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Robert Tierney, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Tierney and Commissioners:

I wish that I could be present at this important public hearing on West Park Presbyterian Church, but I am working with students in Amman, Jordan. I support the designation West Park as an individual landmark with great enthusiasm.

The West-Park Presbyterian Church is simply one of the most beautiful religious structures in New York City. The bold massing of this Romanesque Revival style building, the soaring tower anchoring the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and West 86th Street, and the extraordinary deep red sandstone cladding combine to create a building of singular power.

The history of the congregation encapsulates that of many Protestant churches in New York City, as its congregation moved north to neighborhoods like the Upper West Side and sought to build an architectural distinctive building on a prominent site. The Park Church purchased the notable corner of Amsterdam Avenue and West 86th Street (one of the neighborhood's wide cross-town streets) in 1882. The architect Leopold Eidlitz was commissioned to design a small chapel on the eastern end of the site, along 86th Street.

The Upper West Side's population increased dramatically in the late 1880s and the Park Presbyterian Church soon outgrew the small chapel. The main church was begun in 1889. Henry Kilburn was commissioned to expand Eidlitz's chapel design and the two structures fit together seamlessly. It is possible that Eidlitz's chapel was brick and that Kilburn had it refaced to match the larger sanctuary building.

The West-Park Presbyterian Church is a boldly massed French Romanesque inspired building faced with a deep red Longmeadow sandstone trimmed with red Lake Superior sandstone. At the time of its completion, this was a highly fashionable building. The massing, rock-faced stonework, and heavy round arches reflect an interest, during the 1880s, in the employment of medieval Romanesque forms. The unusual stonework indicates a new interest in the use of earth-toned materials in the 1880s. Although Longmeadow sandstone was used on several houses in New York City, this is the only church that has been identified with a facade that employs this magnificent material.

The church was designed to be a landmark in the neighborhood – a beacon to worshipers who could see this dramatic building from a great distance. The church building has been an important anchor on a prominent Upper West Side corner for well over a century and it continues to be one of the most beautiful religious structures in the neighborhood. It deserves landmark designation as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



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