



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

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April 14, 2016

Hon. Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

The Historic Districts Council (HDC), the citywide advocate for New York's historic neighborhoods, is concerned about a recent occurrence of misrepresentation within the public process of deliberations by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC).

Over the past 12 months, The Friends Seminary School, a private institution in Manhattan's Stuyvesant Square Historic District, sought permission from the LPC to expand its campus. The proposal was opposed by the neighbors and local activists, but was permitted in May 2015 by the agency after some modifications. Subsequent investigation into the public record discovered that a number of letters submitted in support for the proposal falsely represented the authors as neighbors of the institution, whereas in reality, they were non-residents affiliated with the school.

The public input process can be fraught enough without individuals and entities misrepresenting themselves in front of city agencies, potentially swaying decision makers and impacting outcomes. These kind of actions undercut the purpose of community participation in the landmarks process, which is to provide feedback from local stakeholders on issues that determine neighborhood character. The fault does not lie with the LPC; the agency is as much the victim as the public.

It has been reported that the New York City Department of Investigation is looking into the case. HDC expresses its strong support for their vigilant investigation and hope that their research might deter others from attempting similar false identifications. HDC feels that the veracity of official claims made during the public hearing process must be properly vetted and strictly enforced in order to avoid undue influence and to promote a clear and accountable public decision-making process.

Sincerely,

Simeon Bankoff
Executive Director

cc: Hon. Rosie Mendez, City Council District 2
Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
Hon. Mark Peters, NYC Department of Investigation