to describe.

Madison Square Garden might take over part of the building. The sports and entertainment arena is currently right across Eighth Avenue from the General Post Office, and how it would fit is a mystery. The stage and seats will supposedly be dug deep or planted atop the Corinthian-columned building, probably at the western annex along Ninth Avenue (which McKim's firm added in 1934). The Garden's grim concrete 1968 home would be demolished and replaced by millions of square feet of office, retail and residential development in a number of towers. More detail than that, no one will reveal.

Calls to developers, architects and government officials were either not returned or received such noncommittal replies as, "I'm saying nothing," or, "I wish I could help," but no one denied the rumors.

One person will speak for the record on behalf of the players: Howard Rubenstein, the indefatigable and shrewd public-relations image-spinner. Hot-seat clients of his half-century-old firm, Rubenstein Associates, include everyone from Disney to the Macklowe Organization, the Whitney Museum to the Yankees. When asked about the Garden's rumored move, Mr. Rubenstein said affably, "There are just discussions going on—your question is

premature." He added, "There are a lot of hurdles to overcome."

What is clear from press reports so far—they have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The New York Observer*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Crain's New York Business*—is that the site's developers, the Related Companies and Vornado Realty Trust, are planning the move with the Garden's owner, Cablevision Systems Corporation. Architect David Childs of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, who was a longtime friend of Senator Moynihan and has already produced numerous pro-

runs a tiny nonprofit called the Friends of Moynihan Station. The Garden's move, she wrote diplomatically in response to an e-mail, "is an idea, not a confirmed proposal right now, but it has the potential to make bigger, better train stations in Midtown, and partly rectify the crime against our city that occurred when Pennsylvania Station was torn down 40 years ago."

Architect Hugh Hardy, whose firm H3 Hardy Collaboration Architecture is handling the current facade restoration with SOM, told District Lines that



P. BAREAU

Ninth Avenue facade of the James A. Farley Post Office, perhaps one day to be the Moynihan Station. The owners of Madison Square Garden are reportedly under negotiations to move their arena here, tear down the Garden and build towers.

posals for the new station, is reportedly working on a version to incorporate the Garden. Cablevision, owned by the Dolan family, fervently opposed and helped kill Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plan for a West Side Stadium in 2004, so the company's decisions are likely to be subject to intense scrutiny from the city government.

Nevertheless, Maura Moynihan, the senator's daughter, is optimistic about the proposal's prospects. A senior fellow at the Regional Plan Association, she

the Garden's move "is part of a giant, humongous real estate speculation." It will not move fast, he cautioned, partly because the Garden, a private enterprise, will take up so much of what Senator Moynihan originally intended to be a public amenity.

"You can imagine the city administration is not pleased with the Dolans," Mr. Hardy said. "And by the time you finish putting Madison Square Garden in there, you ain't got much left in the way of a train station." ■

EXTENSIVE REZONING BY BLOOMBERG ADMINISTRATION CHANGES SHAPE OF CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

NEW YORK CITY is sometimes criticized for not having exciting modern architecture, and the administration of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg seems to have taken the criticism to heart, charging his agencies to spiff it up. Under his administration, the City Planning Commission has espoused zoning changes that would allow avenues of gleaming residential towers along waterfronts and other selected spots all over the city. In fact, Mayor Bloomberg and the chair of the City Planning Commission, Amanda Burden, have publicly stated that the goal of his mayoralty is to do nothing less than completely rezone the vast majority of New York City.

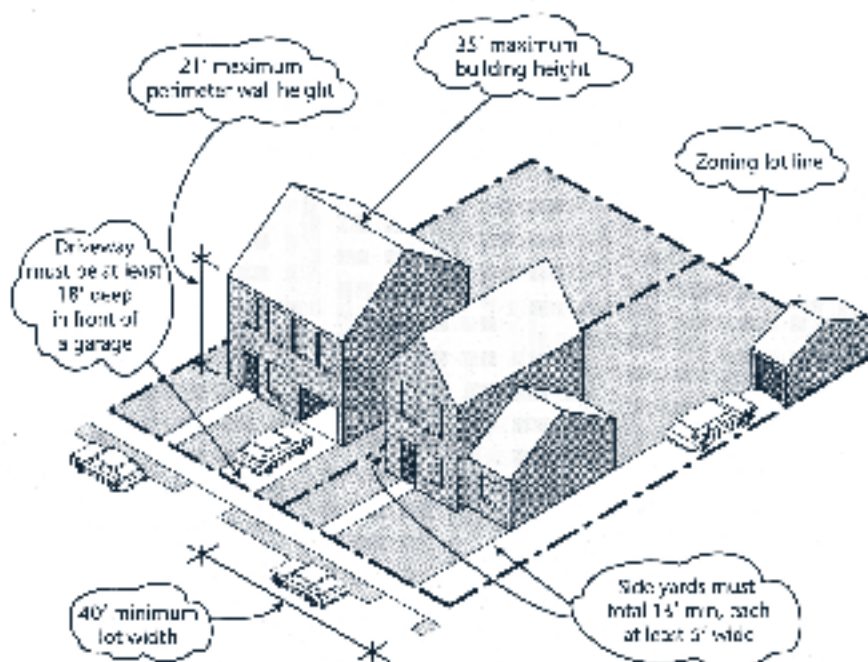
In 1916, New York was the first city in the country to introduce zoning. Forty-five years later, in 1961, a comprehensive Zoning Resolution was adopted to guide development and density in the five boroughs. Labored over for several years by planners, real estate developers and public officials, it was based on forecasts of population growth to 16 or 20 million people by the year 2000 and described a "build-out," or maximum development potential, to accommodate them. Until recently the 1961 zoning map was little changed outside Manhattan. Indeed, it had minimal effect on many neighborhoods, as the population of the city shrank by more than one million throughout the 1960's and 1970's. With the sudden growth of the city's population, however, first in the mid-1980's and then more consistently starting about a decade ago, neighborhoods throughout the city began to see development that conformed to the 1961 plan but was inconsistent and out of scale and density with what was already there—the existing built environment.

The 1961 Zoning Resolution created very general zones permitting maximum flexibility for development. New construction and development assumed a measured pace in response to it until about 25 years later, when a wave of new building began, arousing neighborhood consternation. In response, during the late 1980's the city began to introduce what are called contextual zones in neighborhoods, making building provisions

more specific and creating areas that more closely matched the existing built environment. This effort is ongoing and is marked by a willingness of City Planning to use neighborhood input. As the 1961 Zoning Resolution served developers, this administration seems to be working on plans that will serve neighborhoods.

Consistent with its intention to rezone the entire city, the Bloomberg

In many residential areas City Planning has created what can almost be described as preservation zones, where development options are limited. In total, about 34 neighborhoods have been downzoned over the past 18 months or are in the process of it now. Most of them are on Staten Island and in The Bronx and Queens. About one-quarter of Queens alone has been downzoned.



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Some of the new R2A zoning requirements are illustrated by this diagram from City Planning's 2006 Zoning Handbook, used here by permission. The district has new floor-area allowances, changed lot-coverage requirements and revised height and setback standards.

administration has issued more rezonings, contextual or otherwise, in the past three years than all other administrations have done in the previous two decades. In places like the Far West Side of Manhattan, some main streets of Park Slope and in Williamsburg, Brooklyn—areas with a formerly commercial or manufacturing component—the strategy has resulted in massive "upzonings," or increases in development potential. In more mid-rise and suburbanlike residential areas, the administration's plans have produced large, increasingly sensitive "downzonings."

However, pockets of problems continued to exist, especially perhaps in low-density neighborhoods in Queens. The R2 zone (broadly, single-family detached residential) was widely used in the 1961 rezoning; it allows maximization of square footage of a new house by exempting the lowest story from computations if a garage was included and if the attic was less than eight feet high. This zoning provision created a wave of teardowns and new construction with first-floor garages and low attic ceilings that tripled the size of those houses, which are known derisively throughout

the country these days as McMansions.

Councilmember Tony Avella is chair of the Zoning Subcommittee of the City Council Land Use Committee. His northeast Queens district includes Bayside, a railroad “suburb” characterized by pre-World War II single- and two-family houses on one-eighth-acre lots, semi-attached houses and single-family row houses surrounding a commercial core. His district was seen as a test for City Planning’s response to the neighborhood’s calls for low-density rezonings. Mr. Avella hired Paul Graziano, an urban planning consultant (and Historic Districts Council board member), to propose a plan for the Bayside rezoning that was eventually approved both by the community board and the Queens Office of City Planning.

Late in the process City Planning came up with a new zone—the R2A—which would have essentially approved the McMansions. The reaction of the community was fierce. Paul DiBenedetto, co-chair of the Bayside Civic Database, complained, “The initial R2A zone would have legitimized all of the abuses and loopholes that we were trying to get rid of.”

Chaos ensued and finally, in late December 2004, Messrs. Avella and Graziano renegotiated with City Planning Commissioner Burden and rewrote the R2A zoning district to eliminate loopholes. Within those rezoned areas there has been a dramatic drop in speculative development. “R2A is clearly the city’s first-ever attempt to preserve a ‘normal’ one-family home,” said Mr. Avella, “and to preserve a certain character and quality of life that would otherwise have been destroyed.”

In Manhattan, a different scenario unfolded. With new residential construction and the burgeoning art scene of West Chelsea during the past decade, local residents and Community Board 4 began working on a plan to rezone the area to protect industrial operations west of 10th Avenue, to allow the art galleries to continue to expand and to permit modest residential growth. Plans went awry, however, when the community board’s proposal was overtaken by the High Line Initiative, the effort to turn the defunct elevated freight rail line on the West Side into a park. With property owners adjacent to it pushing for the demolition of

the High Line, agreements were made both to save the High Line and to promote much higher, denser development in the area right around it. The plan, devised in-house by the Manhattan Office of City Planning with Chair Burden personally involved, left residents and community board members at a disadvantage to negotiate for preservation-style zoning and unable to secure a scale for new buildings more in keeping with what exists. According to Ed Kirkland, co-chair of the Land Use Committee of Community Board 4 (and HDC board member), the only place where the size of new development



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

Fifteenth Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in Park Slope South, Brooklyn, showing a new, large apartment building that dwarfs its three-story neighbors. The community wants to limit development potential in areas like this.

was even somewhat mitigated was 10th Avenue south of West 23rd Street, where a maximum height of 80 feet is mandated, and from West 24th to 28th Streets, where it is 125 feet. “Above that,” said Mr. Kirkland in reference to the area next to the Hudson Yards rezoning, “all scale is lost.”

With the Bloomberg administration pushing for iconic architecture of 20 to 25 stories and a fair amount of affordable housing incorporated into the proposal, activists were basically stymied in their fight for a scale of new buildings more in keeping with the existing.

In Brooklyn’s Greenwood Heights the

recent hot real estate market has spurred extensive speculative development. This area, dominated by diminutive one- and two-family wood-frame and brick row houses, was originally zoned for high density development. Aaron Brashear, co-founder of the Concerned Citizens of Greenwood Heights, moved across the street from the verdant Green-Wood Cemetery in 2004 after almost 20 years of living in Fort Greene. “We felt like we were moving out to the country,” said Mr. Brashear. Within a year of their move, however, strikingly large luxury condominium buildings began to be constructed west and north of the cemetery. Concerned Citizens of Greenwood Heights was formed in response in early 2005.

When Park Slope was rezoned in 2003 to encourage lower buildings on side streets, the South Slope/Greenwood Heights area, which had previously gone unnoticed by developers, became a hotbed of new construction. Mr. Brashear’s new civic organization and the South Park Slope Community Group, along with Community Board 7, raced to get a rezoning effort through to the Brooklyn Office of City Planning, but the damage had already been done. “The proposal that they came up with was, in a macro sense, acceptable,” said Mr. Brashear, “but when you took a closer look, the designation to ‘protect the side streets’ was actually adding development potential to low density blocks. Curiously, within three months of our rezoning, a much better fit has been brought to our attention. We’d like to go back to the table with City Planning.”

If the agency is as responsive here as it has been in other areas, that may be possible. ■

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CALL 311

As our friends at the MTA say,
“If you see something,
say something.”

If you suspect illegal alteration
or demolition of a designated
landmark, or of a building
in a designated historic district,
don’t hesitate to report it.

Call 311

DISTRICT PROFILES

WEST 71ST STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

WHEN THE HOUSES that now comprise the West 71st Street Historic District were built in 1893-96, the street was a quiet cul-de-sac separated by a robust wall from railroad tracks along the Hudson River. Sometimes smoke from the trains would billow up and obscure the view of the New Jersey Palisades, and grit from the smoke would land on the street, but that didn't stop upper-middle class people from buying houses there.

Today the street is nicer. The railroad is underground, no longer coal-powered, and the wall is gone. Only a curb and bollards remain to prevent vehicles going through. They are there to preserve the cul-de-sac, because on the other side, running parallel to the Hudson River, is Riverside Boulevard, a street created to give an address to several towering apartment buildings with developer Donald Trump's name on them. That street is

ied as Manhattan streets come. On its length from West End Avenue west to the curb are a budget hotel, some apartment buildings and the 33 houses of the historic district, in themselves varied. Visually part of the street, though beyond the curb, are the side entrances to two Trump buildings, big and glassy. The apartment buildings at the other end of the street are mundane, and then there

Ninth Avenue elevated railroad in 1879; and when Riverside Park was finally finished in 1900 after 24 years of construction, the area closest to it, where this street is, got its biggest lift. By the early 1890's it had become fashionable; but paradoxically, again according to the designation report, the very anticipation of increasing value slowed its realization, for the prices of land along Riverside Drive, Central Park and to some extent West End Avenue were high enough to discourage development there and on the side streets.

Speculators built much of the Upper West Side, West 71st Street included. Nearly all the West 71st Street Historic District was built starting in 1893, the year of a major financial panic, but developers fearlessly continued to work here. The south side was the first to be built, designed primarily by John C. Burne and secondarily by Arthur J. Horgan, who undertook construction on the north side as well in 1894 for his development firm, Horgan & Slattery. The eight five-story houses designed by him in the Renaissance Revival style are still the most noticeable and remarkable on the street, with their Venetian influences, terra-cotta ornamentation, decorative terra-cotta stringcourses, round-arched entrance doors, bracketed balconies, oval windows and round-arched pediments. These details were largely intact when the designation report was written and still are today, 110 years after they were built.

At the time of the designation report, 1989, and for a number of years afterward it was a street of families with children. Now, according to Dr. Lynne Lummel, who has lived there since 1993, it is "celebrity-based because of the Trump buildings. It used to be very quiet. Now there are more people." Still, people who live there know one another, she said; they have pride in the neighborhood, preserve the architectural details of their buildings and have a lively sense of community—block parties, tree plantings, colloquies on the street.

Asked about the budget hotel nearby, she said, "It was, ahem, a different type of customer when we moved in," but she thinks it is now simply a hotel. That she doesn't know for sure means that the people who stay there must blend in with the neighborhood. And possibly show up at block parties. ■



P. BAREAU

From left, 333, 331 and 329 West 71st Street, Renaissance Revival style houses built in 1894 by Arthur Horgan. They are cream-colored brick with white terra-cotta detailing.



LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

The West 71st Street Historic District is a small one, less than one block long west of West End Avenue. It has 33 buildings, very diverse in character, and friendly neighbors.

barren, and traffic roars by on the Henry Hudson Parkway just west of it.

West 71st Street is not barren. It is planted with trees and with flowers in the tree pits, and it is as quiet and var-

are eight Renaissance Revival townhouses of cream-colored brick with white terra-cotta and marble trim gleaming in the sun. Their effect is almost startling, especially to first-time visitors.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission's 1989 designation report for this historic district tells us that the Upper West Side was rural with little villages until development began when the Eighth Avenue horsecar line was extended to West 84th Street in 1864. It expanded with the laying out of streets west of Central Park in 1865 and with the widening of the Bloomingdale Road (now Broadway) in 1868-71.

The western part of the area was given a boost by the completion of the

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