

WEST PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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WEST PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH was the anchor building of the neighborhood when the Upper West side historic district was defined. Professors Landau and Dolkart and I laid out the borders. At the designation hearing held in the Universalist Church, the then minister had a tantrum and demanded the building be excised from the final LPC district. Now, almost two decades later, it is time to empower the church with landmark designation.

The Park Presbyterian Church may have been the first organized religious institution in the region. The congregation strove valiantly to build a modest church twice before the dynamic new minister was able to find the money, seemingly from his own family, to build the wonderful sandstone Richardsonian building we so enjoy today. The congregation when faced with a sinking building and engulfing new streets did not give up on their institution. They persevered and created a beautiful symbol of their mission.

Sadly, religious institutions throughout Europe and America now face the daunting task of keeping the mission and their buildings. But selling to a developer is not the only solution.

The founders of The Park Church are surely turning over in their graves now. A condominium tower holds no mission for the neighborhood. NO congregation in a puny space in a luxury tower ever succeeds. People do not want to worship in the bottom of a symbol of financial excess. In an effort to respect and honor the 154 -year -old congregation, let us attempt to work with the ideals of the church founders, not take the easy method of escape.

The City's architectural historians at Columbia and NYU have been unanimous in begging for the future of this building. West Park qualifies for the National Register and New York State standards. We are not speaking for a marginal structure. There is no question of the quality of this building.

The founders did not look for an easy path. The situation is different today, but an effort to work with other congregations and the community might well yield a happy solution for all. All that is needed is some willingness to cooperate which designation of the building will make happen.

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