



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

330 West 42nd Street, 26th floor New York, NY 10036
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512
www.nyc.gov/mcb4

Christine Berthet
Chair

Jesse R. Bodine
District Manager

October 28, 2015

Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street
9th Floor North
New York, New York 10001

Re: Item 1-Borough of Manhattan Group A:
Item H: Powerhouse, 850 Twelfth Avenue
Item I: Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, West 56th Street

Honorable Chair Srinivasan:

I'm Jean-Daniel Noland, Chair of the Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use and Zoning Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the historical, architectural, social and cultural significance of two buildings in the Hell's Kitchen/Clinton neighborhood of Manhattan District 4.

I would like to reaffirm Community Board 4's support for the designation of the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin at 448 West 56th Street and for our long-held support of the designation of the former Interborough Rapid Transit Powerhouse on 12th Avenue as New York City landmarks.

Mission of the Immaculate Virgin

The Mission of the Immaculate Virgin on West 56th Street is a handsome three-story, three bay, red brick and limestone Beaux-Arts style building completed in 1903 for the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, a Catholic charity founded around 1870 by Irish immigrant and Catholic priest John C. Drumgoole.

For the mission's Midtown branch, architects Schickel and Ditmars designed a modestly scaled civic building distinguished by an elegantly proportioned Beaux-Arts scheme. The building's rusticated limestone base with off-set entry portico is balanced by plain brick facade on the second and third floors punctuated by an ordered rhythm of square and round-arched windows under elaborate lintels. A denticulated, pressed-metal cornice with four consoles crowns the building.

It remains one of the most outstanding examples of the Beaux-Arts style in the Clinton neighborhood. But it is also important a social monument to the immigrant history of the West Side and of New York City. For among those immigrants were thousands of children — poor, homeless, and hungry.

During the 1870s and 1880s in NY, Catholic charities began to assume a greater role in municipal poor relief efforts, especially those aimed at children. According to one historian, by 1885 nuns were rearing over 80 percent of the city's dependent youths and had won effective control of the metropolitan child care system. Catholic priests like Father John Christopher Drumgoole also took leadership in poor relief.

Designed by the firm of Schickel & Ditmars, the building was originally used as a boy's club. The stated purpose of the Mission was to provide temporary and permanent shelter, food and clothing for dependent boys as well as to provide secular and religious education. Father Drumgoole gained considerable recognition for the work of the Mission, becoming known as the "friend and protector of children of the street."

Schickel & Ditmars were responsible for two individually designed NYC Landmarks — the Renaissance Revival-style Church of St. Ignatius Loyola at 980 Park Avenue (18-95-1900) and the Beaux-Arts-style Baumgarten House at 294 Riverside Drive (1900-1901). The Mission of the Immaculate Virgin on West 56th is important both for its architectural quality and for its historical and social importance. We urge its designation as a New York City Landmark.

IRT Powerhouse

The IRT Powerhouse, now owned by Consolidated Edison, is not only important for the design of its exterior by Sanford White but also as a monument of the history of transportation and technology in New York City. This Board has long advocated for its designation as a New York City landmark (see attached letter from October 6, 2008) and raised the alarm over changes which have altered the character of this important edifice (see attached letters).

Occupying the entire block bounded by Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues, West 58th and West 59th Streets, the original powerhouse of the Interborough Rapid Transit Subway is the most monumental building associated with the subway system in New York City. It was the largest powerhouse in the world upon its completing in 1904 and it represented the highest level of technical sophistication in the production of electrical power at that time.

From the powerhouse, current was generated and fed to eight substations to power the signal and lighting systems. In its role as company symbol, the building heralded a new era of electrified urban transportation, illustrating the power of technology to improve urban life. The IRT Powerhouse still stands as a monument to the engineers and architects who planned and built New York City's first successful underground transit system.

Executed in the Beaux-Arts style and drawing upon Renaissance prototypes, it is the embodiment of the aesthetic ideals of the civic-minded City Beautiful movement spawned by the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, which held that public improvement could beautify American industrial cities.

Standing on a base of smooth ashlar granite, the building has symmetrically designed facades of buff-colored brick arranged in bays with two-story arched window openings that are decorated with terra-cotta moldings and keystones. The arches are surmounted by an attic story with paired window openings framed by terra-cotta plaster with foliated terra-cotta rustication blocks and topped by terra-cotta wreaths. Many of the windows retain their original multiplane industrial sash.

The Powerhouse must be preserved not only as a monument to New York City's past but also as a potential great public space for its future.

I would like to quote from the Board's October 6, 2008 letter about the Powerhouse, written by the eminent MCB4 historian and beloved colleague Edward Kirkland and signed by me when I was Chair of the Board.

"The resulting structure shows an impressive exterior and remarkable interior spaces, some of them of

them now unused. Above all, the great hall that contained the huge generators or dynamos is now empty. Suggestions for reuse could point the way toward making this extraordinary interior into one of the great public spaces in New York, and recent changes in the area might support reuse of the underutilized portions of the interior for purposes that would turn the building into a source of income that could enable adequate long-term maintenance and possibly even restoration of missing or destroyed elements of the exterior."

Ed goes on to say:

"The importance of the Powerhouse to the first subway in New York is reflected in the amount of space given to an elaborate treatment of the advanced technology of the building in the third chapter of the commemorative book, *The New York Subway*, produced after the subway opening. This makes clear both the dominant role played by technical requirements and the skills of the engineers that resolved them in shaping the interior spaces and the general form of the building."

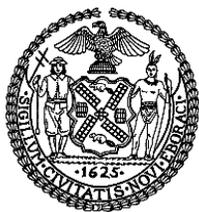
Community Board 4 urges that designation be no longer delayed. The building is important both for its historic importance and for its impressive architectural quality. And, we hope, for the potential its interior spaces offer to one day enrich New York City.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jd", is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Jean-Daniel Nolan
Chair, Clinton / Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee

Enclosure



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JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

October 6, 2008

Hon. Robert Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building 9th Floor
One Center Street
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Former IRT Powerhouse
59th Street and Route 9A**

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing to reaffirm its long-held support of the designation of the former Interborough Rapid Transit Powerhouse as a New York City landmark and to welcome the recent initiative of the recently created Powerhouse Group in pursuing this designation and in seeking new uses for the underutilized interior spaces of the building.

The importance of the powerhouse to the first subway in New York is reflected in the amount of space given to an elaborate treatment of the advanced technology of the building in the third chapter of the commemorative book, *The New York Subway*, produced after the subway opening. This makes clear both the dominant role played by technical requirements and the skills of the engineers that resolved them in shaping the interior spaces and the general form of the building.

An interesting passage on page 74 reads, "Several plans were taken up looking to the construction of a power house of massive and simple design, but it was finally decided to adopt an ornate style of treatment by which the structure would be rendered architecturally attractive and in harmony with the recent tendencies of municipal and city improvements from an architectural standpoint. At the initial stage of the power house design Mr. Stanford White, of the firm of McKim, Mead & White, of New York, volunteered his services to the company as an advisor on the matter of the design of the facework, and, as his offer was accepted, his connection with the work has resulted in the development of the present exterior design and the selection of the materials used."

The resulting structure shows an impressive exterior and remarkable interior spaces, some of them of them now unused. Above all, the great hall that contained the huge

generators or dynamos is now empty. Suggestions for reuse like those of the Powerhouse Group could point the way toward making this extraordinary interior into one of the great public spaces in New York, and recent changes in the area might support reuse of the underutilized portions of the interior for purposes that would turn the building into a source of income that could enable adequate long-term maintenance and possibly even restoration of missing or destroyed elements of the exterior.

Community Board 4 recognizes that the present moment may not be ripe for such improvements; but we urge that designation be no longer delayed. The building is important both for its historic importance and for its impressive architectural quality. It is risky to rely on the presumably still existing standstill agreement to protect the building indefinitely, and it is essential to ensure preservation of the exterior and, we hope, the interior spaces it encloses until a time when the proposals of the Powerhouse Group might be the seeds for future uses that may truly enrich New York. The IRT Powerhouse must not be defaced or lost.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jd', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4

c.c.
The Power House Group



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JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

April 2, 2009

Hon. Robert B. Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building, ninth floor
One Center Street
New York NY 10007

Re: Con Ed Powerhouse at 59th Street

Dear Chair Tierney,

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing to express its serious concern about the series of events that appear to be culminating in the destruction of the sole remaining historic chimney on the former IRT Powerhouse, now owned by Consolidated Edison, at the west end of 59th Street in Community District 4. The original stacks added considerably to the effect of the building, and the very tall modern stack at the east end is quite different in character. The gradual loss of the original stacks has changed the visual character of the building and blurred its significant original function.

Recently we wrote to you reconfirming our longstanding support for the designation of this impressive building, which is important not only for the design of its exterior by Stanford White but also as a monument of the history of transportation and technology in New York City. We remember that at the last hearing on designation of the building in 1990 the then Chair of the Commission accepted as an alternative to designation the agreement to make no significant change of the building without giving sufficient notice to the Commission for it to take action.

It is clear that this "standstill agreement" has not worked. There have been some changes over time, whether before or after calendaring the powerhouse, including the removal of the cornice; but above all most of the historic stacks have been lost. The Board has quite recently learned from Landmark West that the Commission recently signed off on the demolition of "Stack 5," which materials from several sources indicate was the last remaining original stack, even if it appeared to have lost some of its top. The justification alleged for this action is reported to have been a claim that the stack had become dangerous. Demolition is currently underway.

The process that leads to a "Notice of Review" as permission to proceed instead of a permit after landmark designation has clearly been a failure in this case, and not here alone. The historic character of the powerhouse has been diminished by the gradual loss of its original chimneys, at least in part due to lack of maintenance. The Board is concerned that the cumulative effect of seemingly minor changes as well as lack of adequate maintenance of the exterior threatens the character of this major structure. The process for Notice of Review is far less intensive that that

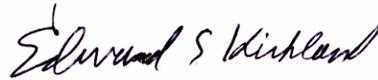
for a Certificate of Appropriateness, and there is no room for public participation, even awareness. There seems to be no legal means to compel exterior maintenance or considered review of minor changes for a building that has not been designated. We believe the Commission should, if it is still possible, take immediate action to stop the demolition of this last stack, and must in any case proceed to prompt designation of the powerhouse and full review of all changes and issues of maintenance.

The example of the slow decay of New Brighton Village Hall warns us that even designation will not in itself save a building in the absence of the will to take action, while on the other hand the recent laudable action to save the Windermere from deliberate neglect shows that appropriate and effective action can be taken against an owner much farther away than Con Ed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jd' with a stylized flourish.

Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair, Manhattan Community Board 4

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Edward S Kirkland' in a cursive script.

Edward Kirkland
Chair, Landmarks Committee

c.c.
Council Member Gale Brewer
Community Board 7
Landmark West
Powerhouse Group



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CHRISTINE BERTHET
Chair

Jesse R. Bodine
District Manager

April 16, 2015

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North
New York, NY 1007

re: Landmark Backlog Process

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) applauds the decision by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to postpone the administrative action to de-calendar a number of sites, including two in the Clinton neighborhood of Manhattan Community District 4 (MCD4). While we understand the pressing need of LPC to address the large number of calendared sites, we welcome LPC's February 23, 2015, announcement that it will seek public input on the backlog.

The two sites in MCD4 which were slated to be de-calendered are the Interborough Rapid Transit Powerhouse on West 59th Street and the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin at 448 West 56th Street.

The IRT Powerhouse, now owned by Consolidated Edison, is not only important for the design of its exterior by Sanford White but also as a monument of the history of transportation and technology in New York City. This Board has long advocated for its designation as a New York City landmark (see attached letter from October 6, 2008).

The Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, a handsome Beaux-Arts style building completed in 1903 for a Catholic charity, remains one of the most outstanding examples of the style in the Clinton community.

It is important that these sites be brought to a public hearing, that the public be allowed to comment on their merits, to insure a clear, consistent, and transparent, designation process and, if warranted, that the LPC respond swiftly and approve their designation. We support Borough President Gale A. Brewer's plan calling for moving items to designation and providing a 60-day noticing requirement to ensure transparency and public discourse.

Background

The Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) has the power to designate landmarks under the 1966 Landmarks Law. Landmarks include Historic Districts, Scenic Landmarks (Central Park),

Individual Landmarks (Brooklyn Bridge) and Interior Landmarks (Lobby, Film Center Building).

The first step toward designation is being placed on the calendar for a hearing. However, no hearing date actually needs to be set. There are no set timeframes or milestones in the same way ULURP has in order for an item to be officially designated.

There are approximately 100 items that have been on the calendar for five years or more, and some of these items date back to 1966. In November 2014, the LPC proposed removing these items from the calendar in an administrative action with no regard to merit.

LPC's decision in February 2015 to postpone the administrative action to de-calendar a number of sites was a welcome decision to this Board.

We look forward to a public hearing on the two items in MCD4 where we can comment on the merits of both items.

Sincerely,



Christine Berthet
Chair



Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair, Clinton / Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee

cc: Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Corey Johnson, City Council
Hon. Helen Rosenthal, City Council