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14 July 2009

Hon. Robert B. Tierney, Chair
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Designation of West-Park Presbyterian Church

Dear Commissioner Tierney,

West-Park Presbyterian Church is a remarkable building for many reasons which you and your fellow commissioners and staff are fully familiar. The building is significant for its architects, Leopold Eidlitz and Henry Kilburn, for the founders and Presbyterian ministry established on the upper West Side in the 1850's, the many volunteers who have set up programs ranging from culture to health and welfare, and for its character, rare use of red sandstone and distinctive French Romanesque style. It is a delightful visual symbol and focal point along Amsterdam Avenue and when I see the spire, I know I am almost home.

I have been familiar with this building on many levels. First, as a neighborhood resident, second, working with the Friends of West Park and a host of other concerned professionals to seek ways to restore and adaptively re-use the building as a house of worship along with other potential and compatible cultural arts and education partners, and lastly, as a member of Community Board 7. I have been in all areas of the building from the basement to the attic. There have been some modest changes to be sure, but the compartments and worship spaces are intact with vestiges of subtle changes over time, that have modified only the interior decoration and specific room uses. The exterior, as with so many sandstone buildings shows its age in some spalling and weathering -- varying from a few localized severe deteriorated areas to the majority of the surfaces which are in good condition. The building cannot be considered building irretrievable as many have speculated, particularly when compared to other buildings of this age which have been neglected, abandoned or ruined. Until a few years ago, the building was occupied and on track for a phased interior upgrading of the various building systems, also not unexpected.

The purpose of landmarking, from my point of view, is to inform, educate and draw attention to the structure; to use all of the financial and technical support mechanisms available for recognized and designated structures, for this building to have the opportunity to benefit from assistance with any type of repair and rehabilitation effort that only designated structures are eligible for. I am aware of the various and deep felt concerns that designation brings limitations, and that the preservation bureaucracy prevents freedom and flexibility for the owners. Preservation is not only about the bricks and mortar but about our cultural heritage and the achievements that buildings represent in the distinctive use of materials, craftsmanship, art and decoration. Preservation also maintains diversity of our urban streetscape and creates anchor for neighborhoods.

Consideration of this building, to join the ranks of other New York City designated landmarks has been a long time in the making. This is a day of celebration for many and I share and fully support the proposed designation.

Sincerely yours,

Page Ayres Cowley, FAIA, RIBA, Leed AP

cc: Mayor Michael Bloomberg
Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Honorable Linda B. Rosenthal
Honorable Eric T. Schneiderman
Honorable Scott Stringer
Honorable Gale A. Brewer
Honorable Jessica S. Lappin
Honorable Christine Quinn