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March 16, 2010

Hon Brad Lander
New York City Council Member
456 Fifth Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11215

Dear Council Member Lander,

I write in support of the City Council's approval of landmark status for West Park Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. It is a powerful and imposing presence on West 86th Street, one of Manhattan's main thoroughfares. The deep earth-red church adorned with arches, multiple pointed roofs, and a tower stands serenely amid the flat-roofed, rectangular, putty-colored buildings that surround and tower above it. Thus, not only is the building itself impressive, its situation makes it all the more striking. One can hardly imagine a more incongruous but felicitous juxtaposition, and as such, West-Park is a perfect symbol for the role houses of worship play in the towns and cities in which they are built.

Societies all over the world have always brought the best of themselves—the greatest artists and architects and the most astounding technology—to the building of their houses of worship. The massive stones dragged for miles from far away quarries, the intricate carvings, the ceilings, the windows, the jeweled accoutrements, the many hundreds of years it took to build the structures, and the many hundreds more it took to rebuild after fires and calamities, still strike us today as astounding. Chartres, Notre Dame, St. Peter's Basilica, the Speyer Cathedral, the Blue Mosque, and the Spanish Synagogue in Prague still stand as a testament to this.

This concentration of beauty and demonstration of prowess are not only a European and Middle Eastern phenomenon, however. It is one we encounter right here in New York City as exemplified by West-Park and many others. It seems as though the first thing an ethnic group did when it wanted to assert itself in New York was to pour its substance into a house of worship and thereby give physical expression to its deepest held aspirations. In New York, one still cannot walk for more than a few blocks without encountering Synagogues, Greek, Russian, Armenian Orthodox Churches, Mosques, Quaker Meeting Houses, Lutheran, Episcopal, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Hungarian Catholic, German Catholic, French Catholic, Irish Catholic, Italian Catholic, Lithuanian Catholic, and African Methodist Episcopal Churches among an infinite

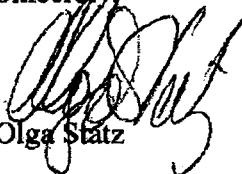
variety of others. These houses are a visible sign of a community's identity, presence, and strength. Their fantastic shapes and meticulous ornamentation stand in stark contrast to the often utilitarian and sometimes poor residential and business structures that surround them.

These houses were the communities' place to live, their place to die and their place to mark the significant events in their lives, hence the house's often very rich historical, cultural, social, and political significance. Thus, to tear down a house of worship in the city is to tear down a significant, living, and visible piece of one of the many communities that make up our city and to erase one of their significant achievements. It is also to deprive the city of the strange but happy architectural juxtapositions for which it is known all over the world.

It is therefore important for the public authorities to look at the big picture, and not just respond to this crisis piecemeal as church after church goes down. It is time for the Council, in cooperation with church leaders and congregations around the City, to take a pro-active and thoughtful look at long-term solutions that balance the needs of church members and those of the citizens of this City--the "people" to whom Administrative Code Section 25-301 (a) refers who would face "the irreplaceable loss ... of the aesthetic, cultural, and historical values" embodied in our magnificent church buildings. This, however, will only be the result of research, planning, and dialogue and never that of lurching from crisis to crisis.

I urge the Council to approve the landmarking of West-Park Presbyterian Church, and to begin to explore ways of developing a coherent and cooperative method of handling issues facing sacred spaces in our great city.

Sincerely,



Olga Stätz

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April 1, 2009

Hon. Robert B. Tierney
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10007

Dear Commissioner Tierney,

I write in support of West-Park's being designated a landmark. It is a powerful and imposing presence on West 86th Street, one of Manhattan's main thoroughfares. The deep earth-red church adorned with arches, multiple pointed roofs, and a tower stands serenely amid the flat-roofed, rectangular, putty-colored buildings that surround and tower above it. Thus, not only is the building itself impressive, its situation makes it all the more striking. One can hardly imagine a more incongruous but felicitous juxtaposition, and as such, West-Park is a perfect symbol for the role houses of worship play in the towns and cities in which they are built.

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I urge the Commission to officially designate the West-Park Presbyterian Church a New York City Landmark.

Sincerely,



Olga Statz