



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

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Statement of the Historic Districts Council  
Designation Hearing

January 12, 2010

Item I

BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

LP 239I

Westbeth (aka Western Electric Company Buildings, aka Bell Laboratories), 463 West Street (aka 445-465 West Street; 137-169 Bank Street; 51-57 Bethune Street; 734-754 Washington Street)

The Historic Districts Council is the advocate for New York City's designated historic districts and neighborhoods meriting preservation.

HDC is pleased to voice our support for the designation of Westbeth.

With buildings ranging from a Civil War-era wood-planing mill to a 1929 experimental motion picture sound stage, Westbeth is, to say the least, an interesting collection of structures that trace different phases of industry and technology in New York City. The results of Bell Telephone Laboratories' work here – transistors, television, radar and talkie movies, to name a few – now seem commonplace, but in their day radically changed the lives of people around the world.

As if this was not enough, these buildings went on to another important phase of life after the laboratories moved in the late sixties when it was reconceived by Roger Stevens, the first Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, as the world's largest government-subsidized artists' colony. The nation's first and largest conversion of an industrial complex into housing for artists, Westbeth was also a pioneer in adaptive reuse. It is a creative example of preservation and one that, as the city's industry continues to move elsewhere, can be looked to today as a model.

HDC is happy to see a cultural landmark proposed for designation. Our city is more than just a collection of beautiful or impressive buildings. New York City's energy, heart and soul come from its people and all their many diverse creations and contributions. The landmarking of Westbeth, which this year celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is another important step in recognizing and honoring the technological and artistic history of New York.