



THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

THE NEW YORK
LANDMARKS
CONSERVANCY

The Municipal Art Society of New York
MASNYC

September 26, 2023

Hon. Maria Torres-Springer
Deputy Mayor for Housing, Economic Development, and Workforce
City Hall
New York, NY 10007
Via Email: MTorresSpringer@cityhall.nyc.gov

Dear Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer:

On behalf of the undersigned preservation organizations, we send this letter regarding our collective concern about municipally owned and managed landmarks and their maintenance and preservation.

This issue came to light with a recent situation at Fort Totten in Bayside, Queens, a former military base owned by the federal government but leased to the City of New York under a long term agreement, and managed by the New York City Fire Department. The base includes a New York City-designated historic district of more than 100 buildings and secondary structures, built between the 1830s and 1960s.

Recently the community was made aware of the impending demolition of two barrack buildings (323 Story Avenue and 322 Murray Street) from 1892, as well as earlier frame structure (317 Murray Street) from 1883. We learned that the NYC Department of Buildings issued an emergency declaration in October 2021 due to unsafe conditions but that demolition did not begin until August of 2023.

Despite this supposed unsafe situation and the lengthy delay, the local community board only received five days notice before demolition commenced, Council Member Vickie Paladino claims she was not formally notified, and other tenants such as the Bayside Historical Society were not consulted. Because of DOB's ruling and the City holding the lease on Fort Totten, the New York State Historic Preservation Office was also not consulted and the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) was told as a courtesy but not consulted in any way to help preserve the buildings.

We believe this sets a dangerous example, despite the efforts the LPC has recently made with the release of its Vulnerable Buildings Plan, which is supposed to bring additional layers of awareness and protection to landmarked structures. How does the city government plan to better monitor, protect, and restore buildings owned and managed by itself, whether through DCAS or other agencies (as in the example of the Fire Department at Fort Totten)?

We recognize the efforts that the city has made to some of the landmarks under its purview, such as allocating \$6 million towards the stabilization and preservation of the (Former) Colored School No. 4, landmarked in 2023, and the recent announcement of an \$8 million exterior restoration of the Harlem Courthouse at 170 East 121st Street. But allowing these buildings to get to a state in which they require major overhauls is more costly than more regular maintenance of the wide breadth of city owned buildings.

We remain concerned that there is not an overarching plan for monitoring city owned landmarks. We would welcome the opportunity to have a meeting with you, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission, and other relevant agencies to discuss city owned or managed landmarks specifically and how we can proactively address the preservation of these important civic assets.

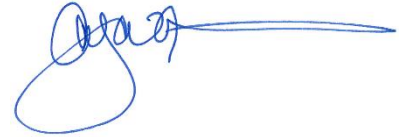
Sincerely,



Frampton Tolbert
Executive Director
Historic Districts Council



Peg Breen
President
New York Landmarks Conservancy



Elizabeth Goldstein
President
Municipal Art Society

CC: Chair Sarah Carroll, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission