

HDC Remarks

I am profoundly honored by this award. I have long admired HDC. Aside from all the good work you know it does, every week, without fail, I listened at the Landmarks Commission to thoughtful HDC testimony, usually given by Nadezhda Williams. All commissioners respected what HDC had to say.

I am also honored by all of you who have come tonight and extraordinarily honored the people who have come from afar. First, of course, my family, Laura, Rebecca, son in law Steven, and brother in law Bill. And from Toronto, the Zeidler family, whom I met because they were dear friends of Jane Jacobs. Margie Zeidler, a wonderful Jacobsian architect/developer, serves with Ron, Stephen, Laurie and me on the Board of the Center For the Living City.

As for Ron, Richard, and Stephen. They have been so important in my life. Ron and I have had a standing argument for about 40 years over who taught whom what. Well, I have the last word tonight and I can tell you that Ron took me from Kelly Street in the South Bronx to Greg O'Connell's piers in Red Hook to see the kind of positive community change led by innovative and dedicated individuals. That started in the early 1970s when most

architecture, planning and preservation organizations did not know Manhattan had bridges.

Richard, an extraordinary and ground breaking historian, taught me how rich is the story that accompanies a landmark and that a landmark is shallow without mining that story. I could not have led the restoration of Eldridge without him.

And Stephen, the first and probably only artist to head a Planning Commission without a planning degree - Salt Lake City during the Olympics - is now an innovative professor of urban ecology and the brilliant director of the Center For the Living City. I took Stephen to meet Jane Jacobs 2 yrs before she died. She loved him and his work and he helped make happen the Center that Jane and I had been talking about for at least 5 years before.

Now I'd like to offer a few thoughts about preservation.

In 1978, a couple of hippies with a \$12,000 loan opened an ice cream parlor in an abandoned gas station in Burlington, Vermont. They called it Ben & Jerry's and against all odds, they changed the ice cream market. But not without a big fight.

Five years later, Pillsbury spent \$70 million to purchase the new fancy Haagen Dasz whose name, some of you may remember, actually meant nothing but its exotic-sounding name gave it license to be very expensive.

That same year, Ben & Jerry started their franchise. Pillsbury got worried and nasty. They threw their weight around and threatened distributors with withholding Haagen Dasz if they carried Ben & Jerry.

Well, Ben & Jerry fought back and started their own campaign: "What is the Doughboy Afraid Of?" The New Yorker Magazine wrote a big story. The rest is history, as they say. But the significant point is that both Haagen Dasz and Ben & Jerry's enjoy considerable market share and a sizable fan base. Neither lost. In fact, they co-exist quite nicely.

So what does ice cream have to do with landmarks preservation? Well, maybe you see the metaphor already. What is the real estate industry afraid of? Why are they trying every which way to undermine the city's landmarks law that is the model nationwide?

Preservation has made them rich. Not only are many of them making fortunes today restoring and repurposing the buildings we wouldn't let them tear down but they are also making fortunes building in or near the historic districts

whose designation they probably opposed. It is those very historic districts that today have the most market appeal in the city. Yes, in New York and every city that I know of, pre-World War II neighborhoods exhibit the highest real estate values of their city.

Landmarks add value to a place. Designation simply restrains excess, promises respect for context, assures design in keeping with the historic fabric and, significantly, averts what Jane Jacobs dubbed the "cataclysmic change" that erases, not rebuilds places. For almost 8 years, I and my colleagues on the commission wrestled with the challenges that came before us and, although I had my share of dissents, the commissioners dealt well to assure that modernization was possible without sacrificing the essence of a renovated landmark or an historic district. Many property owners and developers have conceded that they came out of the process with a better project. And many others have also managed to keep their projects either undesignated or only modestly interfered with.

And what is this nonsense that preservation stops development? Three percent of this vast city is designated. Ed Glaeser complains that 15% of Manhattan below 96th Street is designated. That's not a lot for Manhattan considering

its iconic historic architecture. We need to remind Glaeser that we are a five borough city and new development has been happening all over it. As for preservation stopping the construction of skyscrapers, I don't know what city that refers to. Cranes have been filling our skyline for almost two decades. We have no shortage of oversized buildings constructed with official city blessings.

Historic districts now boast some of the hottest new buildings designed by starchitects. Lord Norman Foster. Jean Nouvel. Raphael Vignoly. Herzon de Meuren. Gwathmy Segal. Aldo Rossi. Design constraints and limits are the best stimulants for creative new design.

The proposal to mandate that the City Planning Commission consider the economic impact of a designation was the most egregious of recent real estate community proposals, especially since square footage is the bottom line value - if not only value -- for real estate bean counters, not good design new or old, cultural and historic values or context.

Penn Central made that economic case to justify tearing down Grand Central Terminal back in the 1970s. They won that economics argument, as distorted as it was, in the lowest state court and the city's landmarks commission was poised to de-designate Grand Central to avoid paying a \$60

million penalty, until the preservation community forced the issue all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and changed the course of urban change nationwide. Ben & Jerry's took on the Doughboy and won that one.

But success breeds pushback. Preservation has had great success in New York City and around the country since I started writing about it in the early 70s. You, the landmarks community of this city, have been vigilant, dedicated, un-intimidated and savvy in so many ways. Your task has only gotten harder and will continue to do so. But for my money, I'll keep betting on you, the Ben & Jerry, to keep the real estate industry, the Doughboy, in its rightful place.