

**Landmarks Preservation Commission Public Hearing
On Proposed Designation of
West-Park Presbyterian Church
West 86th Street and Amsterdam Avenue
July 14, 2009**

LANDMARK WEST! is a not-for-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify emphatically with the conviction of everything I know to be good and true in support of designating West-Park Presbyterian Church as a New York City Individual Landmark.

Even as I say those words, I can hardly believe the day has come. Not that any of us lost hope—hope is too strongly ingrained in preservationist DNA. But, the magnitude of this public hearing is not lost on a single person in this room. Today we have the opportunity to remedy what Robert A.M. Stern recently called “a serious mistake” made nearly 20 years ago, back in 1990, when the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District was designated, with over 2,000 buildings, but without West-Park Presbyterian Church.

Back then, when the West Side preservation movement was new with only a handful of Individual Landmarks and small Historic Districts under its belt, designating a religious structure over owner opposition proved too heavy a lift. And so, West-Park (on West 86th Street and Amsterdam Avenue), First Baptist Church (on West 79th Street and Broadway) and Holy Trinity Church on (West 82nd Street near Amsterdam), all on the edge of the proposed district, were left out of the final designation.

In 20 years, designating sacred sites hasn't gotten any easier. And so this Commission is all the more to be congratulated for taking the historic step of holding a public hearing on West-Park now. You have taken the future of this site into your hands. Thank you. Mindful, however, of the “landmarks limbo” created when a building is calendared or heard but not designated, we urge you to move quickly to designate West-Park, which, beyond question, more than meets the standard for Individual Landmark status.

Architectural scholars agree that West-Park is a building of singular power, a rare example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, one of the most beautiful religious structures on the Upper West Side.

Experts marvel at the exemplary use of materials and the building's exceptionally high level of integrity.

Support for designating West-Park comes from leaders of religious institutions who know first-hand the challenges and rewards of caring for a historic building. Support also comes from residents of neighborhoods throughout the city who know first-hand the irreparable damage that losing a historic religious building can inflict on a community.

Upper West Siders recognize West-Park as one of our neighborhood's most valuable assets. A beacon, an anchor, a public monument to faith, tolerance, beauty and community are words regularly used to describe West-Park. Because of its prominent location on the corner of West 86th Street and Amsterdam, it has a sculptural presence—unlike most New York City buildings, West-Park is visible “in the round.” The entire site—including the chapel originally designed by Leopold Eidlitz in 1884 and the sanctuary expansion by Henry F. Kilburn in 1890—these parts must be designated whole, with the clear understanding that any future changes to any part of this site must be submitted to the thoughtful scrutiny of the Landmarks Commission and community via the Certificate of Appropriateness process.

Each of us is haunted by memories of buildings lost because it was too late. Twenty years is a long time, but it's not too late for West-Park. Please act swiftly to grant this building the landmark protection it so justly deserves.