

Protecting Community Through Historic Preservation



Dear Neighbor,

Our community's rich history is embodied in buildings, green spaces and streetscapes. These elements contribute to a sense of place and certain expectations about our quality of life—

light, air, traffic, and proportions of residential and commercial use, among others. Protecting these attributes along with our cultural, social, and architectural history is an important and worthwhile goal.

In these difficult economic times, it is especially important to grasp those rare opportunities when government can have immense impact with little or no cost. Historic preservation presents just such an occasion with the potential for great reward. In the past, our neighborhoods have received fewer public resources and less attention than others in the borough. A recommitment to preservation can begin to address those inequities so that we may maintain our quality of life and ensure the unique quality of our neighborhoods for future generations.

In addition, a growing number of studies suggest that preservation of solidly-built structures dating prior to 1920 may also be environmentally responsible.

We live in neighborhoods with some of the most unique and consistent architecture in Manhattan. Unfortunately, these areas have yet to be granted the protections they deserve.

I was a founding member of the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee in 1996, and as a member of Community Board 9 I fought vigorously for the district's designation. That activism continues today. While the City's Landmarks Preservation Commission has so far refused to calendar a hearing, I have moved forward with applications to the New York State Historic Preservation Office regarding the significant buildings in and near Morningside Heights.

You may also be interested in another proposal spearheaded by the West End Preservation Society (WEPS). WEPS has filed a formal request for the Landmarks Preservation Commission to evaluate and designate a historic district along the West End Avenue corridor from West 70th Street to West 107th Street.

2010 marks the 45th anniversary of the city's Landmarks Law which defines a historic district as an area that has a "special character or special historic or aesthetic interest," represents "one or more periods of styles of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of the city," and constitutes "a distinct section of the city." The Morningside and West End Avenue applications qualify without a doubt, and I am proud to support both.

Very truly yours,

Daniel O'Donnell
Assembly Member

MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS

Academic Acropolis

In June 1996 the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee, a community group which included O'Donnell and other neighborhood activists, was formed to work towards preserving Morningside Heights' architectural heritage and ultimately securing a historic district designation. To date, there has been no commitment from the Landmarks Preservation Commission to even calendar a hearing, despite overwhelming community support and activism for more than thirteen years.

Situated between two Olmsted-designed public spaces with scenic landmark designation (Morningside and Riverside Parks), the Morningside Heights neighborhood is characterized by architecturally-unified apartment houses and single-family row houses in juxtaposition with major institutional complexes. Given the nickname "Academic Acropolis," the neighborhood's history is a narrative of the interactions between the residential and institutional.

Consistency of architectural styles is the result of the majority of Morningside Heights being erected in a single burst of development between 1900 and 1915, enabled by the extension of the IRT subway line. Young designers and architects applied Beaux-Arts styling to 10-to-12-story apartment houses. In its infancy, Morningside Heights became New York City's first middle-class apartment house neighborhood, with upper middle-class households settling in impressive twelve-story apartment buildings on Broadway, Riverside Drive, Claremont Avenue, and Cathedral Parkway. Less prosperous households moved into more modest six- to eight-story buildings on side streets and Morningside Drive. The neighborhood was marketed as the "high-class apartment house district" and remains mostly first-built historic structures with few non-contributing buildings.

Morningside Heights has long been a cultural center as home to numerous important figures in the arts, literature, civil rights and politics, either as residents or through institutional affiliations.

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Remembering...

CAROLYN KENT

On August 22nd, 2009, preservation activist and founding member of the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee Carolyn Kent passed away. Her death is a great loss to our neighborhood and the larger preservation community. Carolyn's commitment to public service as a member of Community Board 9 and her tireless efforts on behalf of the designation of a historic district in Morningside Heights are well-known to many.



Overwhelming Support

To date, Assembly Member O'Donnell has secured letters of support for the district from Congressman Charles Rangel, Public Advocate Bill de Blasio, State Senator Eric Schneiderman, City Council Member Inez Dickens, Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, the Trust for Architectural Easements, the Preservation League of New York State, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Landmark WEST, Westsiders for Responsible Development, and many individual constituents. Community Board 9 has passed resolutions in support and has included designation of a comprehensive district in Morningside Heights in its recently completed 197-a land use plan.

Development Pressures

Morningside Heights has seen incredible development pressures in recent years and is in desperate need of the protections afforded by historic district designation. Besides over-development and potential institutional expansion, the threats to existing buildings are many, including the gradual erosion of character by the removal of cornices and other ornamentation, weathering, and improper maintenance. The development possible in the absence of historic designation could very well change the neighborhood's character and the quality of life its residents enjoy.

301 Buildings

Because this application has lingered for over thirteen years, Assembly Member O'Donnell submitted a series of applications, including hundreds of photographs and extensive building research, to the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO) to determine whether buildings in Morningside Heights meet the eligibility requirement for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The Assembly Member is thrilled to report that 301 buildings have been deemed significant by NYSHPO, including every building originally meant for residential purposes in Morningside Heights as well as additional buildings along Riverside Drive as far down as West 106th Street.

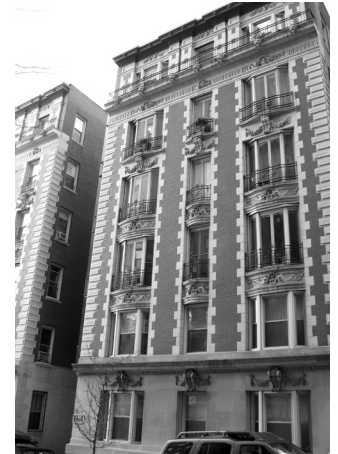
While these buildings met the criteria, the cooperation of a majority of the property owners would still be necessary to move forward with an official listing of any site or district. These determinations obtained by O'Donnell should bolster the already compelling argument for the Landmarks Preservation Commission to finally calendar a hearing.



The Britannia at 527 West 110th Street is ornamented with whimsical grotesque figures. Built in 1909, the building's façade features projecting bays, tall gables, and spectacular multi-paned windows as if an English manor house had been expanded vertically.



100 Morningside Drive. Buildings along Morningside Drive were meant to match the grandeur of those along Riverside Drive.



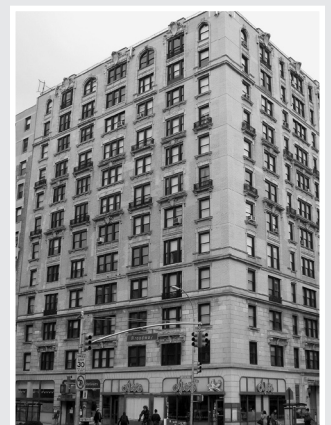
Fowler Court, 400 Riverside Drive, built in 1908.



Building detail, 610 West 116th Street.



Copper bays embellish the front of the Rensselaer building at 536 West 113th Street (1909).



The Rexor at the southwest corner of 116th and Broadway, dating to 1911. A lintel above the 116th Street entrance is emblazoned with a "JP" for Joseph Paterno, representing one of the most prolific building families in the Upper West Side and Morningside Heights. The Paternos were so proud of their buildings that the facades of some of their grandest works feature their initials—"P" for Paterno, "JP" for Joseph Paterno, or "PB" for Paterno Brothers.



New York City firehouse dating from 1889 at 500 West 113th Street.



Colonial-inspired rowhouses (1897), 619-627 West 113th Street.

Sites Eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places

Assembly Member O'Donnell submitted four successful applications to the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO). Based on those applications, NYSHPO determined that 301 buildings were eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Alongside previous determinations, a majority of properties in Morningside Heights have been deemed architecturally significant. Despite local support, the City's Landmarks Preservation Commission has refused to calendar a hearing for local designation.



The shaded areas represent buildings and districts eligible for listing on the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places. The areas that are darker with bold boundaries were recently determined eligible in response to applications filed by Assembly Member O'Donnell.

WEST END AVENUE

An Apartment House Boulevard

West End Avenue, extending from West 70th Street north to West 107th Street, is one of the premier residential boulevards of New York City. The first phase of development on West End Avenue, largely dating from 1885 to 1900, brought fine, upper-middle-class, single-family row houses with a few somewhat larger French flats and several impressive institutional buildings. From 1910 to 1930, many of the earlier buildings were replaced with impressive apartment houses, most rising twelve to sixteen stories. This rapid transformation is fairly unique in New York's development history and resulted in a cohesive streetscape.

In July of 2007 the West End Preservation Society (WEPS), a grassroots community group, was formed in response to the news that four brownstones on the Avenue were in danger of being demolished. In this short span, WEPS has laid the groundwork for a designation of a historic district by securing the support of all of the local elected officials, hosting a town hall meeting, tabling at community events and commissioning a 260-page survey of buildings along West End Avenue, completed by Andrew Dolkart in 2008. Assembly Member O'Donnell is proud to support their efforts.

The remaining single-family row houses, the only physical history that remains of the Avenue's initial phase of growth, are under threat. The most recent demolition of 732-734 West End Avenue is only the latest development that underscores the very real need for historic district protection both here and in Morningside Heights.

If you are interested in supporting the efforts of the West End Preservation Society, please visit www.westendpreservation.org.



A Beaux-Arts style apartment building at West End Avenue and West 105th Street, near the northern end of the proposed West End Avenue Historic District.



At 850 West End Avenue stands this neo-Renaissance style French flat. Its entrance is supported by paired Ionic columns and its façade is adorned with intricate details.

STAY INFORMED!

If you'd like to receive further updates about progress, community meetings, and other ways you can help please provide your email address, mailing address and telephone number to **odonneld@assembly.state.ny.us** or call **O'Donnell's district office at 212-866-3970.**

Assembly Member O'Donnell will continue to fight for Historic District designation in Morningside Heights and to support the efforts of the West End Preservation Society. If you'd like to know more about the New York State Historic Preservation Office, please **visit <http://nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/>**.

BENEFITS OF A HISTORIC DISTRICT

The benefits of historic designation are both tangible and intangible. Historic preservation promotes neighborhood stability, protects the investments of owners and residents, promotes public recognition of architecturally and historically significant buildings and districts, promotes more innovative use of materials, encourages greater public appeal of new buildings, and boosts tourism. Landmarked properties, particularly residential properties in designated historic districts, typically increase in value over the long term.

It is becoming increasingly clear that historic preservation is also environmentally sound policy because it encourages the preservation of building materials and reduces the use of energy associated with wholesale demolition and construction. The National Trust for Historic Preservation reports that “it takes about 65 years for an energy efficient new building to save the amount of energy lost in demolishing an existing building.” Data from the U.S. Energy Information Agency finds that buildings constructed before 1920 are actually more energy-efficient than those built at any time afterwards—until 2000.

There is a common misperception that a historic district or landmark designation prevents new construction altogether. In fact, designations only create an additional level of public review, ensuring that new development or modifications are appropriate and contextual.

Financial incentives are available to help purchase, maintain and restore historic properties. City, state and national preservation offices as well as non-profit organizations offer grants, low-interest loans and tax incentives, which often make it economically feasible to rehabilitate or restore solidly-built structures as opposed to demolishing them and constructing new buildings.

Just this year, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed into law an enhanced historic preservation tax credit. The enhancements will gradually increase the cap on credits, target the credit in “distressed” areas, and offer the tax credit as a rebate for lower-income homeowners. The goal is to stimulate investment in urban neighborhoods, create jobs, increase property values and revitalize historic areas.

PHOTO COLLAGE KEY:

1. Stately apartment building at 501 West 110th Street overlooking the Cathedral Church at St. John the Divine.
2. Building detail, 612 West 115th Street.
3. Row houses at 860-872 West End Avenue including five Neo-Renaissance buildings designed by the noted architecture firm Neville & Bagge.
4. Details on the Hendrik Hudson, 611 Cathedral Parkway.
5. 838 West End Avenue, showcasing extraordinary terra cotta details in horizontal bands.



Morningside Heights is home to many outstanding examples of rowhouse architecture. Following the extension of the IRT, construction of speculative multi-unit apartment buildings dominated.



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Manhattan Valley • Morningside Heights
Upper West Side • West Harlem



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