

Testimony of the Municipal Art Society
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
By Melissa Baldock, Kress/RFR Fellow for Historic Preservation and Public Policy
Designation of the West Park Presbyterian Church, 165 West 86th Street, Manhattan
July 14, 2009

I am Melissa Baldock, speaking on behalf of the Municipal Art Society's Preservation Committee in support of the designation of the West Park Presbyterian Church on Manhattan's Upper West Side at the corner of West 86th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. The Municipal Art Society is a private, non-profit membership organization that fights for intelligent urban planning, design, and preservation through education, dialogue and advocacy.

We are pleased that the Commission's calendar today includes West Park Presbyterian Church, an imminently endangered and important historic church near the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District that has long been a preservation concern for the surrounding community. The complex retains the original Romanesque chapel, designed by architect Leopold Eidlitz in 1883. The later addition, designed by Henry F. Kilburn, incorporated the earlier chapel along with the new sanctuary and bell tower and was completed by 1889. The church is strikingly clad in red sandstone, which accentuates the rusticated stonework and Romanesque detail so skillfully executed here.

Like many ecclesiastical buildings of this time, West Park Presbyterian was planned as a neighborhood anchor and continues as such today. This corner building stands out as a magnificent remnant of the neighborhood's 19th century development amidst the later residential buildings surrounding it. MAS is pleased to join the local community in advocating for the protection of this exemplary example of New York City's religious architecture and commends the Commission for recognizing the long-term preservation effort that brings us here today.