



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

252 East 11th Street
New York, New York 10005

(212) 475-9585
fax: (212) 475-9582
www.gvshp.org

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Anthony C. Wood

March 17, 2010

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
224 West 30th Street, Suite 1206
New York, NY 10001

Re: Landmark Designation of West Park Presbyterian Church, Manhattan

Dear Speaker Quinn:

I write to strongly urge you not to overturn the landmark designation of West Park Presbyterian Church when it comes before the City Council. I understand that there is an organized campaign to persuade the City Council to overturn the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation of this structure, which seems to be based upon false premises regarding the landmarks law and its applicability. While the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation rarely comments upon landmarks issues outside of our area, we are deeply concerned that if the Council were to overturn this designation based upon the arguments being advanced, it would set a dangerous precedent and severely compromise the effectiveness of the New York City landmarks law.

The basic argument for overturning this designation hinges upon the notion that religious properties should not be landmarked without owner consent. This flies in the face of well established case law as well as state and federal law, and if true would prevent the city from saving any religious structure from demolition, no matter how precious or historically significant, if its owners preferred to demolish it. This would be a devastating loss to our city's history and heritage.

Landmarks designation of religious structures is carefully tailored so as not to in any way interfere with the free practice of religion. Interiors are not landmarked or regulated; changes to religious iconography are not proscribed; needs for changes in response to essential activities are typically accommodated.

There are of course legitimate concerns which religious institutions have regarding landmark designation of their properties and challenges which they face, often relating to financial need. That is why there are several sources of grants and loans available specifically for landmarked historic religious properties. That is also why under the law if churches or other religious institutions can demonstrate that they cannot fulfill the obligations of landmark designation, and must demolish or alter their structure due to financial need or fulfillment of their charitable mission, they can receive permission to do so through a hardship application.

For all of these reasons, overturning this landmark designation would be a terrible mistake with potentially devastating consequences. If you wish to discuss this matter further, please don't hesitate to contact me. But I hope you will ultimately uphold the landmark designation of West Park Presbyterian Church.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Berman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Andrew Berman
Executive Director

CC: Councilmember Margaret Chin
Councilmember Rosie Mendez
City Council Land Use Committee
City Council Landmarks Subcommittee
Landmark West!



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March 17, 2010

City Council Member Rosie Mendez
237 First Avenue, Suite 504
New York, NY 10003

Re: Landmark Designation of West Park Presbyterian Church, Manhattan

Dear Councilmember Mendez:

I write to strongly urge you not to overturn the landmark designation of West Park Presbyterian Church when it comes before the City Council. I understand that there is an organized campaign to persuade the City Council to overturn the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation of this structure, which seems to be based upon false premises regarding the landmarks law and its applicability. While the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation rarely comments upon landmarks issues outside of our area, we are deeply concerned that if the Council were to overturn this designation based upon the arguments being advanced, it would set a dangerous precedent and severely compromise the effectiveness of the New York City landmarks law.

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Landmarks designation of religious structures is carefully tailored so as not to in any way interfere with the free practice of religion. Interiors are not landmarked or regulated; changes to religious iconography are not proscribed; needs for changes in response to essential activities are typically accommodated.

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Andrew Berman
Executive Director

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March 17, 2010

City Council Member Margaret Chin
165 Park Row, Suite 11
New York, NY 10038

Re: Landmark Designation of West Park Presbyterian Church, Manhattan

Dear Councilmember Chin:

I write to strongly urge you not to overturn the landmark designation of West Park Presbyterian Church when it comes before the City Council. I understand that there is an organized campaign to persuade the City Council to overturn the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation of this structure, which seems to be based upon false premises regarding the landmarks law and its applicability. While the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation rarely comments upon landmarks issues outside of our area, we are deeply concerned that if the Council were to overturn this designation based upon the arguments being advanced, it would set a dangerous precedent and severely compromise the effectiveness of the New York City landmarks law.

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