

THE ADVOCATE FOR NEW YORK CITY'S HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

Date: June 17th, 2026

Dr. Margaret Herman, Director of Research,
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
253 Broadway, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Subject: RFE for Proposed Individual Landmarks in Wakefield, the Bronx

Dear Dr. Herman,

HDC and concerned community members in the Bronx are submitting the following Request for Evaluation for several buildings in the Wakefield neighborhood of the Bronx. The neighborhood of Wakefield is located at the northern most point of the Bronx, offering a unique snapshot of the early development of the Bronx, from the Revolutionary Era to the modern day. Currently, there are no designated landmarks or historic districts in Wakefield or this area in the Bronx. However there exist buildings with historic significance to merit designations.

In 2008, the Office of the Bronx Borough President, along with all twelve of the Bronx Community Boards, surveyed the entire borough for potential landmarks to submit for designation. While many of the surveyed buildings have been landmarked, there are still historic buildings in the outer parts of the Bronx that are worthy of designation. With the proposed rezoning of this area, it is now imperative that the LPC move forward with designation of significant yet unprotected historic resources.

HDC submits the following sites for consideration of individual landmark designation and provides this Statement of Significance:

- Neighborhood Government Building (formerly the 47th Precinct) - 4101 White Plains Rd
- EMS Battalion 15 (formerly Engine 63) - 4109 White Plains Rd
- Wakefield Library - 4100 Lowerre Pl

The History of Wakefield and White Plains Road

To understand the context of the three municipal buildings, it is vital to contextualize them through the history of Wakefield as a whole and White Plains Road, more specifically. The Village of Wakefield was established in 1876 as the United States was celebrating the 100th anniversary of independence. The name of the village, Wakefield, came from the name of the plantation where George Washington was born. The neighborhood of Wakefield has been known as the “Last County” ceded to Bronx County from Westchester in 1895 as a part of the City’s 23rd and 24th Wards, also referred to as the “Annexed District”.¹

When the City of New York annexed the area west of the Bronx River in 1874, the Village of Wakefield remained a portion of Westchester. It was clear that further annexations would be inevitable as the areas developed within New York City’s orbit, dependent upon its economy, population and transit.² In particular, the Village of Wakefield had been dumping its sewage disposal into the Bronx River, and the village did not have the means to create alternative sewage lines.

Both Manhattan political leaders and Bronx residents supported becoming part of New York City, which was already accessible due to the new train lines connecting New York and Westchester. For the political leaders of New York, annexation expanded the territory and the tax base. They recognized that many of Manhattan’s wealthiest residents were moving to these Westchester County villages and were no longer Manhattan taxpayers.

On the other hand, in the 1870s, partially because of good advertising, people were attracted to the open land of the Bronx and its promise of a suburban lifestyle. However, these growing communities lacked vital resources, such as police and fire protection, passable streets, rapid transit, a reliable clean water supply and a uniform sanitation system. Residents wanted a functional political body to fully implement such necessary improvements. White Plains Road became a hub of new infrastructural development, as the thoroughfare between New York City and Greater New York State through Mt. Vernon.

The area was connected to the rest of the Bronx by two trolley car lines along White Plains Road until 1917 when the elevated Interborough Rapid Transit line reached Wakefield terminating at 238th Street, connecting Wakefield with Manhattan. Following the opening of the elevated line, Wakefield continued to develop in a suburban manner, consisting of single-family residences and low-rise apartment buildings with commercial activity along White Plains Road.

¹ The Last County: The Bronx, <https://www.archives.nyc/blog/2017/5/25/the-last-county-the-bronx>

² <https://cris.parks.ny.gov/Uploads/ViewDoc.aspx?mode=A&token=VWoOt72vQWovWpChwfr4raTHjqkdWTheSuO5DwxhB6hWCiflqTF2IFhrzzO8ZnVP1lsG7UIq+WcLn8TuO/uG1BLNBT7EDU/6SAN/njkChidIICTXczcv6Mq4/wbXr8DV&q=false>



According to historian James Macnamara, the modern-day White Plains Road is not the same as the one so frequently mentioned in revolutionary texts. The original lane was rough and winding, paralleling the modern day Road, though parts of the road do belong to the first path to Mt. Vernon. Today's thoroughfare was laid out in 1863 and widened in 1902-1908, flowing past the beautiful balsam flowers that gave the area its name.³ Initially, White Plains Road was originally accessible through horsecar, until the Streetcar was established in 1892.

After much deliberation and planning, the Suburban Rapid Transit's (SRT) Third Avenue elevated line, built between 1886 and 1905, became the first to serve the Bronx. The route traveled through Mott Haven to Tremont. Jay Gould, who controlled the SRT and New York, Fordham, and Bronx Railway, made a deliberate decision to build the line through the Third Avenue corridor because he saw it becoming immediately profitable. In 1917, the elevated White Plains Line of the I.R.T. Subway opened, creating further interest in Wakefield's real estate. The line (which is now part of the 2 and 5 Trains) allowed people living further in the Bronx to be connected to the city. This resulted in the creation of a new shopping district to cater to the burgeoning community.

Early settlements in Wakefield consisted of immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe. McNamara also added that four cohesive black communities resided in Wakefield, spread across two blocks at a time. The availability of vacant land, new transportation networks and booming real estate market allowed a pocket of

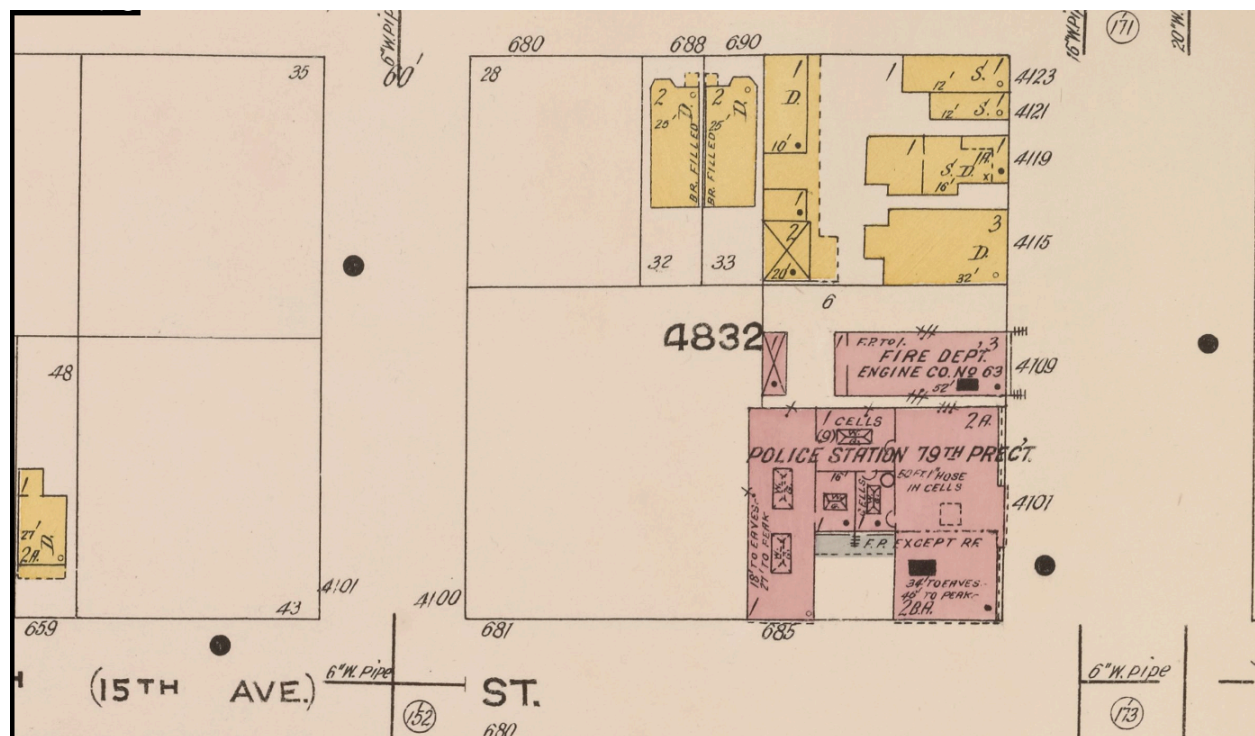
³ History in asphalt : the origin of Bronx street and place names, Borough of the Bronx, New York City, James McNamara.

black families to take up service jobs and create their own community networks⁴. After immigration was liberalized in 1965, the communities' countries of origin switched from Europe to Jamaica, Guyana, and Antigua-Barbuda. The result is one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the Bronx.

Buildings in Wakefield, especially along White Plains Road, are largely residential and commercial. There are many low density single and dual family residences with some apartment buildings and industrial facilities in the area. Against this backdrop, the siting of libraries, police facilities, and fire or ambulance buildings near White Plains Road was not accidental: these structures were placed where public institutions would be visible, accessible, and legible as symbols of city government.

Government building (formerly the 47th Precinct House):

The Neighborhood Government Building is located at 4101 White Plains Road and was originally the home of the 39th, and subsequently the 47th Precinct. Built in 1903 by the firm of Whitfield and King, the building reflects the institutional masonry tradition that characterized municipal construction in New York at the turn of the twentieth century. This three-story Italianate building is made in a U-shape, sloping down slightly to the West. It also includes a one-story carriage house that originally was used for police horses. Earlier fire insurance maps also indicate the presence of jail cells.⁵



⁴ McNamara's old Bronx

⁵<https://www.nyc.gov/site/dcas/business/dcasmanagedbuildings/bronx-neighborhood-government-building.page>

The building itself is a three-story Neo-Federal/Neo-Georgian municipal building with a stone base, typical Neo-Georgian red brick mixed with a limestone base, limestone quoining and other details, and a standing-seam metal roof capped by a wooden cupola. As typical of the Neo-Georgian architecture, the windows spread symmetrically across the building with minimal embellishments on the window sashes. The most decorated aspect of the building is the portico with Doric columns, underneath an intricately designed wrought-iron balcony and smaller columns on the first floor. There is a stone engraving over the entrance that commemorates the building's history as a police precinct and an oeil-de-boeuf. Above, the mansard roof also has five gabled dormers on the front and the back, in line with the pattern of the windows, and rounded by dentil ornamentation. At the center of the roof is a cupola that remains in good shape, and the overall look of the roof reflects a clean, horizontal profile that does not clash with the elevated train next to it.

Neo-Georgian buildings have often been associated with civic structures because their architectural patterns often come to represent order, repetition and structure through strict geometry. The columns at the door especially harken to older Greek and Roman ideas of proportion and symmetry to represent the ideals of government and authority.

The historic 47th precinct oversees one of the largest and most residential commands in the borough, patrolling Woodlawn, Wakefield, Williamsbridge, and Baychester. Given the increase in population after both cession into the Bronx and consolidation into Greater New York City, it was vital to create patrolling stations to manage the burgeoning population. At the time of annexation, this entire area was patrolled by only thirty-seven men, most on horseback. By January 1896, plans were already underway to add 100 officers to the region.



With the consolidation of 1898, the Police Department of Greater New York assimilated eighteen small police agencies, and a move was initiated to conform the boundaries of police precincts to the lines of the individual townships. New precincts were created to serve newly annexed areas and to accommodate rapid population increases and building and commercial development in the once-rural farmlands. In accordance with the general objective of creating a flexible system that would provide for future expansion of the force, several renumberings of Bronx precincts occurred during the next thirty years.⁶ This explains why the Fire Insurance Maps sometimes refer to the building as both the 39th, 47th and 79th Precinct.

Prior to the station's construction, the police operated in a crowded loft of an old firehouse. The Police Department Annual Report from 1903 describes the 39th Police Precinct's sanitary conditions as, "entirely inadequate for the service and its general and sanitary conditions are a disgrace to the City."

At the time, municipal architecture was seen as a disgrace, with sub-standard designs made by builders, rather than professional architects. The situation resulted in a citywide reconstruction to modernize police facilities, built in the monumental style of neo-Classical, neo-Renaissance and Beaux-Arts. In 1903, the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund appropriated funds to construct a new station to accommodate the new precinct. Newspaper articles at the time commented on the impressive designs noting they would be "three of the finest police stations in the greater city," and "of elaborate design and fitted with modern improvements."

⁶ <https://nypdhistory.com/lineage-of-the-nypds-43rd-precinct-a-brief-history-of-policing-in-the-bronx/>

In subsequent years with expansions of the New York Police Department, several renumberings of Bronx precincts occurred. In 1908, the 39th Police Precinct was renamed the 79th in order to correct the irregular numbering systems in place throughout all boroughs of the city. Shortly after, in 1918, the precinct was renumbered again and became the 56th Precinct. In 1924 the precinct was designated the 27th. The final renumbering came in 1929, when the precinct became the 47th. In 1973, the 47th Police headquarters moved to its new station house constructed nearby at 4111 Laconia Avenue.

The 47th Precinct eventually relocated to a new facility, and in 1973 the building at 4101 White Plains Road was transferred to the Department of General Services — the predecessor agency of the current Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) — and repurposed as a neighborhood government building.

Renovations have occurred as the building became the new headquarters of Community Board 12, however the State Historic Preservation Office states that the changes do not detract from the original architectural character. These modifications include the replacement of original six-over-nine and six-over-six, double-hung windows with one-over-one aluminum frame windows (original six-over-six windows are found at the basement), conversion of the stable house into a meeting hall resulting in bricking up the old stable entrance, and a new roof-top mechanical unit constructed in 1982. In 1994, as the result of the severely deteriorated condition of the station house, the City of New York Bureau of Building Design undertook a careful restoration in which the roof was replaced, masonry was cleaned and repointed, the wood cornice and dormers were repaired, two period iron lampposts were installed at the entrance and the cupola was reconstructed. Overall, the restoration in 1994 was carefully done to maintain original materials and all work was based on historical documentation and existing conditions.

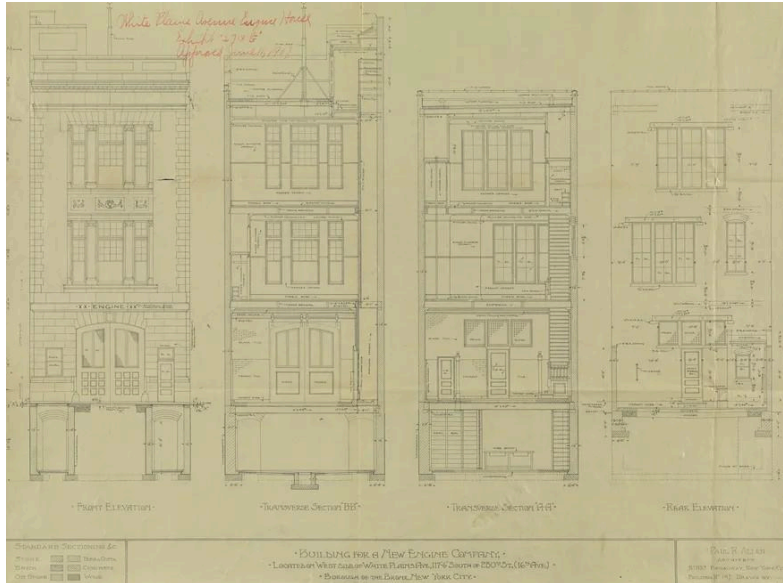
The building thus embodies a remarkable arc of civic continuity: from frontier police outpost at the edge of an expanding city, to anchor of a mature neighborhood government serving tens of thousands of Bronx residents.

E.M.S Battalion 15 (formerly Engine 63 Firehouse)

Located at 4109 White Plains Road, the 63rd Engine Firehouse building was constructed by Paul R. Allen, with an uncomplicated, neo-Georgian design that looked like a townhouse.⁷ Engine 63 was one of the many fire units established in the outer Bronx as the population swelled during the late 19th Century. It was created as a volunteer company in February 1896, when much of the Fire Department of the City of New York (FDNY) was composed of volunteer companies. The Engine was first housed on White Plains Road and St. Ouen Place, and moved to the structure on White Plains Road in 1909.⁸ Design plans for the building were approved by the Arts Commission of New York in 1907.

⁷ <https://urbanarchive.org/city/ny/img/f5eaa0c3-2022-4849-b2d7-036ed30a62c7>

⁸ <https://nyfd.com/history/cityhist.pdf>



Architecturally, it was important to create a building next to the police precinct that could be in conversation with the already-established building, but also retain its unique character. This red brick building with rusticated stone/granite quoins in the corners blends a Renaissance Revival structure with Beaux-Arts elements; it has a ground floor dedicated to a vehicle with two extra floors above. Stone banding separates the floor levels, reinforcing the horizontal tripartite composition. One of the most notable aspects of this building are the carved stone relief panels between the second and third floors, which features foliage and maybe civic insignia.

The building remains in good condition despite the passage of time. The grand rounded arch frames the apparatus bay door, a hallmark of firehouses. And keeping with the neighboring building, the heavy stone pilasters emit a sense of civic authority. The multi-pane double-hung sash windows are arranged in vertical groups of three, which also match the verticality of the building. Although the wood windows are in poor shape, they still seem to be the original windows. A pronounced projecting stone cornice crowns the building with classical dentil-like detailing, consistent with Beaux-Arts civic design.

After a series of fires in the 19th Century, the city established a municipal building code to fireproof buildings in 1860. Buildings were to be constructed of fireproof material, such as brick or stone, and had to be roofed in tile or slate. Much like the police stations, firehouses grew in the Bronx during the 19th and early 20th Centuries as the need for more complex, mechanized equipment was needed. Early firehouses like this would require space for machinery and horse-carriages. According to the Real Estate Record and Guide of 1898, municipal architecture was not considered aesthetically pleasing, and work began to not only modernize facilities to meet current demands but also construct civic monuments that were grand in design.

In 1880, the FDNY hired Napoleon LeBrun & Sons as the official architectural firm for the department. The need for modern facilities was great, and LeBrun designed 42 New York City firehouses before his death in 1895.

LeBrun opted for classically-inspired designs. Among his innovations in firehouse design was a vertical hose drying system that was implemented in firehouses for years to come.

In terms of aesthetics, The City Beautiful movement of the late 19th century promoted the idea that civic buildings referencing classical themes inspired civic pride and were also easily recognizable as centers of government and order. The Art Commission, established in 1897 with Charles McKim of McKim, Mead and White as the founding members, came about during the City Beautiful Movement to review the designs of certain public structures. Their goal was to ensure recognition of municipal buildings in their consistency as well as their grandeur. It is worth noting that the firehouses predates the modular firehouse designs popularized by Hoppin & Koen.

The construction of the Engine 63 Firehouse was directly connected to the post-Consolidation building boom: the merger of the five boroughs in 1898 obligated the municipal government to professionalize and expand fire protection in areas previously served by volunteer companies. The Bronx in particular saw a concentrated campaign of firehouse construction in the years between 1900 and 1915, as planners worked to keep pace with explosive residential growth along the White Plains Road and Jerome Avenue corridors.

The Engine Company 63 firehouse reflects the Classical Revival sensibility that dominated American public architecture at the turn of the century. Bronx firehouses of this era characteristically featured masonry facades — typically brick with limestone or brownstone detailing — arched apparatus bay openings, decorative cornices, and carved stone panels identifying the company. These design choices were deliberate: the city's investment in architecturally distinguished firehouses conveyed institutional authority and civic pride to the communities they served. The building was also constructed at a pivotal transitional moment in the history of urban firefighting: it was designed to accommodate both horse-drawn apparatus and the newly emerging motorized fire engines, placing it on the cusp of a profound technological shift that would transform the FDNY within a decade of the structure's completion.

As changing needs left the old firehouse outdated and unable to handle new emergencies, Engine Company 63 relocated to 755 East 233rd Street in September 1971. Community sources mention that the building lay vacant but in good condition for several years. In 1996, Emergency Medical Service (EMS) was merged into FDNY and became the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (BEMS). Shortly afterward, the building became home to EMS Battalion 15, and the building was updated to suit emergency medical needs in the area.

Wakefield Library:

Although there is not much public information available, the Wakefield Library on Lowerree Place has been a pillar of community support since the early 20th Century. The structure was built in 1938 by Thomas Dunn who was responsible for many of the residential, educational and religious institutions in the Bronx.

Its location on Lowerree Place has a much older history. The street was once a high spot known as Prospect Terrace, due to its unique view of the Bronx River at East 227th Place. It derives its name from the Lowerre Family, landowners who have been in this region since 1817, and who were related to the Bell and Baldwin families.⁹ Lowerree Place has been described as a suburban enclave with low-rise buildings with single-family homes, multi-family homes and small apartment complexes. A majority of the buildings on Lowerree Place were constructed between 1920 and 1929, to take advantage of the real estate boom following the creation of the new elevated subway system. However, the Wakefield Library is the most notable structure on the otherwise quiet street.

The earliest New York Libraries were often subscription libraries, school/university libraries, religious libraries and other special collections. It wasn't until the second half of the 19th century that libraries were considered a philanthropic endeavor, with several free libraries being funded by the Astor and Lenox family. Although the New York Circulating Library was founded in 1878, branch libraries and free libraries were few and far between, especially in the Bronx.

Even after the consolidation of the city, libraries were still divided on three lines: the New York Public Library (which encompasses Manhattan and the Bronx), the Brooklyn Public Library and the Queens Public Library. Among the library's earliest beneficiaries were recently arrived immigrants, for whom the Library provided contact with the literature and history of their new country as well as the heritage that these people brought with them.

Many have described the Wakefield Library as a grand Colonial Revival structure, set back from the street in a style similar to the other civic structures made by Dunn during the later half of his career. The U-shaped building is also made of red brick with white stone corners; however, it has a unique hipped roof with a flat parapet, giving a restrained single story silhouette that contrasts with the other two buildings. The Central Entry Pavilion has a projecting central bay crowned with a classical pediment with a circular oculus on the top. The door and its rounded arch are painted in a striking green color, with transom glazing above. The pediment and stone sash are both in white to contrast with the red brick. They carry a distinct emblem of a book alongside carved lettering for the New York Public Library - a distinct identifying marker of its use. Large arched windows flanking the central entrance on both sides, and are multi-paned, with brick voussoir arches.

However, it is difficult to remove the influence of the Carnegie libraries on this structure, with notable features like an elevated basement, large windows, brick detail work on the facade and the large windows on all sides of the building.

Wakefield Library's importance to the community can be seen through The building has two floors which hold both the collection as well as programming spaces. and recently went through a \$3.6 million renovation to

⁹ History in asphalt : the origin of Bronx street and place names, Borough of the Bronx, New York City, James McNamara.

become ADA accessible.¹⁰ The library has also participated in the ‘Bronx Green-Up’ Initiative, established by the New York Botanical Garden in 1988, to provide education and training on the maintenance of community gardens.¹¹ Such an initiative has been especially vital to a place like Wakefield, which offers very little green space for community activities.

Conclusion:

The three municipal buildings proposed for individual landmark designation collectively represent more than a century of New York City's civic investment in its northernmost neighborhood. Each building reflects a distinct chapter of Wakefield's evolution: from a newly annexed frontier community establishing basic services, to a mature, ethnically diverse neighborhood anchored by enduring public institutions. However, they have created a cohesive compound due to their similar materiality and facade designs.

Though each structure served a different function, they share a common thread. They were built with architectural intention, designed to project institutional authority and civic pride at a moment when the City was actively knitting together its newly consolidated boroughs. Today, they continue to serve the Wakefield community in adapted but meaningful ways — as a neighborhood government center, an emergency medical base, and a public library that has undergone recent renovation to remain accessible to all residents.

The cluster of civic buildings along White Plains Road and Lowerre Place is not incidental. It is the physical record of a city keeping its promises to a growing community. Designating these structures would honor that history and help ensure that future generations of Bronx residents can understand and take pride in the neighborhood's remarkable arc from rural outpost to vibrant urban community.

Warm Regards,



Frampton Tolbert
Executive Director

¹⁰ <https://www.norwoodnews.org/wakefield-library-gets-funding-of-360k-for-infrastructure-and-ada-upgrades/>

¹¹ <https://www.nyc-arts.org/organizations/wakefield-branch-new-york-public-library/>