

# DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL SPRING 2008 VOL. XXI NO. 3

## HDC ANNUAL CONFERENCE EYES PRESERVATION'S ROLE IN THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK CITY

IN MARCH 2008, the Historic Districts Council's 14th Annual Preservation Conference, **Preservation 2030**, took a

neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs were able to admire the recently restored rotunda, built on the land where

and infrastructure concerns.

A group of respondents to the keynote zeroed in on PlaNYC's lack of attention to community preservation. Participants included Peg Breen, president of The New York Landmarks Conservancy; Jonathan Peters, a transportation expert from the College of Staten Island; and Anthony C. Wood, author of "Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City's Landmarks."

"New Yorkers need more than just water to drink and beds to sleep in," said Mr. Wood. "New York is a city of neighborhoods, and long-term planning for the city has to take that into account."

"Surviving the Building Boom: Urban Neighborhoods of the Future," brought together experts to discuss tools for preserving the city's historic urban neighborhoods while providing new housing and services for expanding populations. Addressing out-of-scale development in the Village, SoHo and the Far West Village, Andrew Berman, executive director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, attributed recent loss of neighborhood character to faults in the community-facilities bonus. By granting schools, cultural institutions and hospitals special permission to build beyond the dimensions typical of their corresponding zoning envelopes, Mr.

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*HDC Director Leo Blackman, left, moderates "Surviving the Building Boom: Urban Neighborhoods of the Future," featuring Michael Rebic, Andrew Berman and Brad Lander.*

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critical look at preservation's role in shaping New York's urban environment for future generations. Rather than lamenting lost battles and reacting to impending threats, this year's program focused on establishing long-term tools and strategies to protect the city's historic resources before they are demolished or fall victim to unsympathetic alterations.

The Opening Night Reception was held at Federal Hall National Memorial. Nearly 150 people turned out despite the unexpected onslaught of rain that evening. Once inside, preservationists from

George Washington took his oath of office as the first president of the United States.

The next day, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's PlaNYC 2030 was used as the basis for the Conference theme. Rohit Aggarwala, director of the Mayor's Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability, presented the keynote address outlining the major tenets of the Plan. PlaNYC 2030 aims to prepare the city to accommodate an additional one million residents over the next 20 years, specifically emphasizing environmental

## CLEANER, GREENER, FEWER LANDMARKS

THE OSTENSIBLE GOAL OF PlaNYC 2030 is to provide a roadmap for the future of New York City. If the plan is followed, that future New York will be more populated and cleaner with increased transit. It will have fewer cars and more trees. What it won't have is more landmarked areas.

Despite PlaNYC's laudable aim

to enshrine environmentally-beneficent benchmarks in city policy, historic preservation – as a strategy, tactic or even a philosophy – is almost completely absent from the document. Its one appearance is under the Housing section's fifth initiative, "Adapt Outdated Buildings to New Uses," which solely addresses publicly-owned properties. The sidebar case study, "Re-imagining P.S. 109," is a seemingly-innocuous story about transforming a former public school into artists' housing. This tangent largely

downplays the intense community-based struggle to rescue this beautiful and significant building from the city's Department of Education, which wanted to demolish it; HDC honored this laudable fight in 2000 by bestowing a Grassroots Preservation Award upon the Coalition to Save P.S. 109 (Teri Slater, Ray Plumey, Gwen Goodwin, David Corbin). In fact, this act of preservation is back-handedly blamed for creating blight. "But in the years following the decision [to not demolish it], P.S. 109 sat

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## HDC TURNS THE SPOTLIGHT ON “NEIGHBORHOODS AT RISK”

WHILE THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL is dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of all of New York City's historic resources—be they churches, bridges, apartment buildings or otherwise—our main focus is on districts. More than just a single building, historic districts concern an ensemble of structures, their relationships to one another and the history they tell together.

The New York City Landmarks Law defines an historic district as an area that has “special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value [representing] one or more periods or styles of architecture” and has been designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The LPC is further mandated to preserve and protect buildings and areas “of special distinction or special historical or aesthetic interest or value” through designating and regulating landmarks and historic districts.

However, by no means are all of the deserving historic neighborhoods in New York City landmarked.

Increasingly, the special character and sense of place of these areas are under dire threat or direct assault from demolition, out-of-scale and garish new construction or unsympathetic alterations. Over the past 15 years neighborhoods whose architecture and sense of place were seemingly stable for decades have moved beyond simply being worthy of landmarking to being seriously at risk.

Whereas landmark designation might once have been merely a worthwhile community goal, all too often now it is a vital ingredient in the continued life of a community.

In 2004, HDC launched a feature on our Web site called “Neighborhoods at Risk” with five threatened areas — Sunnyside Gardens, Queens; Stapleton, Staten Island; Grand Concourse, The Bronx; Fiske Terrace/Midwood Park, Brooklyn; and the undesignated sections of NoHo in Manhattan. The neighborhoods, one from each borough, represent a range of dates, architectural styles and building types that all speak to the history of New York City. In the four years since its launch, there has been progress.

The part of Stapleton centered on St. Paul's Avenue was designated in 2004, while the section around Harrison Street



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*The west side of Bowery, between Bond and Great Jones Streets, is include in the proposed NoHo extension in Manhattan.*

still cries out for landmarking. Sunnyside Gardens was landmarked in 2007, and Fiske Terrace/Midwood Park in March of 2008. Most recently the proposed NoHo extension had a favorable Public Hearing. A dozen other neighborhoods have been added to the list since its inception, and some of them, such as Brooklyn's DUMBO and Crown Heights North neighborhoods, have been designated as well.

The “Neighborhoods at Risk” list is by no means conclusive. Like the initial list, it strives for a balance of geography, styles, date ranges and building types. One of the things that the chosen areas have in common, and a primary reason for success, is an organized neighborhood preservation campaign behind them. HDC works closely with such local groups to further their cause. By building awareness of these efforts, HDC hopes to push them forward on the path to designation.

The threats facing our city's historic neighborhoods are manifold, but demolition is obviously the most dire. Besides the irreplaceable loss of historic architecture, demolition can lead to new construction that is often out of scale and at odds with existing buildings. While the LPC judges new structures on how their design, materials and scale harmonize with the historic district, no such review is required in nondesignated areas as long as zoning

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## WHEN “CALENDAR” IS A VERB

PRESERVATIONISTS ARE OFTEN ACCUSED of speaking in tongues, using acronyms and abbreviations such as ULURP, CNE and SHPO in everyday conversation. It sometimes gets even more arcane, with constructions such as NR-eligible and NegDec making their way into meeting notes.

But one of the most obscure terms used exclusively by New York City preservationists is “calendar.” The word itself, which is derived from the French and means a reckoning of time in which the divisions of a year are defined, is not at issue; it is the use of the word as a verb that seems odd.

In almost every conversation about a potential landmark designation or an historic building at risk, eventually the question is raised, “Is it calendared?” This odd query is almost always followed immediately by “How can we get it calendared?” which leads to a strategy session. This conversational turn often leaves landmark laymen somewhat at a loss — What is this “calendar” that is being referred to? Does it have something to do with fiscal years? Or

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## ADDISLEIGH PARK: UNCOVERING AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY IN SOUTHEAST QUEENS



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*Clockwise, from top left: The homes of former Addisleigh Park residents Jackie Robinson; Rose Murphy and Slam Stewart; Ella Fitzgerald; James Brown and Cootie Williams; Milt Hinton; and Lena Horne.*

IN THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF QUEENS, not far from the bustling urban heart of Jamaica, there is a charming, little-known suburban-type enclave with a rich and distinctive history named Addisleigh Park. With approximately 650 houses on ample lots with graceful, mature trees, the neighborhood is a hidden gem and one definitely worthy of preservation protections.

Addisleigh Park was largely developed in the 1930's as part of the pre-World War II building boom that shaped large swaths of eastern Queens. The neighborhood lies in a rough triangle between Linden Boulevard on the south, the tracks of the Long Island Rail Road on the east, Sayres Avenue on the north and Marne Place on the west. Typical of the era, the area possesses fine examples of English Tudor-style and neo-Colonial Revival houses, many of which are quite sizable (some with as many as eight bedrooms). Architecturally, the buildings are remarkably intact with few examples of inappropriate alterations or teardowns. Original materials such as stucco, wood siding and stone are predominant.

A walk along Murdock Avenue, its principal street, reveals a pristine and attractive community. The broad, sweeping, well-manicured lawns, the charming landscaping and the near complete lack of fences combined lend a graciousness not often found in similar neighborhoods.

Together with the handsome architecture, it is obvious that on its physical merits alone, Addisleigh Park warrants serious consideration as a potential historic district. However, the true secret and fascination of this neighborhood lie in its social, rather than its architectural, history.

Built when race-restricted covenants dictated the segregation of the city's neighborhoods, Addisleigh Park eventually transformed from an exclusively white neighborhood into one of New York City's premier African-American enclaves by the early 1950's.

Beginning in 1946, the NAACP sought to challenge the legality of the area's racial-ownership restrictions, and two years later the New York State Court of Appeals handed down a decision that helped overturn this offensive practice, permitting Mr. Samuel Richardson, an African-American merchant from Manhattan, to purchase a house from Ms. Sophie Rubin on 177th Street in the neighborhood. Many civic and trade organizations, including the American Veterans Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the National Lawyers Guild and the Committee of Catholics for Human Rights, submitted amicus briefs detailing the evils of segregation, and although a number of affluent and notable African-Americans were already living in Addisleigh Park, the resolution

of this case helped open the neighborhood to all.

Lured by the promise of seclusion, quietude, space and beauty, many of the newcomers were world-famous. Beginning with William "Count" Basie, the area would eventually become home to notables such as Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald, Illinois Jacquet, Jackie Robinson, James Brown, Joe Louis, Milt Hinton, Roy Campanella, Cootie Williams and many others.

Today Addisleigh Park continues to be a much-beloved home to a community of middle- and upper-middle-class African-American teachers, attorneys, doctors, politicians, entrepreneurs and other professionals.

Given Addisleigh Park's rich and largely unrecognized history, the Historic Districts Council has partnered with the Addisleigh Park Civic Organization to research and document the neighborhood's story.

Generous grants from Preserve New York, a grant program of the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts, and from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Northeast Office have enabled HDC to hire two consultants to study the neighborhood's social history as well as its physical development.

The historians are currently conducting  
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## A PRESERVATION MANIFESTO: TONY WOOD ON HIS NEW BOOK

VIRTUALLY EVERY PRESERVATION GROUP in New York City has benefited somehow from Anthony C. Wood's eloquence and generosity during his three-decade career in preservation advocacy and philanthropy. Wood, executive director at the Ittleson Foundation, which funds projects combating AIDS, fostering mental health and improving the environment, spent the 1980's working at the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the Municipal Art Society and the J. M. Kaplan Fund. He has headed or served on nonprofit boards including the Historic Districts Council, the Preservation League of New York State, Partners for Sacred Places and the New York Preservation Archive Project. His first book, "Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City's Landmarks" (422 pp., Routledge, \$45), engagingly explains how varied activists—including bluebloods, architects, artists and hippies—fought side by side from 1913 to 1965 for legislation to protect landmarks. The volume, as Mr. Wood explains in this interview, is part meant as a manifesto, inspiring preservationists to think critically about their past and future.

**How did you get interested in the topic?**

While I was working at the Landmarks Commission and the MAS—learning about city government, the threats to the Landmarks Law, the clashes between the real-estate community and preservationists, the best ways to organize grassroots activism—I kept trying to understand the history that I was becoming part of.

**Did you find anything about preservation history?**

In the 1980's, I tape-recorded interviews with some major early players—Harmon Goldstone, Geoffrey Platt, Margot Gayle—and some of them were published in *Village Views* (a periodical of the Society for the Architecture of the City). I pursued the history of preservation in my every idle moment. I realized there were stories that needed to be told. I'd originally thought that everything just dates back to Pennsylvania Station,

but then I realized that the Bard Act, which made landmarks laws possible, was passed in 1956.

**Who was Bard anyway?**

It turns out that Albert S. Bard was a lawyer and civic leader with significant inherited wealth. In 1913 he proposed an amendment to the state constitution allowing the government some control



*Anthony C. Wood*

over a building's aesthetics, and he kept pushing for that radical concept—it was passed in 1956, when he was 89 years old.

**What other colorful characters did you end up studying?**

George McAneny; he was a former borough president who fought for a decade against Robert Moses to save Castle Clinton. And there's Robert C. Weinberg, a planner, architect and lecturer who especially fought for planning advances and to protect Greenwich Village. I kept finding these wonderful, creative, witty, often irascible individuals. The book is meant partly as a family history—these are our preservation ancestors.

**How did examining preservation history change your attitude toward where the field is headed now?**

Writing the book recharged my batteries and gave me tremendous cause for hope. I realized how many past preservationists didn't just assume that the political tide was against them; they never gave up. They refused to accept the inevitability of losing buildings and neighborhoods that they cared about so passionately. This year I'm chairing a yearlong initiative called Preservation Vision New York City, to engage the preservation community in thinking about its future. It's partly in response to Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC 2030, which barely mentions preservation.

Preservation Vision began with a survey on the internet gathering information from a broad range of preservationists on such concerns as: What threats and opportunities face preservation now? Which ones might emerge in the future? How should preservationists respond? Are there approaches by other cities that we should adopt? Are government incentives for preservation needed? Will we have enough trained restoration craftspeople in the future and if not what do we do about it?

**What trajectory do you think it's on?**

Personally, I'm interested in strategic issues, like how and when should we take off our gloves in our battles? How can we emphasize our core values while also showing how preservation advances other social goals? And such questions as what new funding sources and incentives can we create to advance preservation? Also during the project we'll convene some 20 emerging preservation leaders at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's Pocantico Conference Center to help analyze the survey results and tease out of them an "idea bank"—actions that preservation needs to take to be a vital city force in 2030. The idea bank will be expanded, refined and brought back to the preservation community for development, discussion, debate and prioritizing. We'll release a final report by the end of 2008. The goal is to get the preservation community thinking longer-term—beyond next Tuesday's Landmarks Commission hearing, or the next mayoral administration. History shows that transformational ideas in historic preservation take years to realize. 🐾



## HDC AUCTION HIGHLIGHTS LITTLE- KNOWN MODERNIST MASTERWORK

WHILE NEW YORK CITY has achieved a respectable record of preserving its Beaux-Arts Gilded Age, the masterworks from the post-WWII decades are still greatly unrecognized and unprotected, which is why the Historic Districts Council hosted this year's Auction for Advocacy at the Edgar J. Kaufmann Conference Center, designed by renowned Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. Proceeds from the April 3rd event will support the League of Preservation Voters, an HDC initiative aimed at educating elected officials and candidates about preservation and development issues within their districts.

While enjoying panoramic views of the East River and the United Nations, guests had the opportunity to bid on an array of items, ranging from behind-the-scenes tours of historic houses to original artwork to a vacation at a private Puerto Rico estate. Guest auctioneer George McNeely of Christie's presided over the main event, and pianist Arthur Abrams of the East 12th



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*Attendees at the Auction for Advocacy.*

Street Block Association kept the atmosphere lively.

Alvar Aalto (1898-1976), one of the most important Finnish architects of the 20th century and a central figure in International Modernism, was famous for his marriage of the naturalism of Finnish Romanticism with modernist ideals. The Conference Center is the only example of this master's work in New York City and one of only four of Mr. Aalto's structures remaining in the United States.

sioned "Fallingwater" from Frank Lloyd Wright. Aalto's resulting design is typical of the architect's best work.

The space is an artistic entirety; everything in it was designed and produced by Aalto to create a harmonious effect. Serene and light-filled, the curved forms of ash and birch create an abstract forest-like sculpture of sinuous bent wood. Combined with blue porcelain tiles and modern yet humanistic lighting, the Conference Center is without a doubt an

# DISTRICT LINES

NEWS AND VIEWS OF THE  
HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

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NO PART OF THIS PERIODICAL MAY BE  
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THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL WORKS  
TO ENSURE THE PRESERVATION OF  
SIGNIFICANT HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS,  
BUILDINGS AND PUBLIC SPACES IN  
NEW YORK CITY, UPHOLD THE INTEGRITY OF  
THE NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS LAW AND  
FURTHER THE PRESERVATION ETHIC.




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*Auction guests watch the bidding in action.*

HDC is advocating for the landmark designation of these rooms and petitions in support of designation were on hand at the auction event to resurrect the public campaign to preserve this worthy modern interior.

Located within the Institute for International Education at 809 United Nations Plaza, the rooms were commissioned in 1961 by Edgar J. Kaufmann Jr., a scholar and patron of modern architecture and design whose family commis-

sioned architectural gem.

This proposed interior landmark was heard at the Landmarks Preservation Commission nearly seven years ago, on November 20, 2001. Today the Center still lies in preservation limbo, eagerly awaiting the LPC's official designation. Until then, this space remains vulnerable, unprotected and largely unknown to many New Yorkers. For more information on how you can help save the Aalto rooms, E-mail us at [hdc@hdc.org](mailto:hdc@hdc.org). 



*Tour-goers enjoy "After the Plan: Greenpoint and Williamsburg," led by Ward Dennis of the Williamsburg Greenpoint Preservation Alliance.*

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## CONFERENCE

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Berman said the city's zoning laws continue to compromise the integrity of these renowned historic areas.

Focusing on New York City's decline and subsequent resurgence, Brad Lander, director of the Pratt Center for Community Development, framed his presentation within an historical context, looking at population increases and the rise in immigration as key factors for the swelling demand for housing stock. Mr. Lander underscored ongoing conflicts among market forces, the preservation of neighborhood character and the importance of achieving equity, whether through affordable housing or an increase in job opportunities. The panel concluded with Michael Rebic, property manager of the Episcopal Diocese, who addressed the church's willingness to preserve its historic properties so long as it receives adequate support from individual congregations and the surrounding community.

"Building It Out: Suburban Neighborhoods of the Future" examined the threats to the city's more suburban-style neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, with teardowns and subdivisions becoming more and more common and entire communities being transformed against their will. The engaged, lively discussion featured planner John Shapiro, who acknowledged the city's successful efforts to rezone certain suburban-type neighborhoods and highlighted specific projects he has worked on in Brooklyn and Staten Island.

HDC President Paul Graziano pre-


sented his own efforts to rezone portions of Queens and critiqued the frequent meddling of politics with locally based planning initiatives. Susan Siegel, former executive director of the Flatbush Development Corporation and a participant in the Municipal Art Society's Flatbush 2030 initiative, discussed how the Flatbush 2030 coalition is creating its own community-based goals for sustainability beyond those laid forth in PlaNYC.

For the last panel, a wide range of technical preservation tools and available financial-assistance sources were introduced to the audience and debated at length. Less a discussion than an in-depth "how to" session, this panel provided attendees with an arsenal of strategies for protecting their communities and the city's historic resources. Juan Camilo-Osorio, GIS analyst and planner at the Municipal Art Society, discussed geographic information systems, or GIS, as a tool for understanding the relationship of preservation, zoning and development in a more complete way.

Jay DiLorenzo, president of the Preservation League of New York State, gave an overview of the Historic Homeowners Tax Credit and its benefits. Passed in the state Legislature in 2007, the credit is still in its nascent stage.

The third and final panelist, Steven McClain, president of the Trust for Architectural Easements, discussed preservation easements as another, voluntary method of encouraging preservation activities.

Complementing the discussions, HDC sponsored six walking tours the following day to illustrate the issues raised during the panel sessions. From the massive new construction brought on by the upzonings of Greenpoint and Williamsburg in Brooklyn, to the loss of historic Victorian houses in Richmond Hill, Queens, this year's tours highlighted the types of transformations all

New York's neighborhoods will surely suffer if a holistic approach to planning is not embraced now for the future. Other featured tours included the Far West Village and Lower East Side in Manhattan; Flushing, Queens; and the High Bridge, the original conduit for the city's water supply that connects Manhattan's Washington Heights with The Bronx. 


## NEIGHBORHOODS AT RISK

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requirements are met. Over the past decade, numerous important free-standing, wood-frame houses have been replaced by brick boxes in Old Astoria Village, once one of the city's largest intact pre-Civil War communities. Broadway-Flushing, an early-20th-century suburban-type neighborhood in northeast Queens, had 11 teardowns in 2007 alone. Their replacements do not share the same natural materials and level of detail of the originals.

Areas bordering landmarked districts are often at particular risk. The cachet and stability of an historic district can make a neighborhood more attractive, but regulations can make development difficult. Instead, properties on the borders are eyed where the benefits of landmarking can be enjoyed without the responsibilities. This is evident in the proposed NoHo extension, sandwiched between the NoHo and NoHo East Historic Districts, where landmark-worthy buildings along Bond Street have fallen prey to much larger construction of incompatible styles.

Alterations to existing buildings also set a neighborhood at risk of losing its character. While an historic building may still stand, new materials like stucco or vinyl siding can quite literally change its look and feel. If part of a row, the alteration can interrupt the flow of the original design across a continuous facade. In neighborhoods that were planned and designed as a unit, such as the recently designated Sunnyside Gardens, small alterations like enclosing a porch or adding a pathway can have a large impact.

In today's development and real-estate climate, nearly all of New York City's undesignated neighborhoods are at some risk of losing the special physical characteristics that draw residents to the communities. By naming particular areas to the "Neighborhoods at Risk" list, HDC hopes to keep them in the foreground until their safety is assured. 



## HDC CELEBRATES LISA ACKERMAN AS OUR 19TH LANDMARKS LION

The Lion Award ceremony was held on October 24, 2007, at the Prince George Ballroom in the Madison Square North Historic District, Manhattan.

ALL PHOTOS: VIRGIL STEPHENS



*Historic Districts Council Executive Director Simeon Bankoff; Stacy McLaughlin; Frank E. Sanchis III, senior vice president of the Municipal Art Society; and honoree Lisa Ackerman.*



*Alexander Popovich, senior project manager at Essex Works, and Denise Brown of the Crown Heights North Association raise their glasses to toast the new Lion.*

### CLEANER, GREENER...

*continued from page 1*

abandoned” and “The building wasn’t being utilized” are two comments that appear in the story. The lesson being taught here is that preservation stands in the way of progress and is an obstacle to be surmounted.

This argument reveals a real paucity of understanding of the goals of preservation as it is practiced in New York, as well as a troubling short-sightedness of the actual conditions that exist in preserved areas of the city today. On a municipal level, the Landmarks Preservation Commission—the city’s own preservation agency—currently oversees and regulates around 25,000 properties in all five boroughs, which is roughly 3% of the real estate property in New York.

The vast majority of these properties are privately-owned and the Landmarks Commission acts by regulating private proposals to alter these buildings. The agency issues over 9,000 alteration permits a year, which should dispel any kneejerk concerns about “freezing the city in amber” or “halting development” or whatever version of preservation impedes progress that is currently making the rounds. The reality is that the agency oversees some of the most desirable and valued neighborhoods and real estate in New York City, including but not limited to portions of Brooklyn Heights, the Upper East Side, Greenwich Village, Park Slope, Douglaston, the Empire State Building and Rockefeller Center. All of these properties have actually blossomed and flourished under Landmarks regulations. In point of

fact, some extraordinarily desirable areas, such as SoHo or the Ladies’ Mile, would not exist in their current form without the prescient landmarking that preceded their revitalization. Jane Jacobs put this idea succinctly by saying “old ideas can use new buildings but new ideas need old buildings,” and 43 years of landmark preservation have shown this to be true.

Setting aside the demonstrable effect that landmark designation has on the long-term health of a neighborhood, another good reason to include preservation as strategy in planning for New York’s future is its environmental effects. It has been estimated that up to 70% of the waste-stream that our country produces annually is construction debris. By recycling buildings for new uses rather than demolishing them, we would actually be reducing the city’s waste. Furthermore, new building materials—such as aluminum and plastic—typically require a greater expenditure of energy to manufacture than do traditional building materials such as plaster, glass and wood. By choosing newer materials, the overall energy expenditure for the construction of new buildings is far greater than the restoration and rehabilitation of existing ones. Existing historic buildings, when maintained properly, are also more energy-efficient to heat and cool than are modern buildings, as the former were built with lower-impact technology (e.g., operable windows rather than central air-conditioning). Finally, preservation practices require skilled labor and typically funnel more money into local economies than does transporting pre-made construction materials to a building site. Truly, the greenest building is the one already built.

The goal of PlaNYC 2030 is to ensure a higher quality of life for generations of New Yorkers to come. The best way to do that is to begin with respecting the gifts left to us by generations of previous New Yorkers. ♪

### SAVE THE DATES

HDC’s monthly Coffee Talk series:  
first Monday of every month

Neighborhood Preservation Center  
232 East 11th Street, Manhattan  
8:30am

Visit our Web site at  
[www.hdc.org](http://www.hdc.org) for details.

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pin-up models?

In fact, “to calendar” is a neologism that is derived from Department of Buildings (DOB) terminology. How this came to be reveals an intricacy of the landmarks process that gives wide-reaching, but curiously limited, protections to historic buildings.

The municipal process of designating a property as a landmark is fairly straightforward, at least on paper. The Landmarks Preservation Commission holds a Public Hearing on a proposed individual landmark or historic district, then makes a decision based on the property’s merits and takes a vote to designate. If the majority votes yes, the new landmark travels to the City Planning Commission to be reviewed and then the City Council to be affirmed, modified or overturned. In terms of land-use processes, this appears relatively simple. However, what happens is a little more complicated.

When the LPC receives a Request for Evaluation (and it receives hundreds of requests annually), senior staff and the Commission chairman determine whether the property (or area) meets the criteria for designation. If this group determines that a proposed historic property merits further consideration, a photograph, statement of significance and the committee’s recommendation are sent to each individual Landmarks commissioner for comment. Ultimately, however, the decision whether to bring the property forward to the full Commission for review is made by the chairman.

The full Commission reviews such potential landmarks at Public Meetings, where it can vote to schedule a Public Hearing on properties for further review. Thus, an item is put “on the calendar” for a future Public Hearing. Now, here’s where the Department of Buildings comes in.

According to Operations Policy and Procedural Notice #19/88, issued by the Department of Buildings on July 6, 1988, “the LPC shall notify the DOB whenever a new historic district or individual building is calendared.” In addition, when a construction, alteration or demolition DOB permit is applied for, the clerk “will check the computer records to determine

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## PRESIDENT’S COLUMN

THE ONE THING that makes New York City great and so appealing to people all over the globe is its ability to adapt to change without losing its identity. So far.

While the city has always been a place of transformation, we are currently experiencing helter-skelter development not seen—or tolerated—by our government since before the turn of the 20th century.

From the southernmost tip of Staten Island to the northernmost neighborhood in The Bronx, the sheer amount of new construction has not only visually altered our city but has destroyed important buildings, streetscapes and communities that had remained relatively intact for decades and, in some cases, centuries. Additionally, much of the new construction that is occurring has proven to be illegal and shoddily built. This surge in unfettered development has altered the way in which both residents and visitors respond to New York City’s built environment.

However, the Bloomberg administration has a plan—a framework—for New York City’s future development, entitled PlaNYC 2030.

Described as a forward-looking eco-friendly blueprint that features more “environmentally friendly” new construction, energy-saving retrofitting of existing buildings, the planting of new trees and increased acquisition of rare open space, there is virtually nothing in PlaNYC 2030 that calls for additional protection—and increased designation—of historic neighborhoods and individual buildings of importance. The specific reference to preserving historic buildings suggests adaptive reuse of city-owned properties, such as schools, hospitals and the like, regardless of historic value if it is convenient. Without including a well thought-out preservation plan, PlaNYC 2030 neglects an extremely important part of New York City’s environment.

How will this affect our historic—and non-historic—neighborhoods? How will the city respond to the increased—and increasingly desperate—outcry for more historic districts and individual landmark designations, particularly outside of Manhattan? And what about properties with high inherent “green” potential that also happen to be incredibly important from an historical perspective?



DENISE CERMANSKI

**Paul Graziano**

Take, for example, St. Saviour’s Church, a Carpenter Gothic country church designed by Richard Upjohn in 1847 that was sited on two wooded acres in a part of Maspeth, Queens, that is farther away from “park” space than any other neighborhood in the five boroughs. However, when the property was placed on the market for development, the Parks Department refused to acquire the site for public use. Currently being disassembled, this historic church may only be saved through an eleventh-hour agreement due to the incredible moxie of community activists. But, in a general sense, what happens when buildings and sites like this are not acquired, restored or otherwise protected in their hour of need by our government?

It is as if the current administration is only interested in the most superficial aspects of our city, not how it actually functions. Nor does PlaNYC 2030 seem to take into consideration the economic and social impact that the denigration of the history and character of our neighborhoods will have on us—New Yorkers.

HDC’s recent Conference, “Preservation 2030,” took a hard look at whether PlaNYC 2030 was a visionary concept or merely a vehicle for more development wrapped in “eco-friendly” packaging. The jury may still be out for some, but based on the program’s presentations and their ensuing discussions, a healthy debate will be continuing on this subject for years to come. That New York City will continue to grow and change is a given. But if steps are not taken to protect our historic neighborhoods and buildings, by 2030 the city, as we know it, may no longer exist.

—**Paul Graziano**



## WHEN “CALENDAR” IS...

*continued from page 8*

if the premises has been calendared by the LPC.”

If the property is calendared, the LPC will be immediately notified by the DOB that a permit has been applied for, and LPC “will have 40 days from the date the application is filed to consider the case and, if necessary, to vote on its designation. If within the 40 days the building is designated as a Landmark or a Landmark District immediate notification should be sent to DOB. DOB will then advise the applicant to obtain the required LPC permits.”

In other words, if a building is calendared, LPC has 40 days to act to designate it to prevent the issuance of a Buildings Department permit.

This procedure has led to such last-minute rescues as the Italianate villa at 70 Lefferts Place in Brooklyn, which was literally saved from a demolition permit by a lightning-fast designation vote by the LPC in December 2006. However, “at the end of the 40-day period, if no response is received from the LPC, DOB will con-



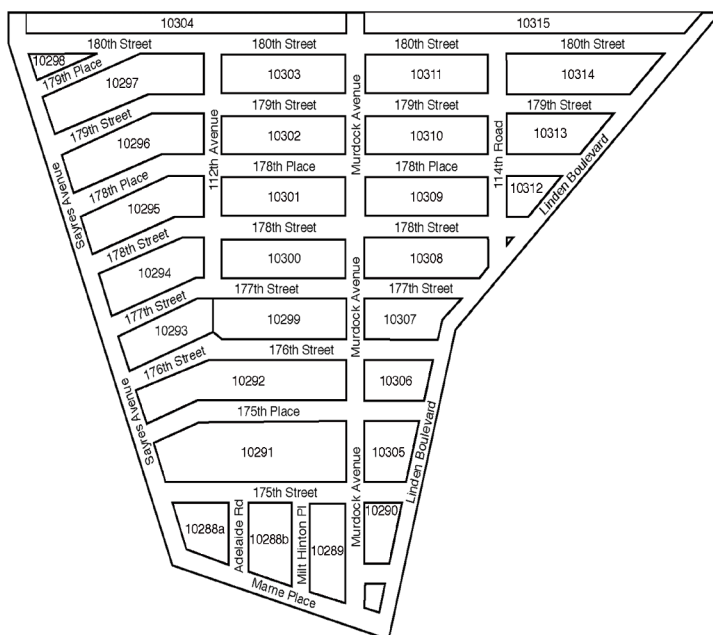
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*A “pin-up model” for calendaring—the 1854 James and Lucy Elwell House at 70 Lefferts Place in Brooklyn was saved from demolition in December 2006 by the Landmarks Commission’s speedy calendaring and designation.*

tinue with the review and approval process.” Thus, the LPC must act within 40 days or else the permit may be issued in full. While rare, this scenario is most

likely to happen within a calendared historic district because the agency might be hard-pressed to be able to designate a large area within the 40-day window. 🏠

## MAP OF ADDISLEIGH PARK Queens County, New York



ADDISLEIGH PARK CIVIC ORGANIZATION

## ADDISLEIGH PARK

*continued from page 3*

ing research and gathering information that they will compile into a baseline research document. In addition to such material as original building records, architectural drawings, historic news accounts, period advertisements, property records and photographic images, the team will also interview some of the long-time residents. These oral and written histories will provide rich details that paint a full picture of life in this picturesque neighborhood.

One of the goals of the project is to create an informational and advocacy brochure that will educate the public about the historic and cultural significance of Addisleigh Park and contribute to the general understanding of New York City’s social and cultural history and development. The research will also provide the basis for possible future preservation initiatives, such as attaining New York City historic-district status or listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. HDC expects this project to be completed in fall 2008. For more information and updates, visit our Web site at [www.hdc.org/addisleighpark.htm](http://www.hdc.org/addisleighpark.htm). 🏠

## RECENT GIFTS AND GRANTS

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS by government, foundations, organizations, companies and Friends of the Historic Districts Council are very much appreciated. Many thanks to those who gave in the period from July 2007 through February 2008:

**Government:** New York City Council Member Vincent Gentile, 43rd District; New York City Council Member Jessica Lappin, 5th District; New York City Council Member Michael McMahon, 49th District; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; New York State Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried 64th District; New York State Council on the Arts; New York State Senator Diane J. Savino, 23rd District.

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**Organizations:** Alice Austen House Museum, The Beaux Arts Alliance, Brooklyn Heights Association, Carnegie Hill Neighbors, Central Park Conservancy, Citizens for Cambridge/Oxford Historic District, Crown Heights North Association, Ditmas Park Association, Douglaston/Little Neck Historical Society, DUMBO Neighborhood Association, East Side Rezoning Alliance, Fisher Landau Center for Art, Fiske Terrace Association, Fort Greene Association, Friends of Terra Cotta, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, Gramercy Neighborhood Associates, The Green-Wood

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HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

*Detail of the Aalto-designed interior of the Kaufmann Conference Center. Article, page 5.*



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