

March 10, 2010

Hon. Brad Lander  
New York City Council  
465 Fifth Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Dear Councilman Lander:

As Chair of the Subcommittee on Landmarks, I strongly urge you to resist the efforts of those seeking to overturn the recent decision to landmark the West Park Presbyterian Church, northeast corner of Amsterdam Avenue and West Eighty-Sixth Street. Make no mistake, the church complex, including both Leopold Eidlitz (1823-1908)'s mid-block chapel (1884) and Henry F. Kilburn (1844-1905)'s main sanctuary and tower (1889) anchoring the corner, are landmarks of the highest order, a fact that must remain paramount when reviewing any attempt to reverse the Landmark Preservation Commission's ruling, a judgment not lightly considered. The pair, by important and prolific practitioners whose work has unfortunately often met the wrecker's ball (including the relatively recent loss of Kilburn's Colonial Club on West Seventy-second and Broadway where my architectural practice was once housed), work remarkably well together. These are distinguished and robust works of architecture that well represent their time, icons of the late nineteenth century that we can ill afford to lose. They are also beautiful and urbanistically adroit, giving identity to an important corner site.

Unfortunately, the church complex has been allowed to somewhat deteriorate, perhaps in deliberate anticipation of its full or partial demolition, but it can certainly be restored to its original glory, aided by an active community dedicated to a beloved landmark.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Stern', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert A. M. Stern, FAIA

RAMS/fjtp

March 24, 2009

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

Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Dear Commissioner Tierney:

I am writing to lend a strong voice of support for the proposed landmark designation of the West Park Presbyterian Church complex, northeast corner of Amsterdam Avenue and West Eighty-sixth Street, including both Leopold Eidlitz (1823-1908)'s mid-block chapel (1884) and Henry F. Kilburn (1844-1905)'s main sanctuary and tower (1889) anchoring the corner. Eidlitz's handsome chapel was designed with expansion in mind, influencing the stylistic direction of Kilburn's design for the main sanctuary that culminates in a powerful tower crowned by a steep, ribbed, bell-shaped dome. The pair, by important and prolific practitioners whose work has unfortunately often met the wrecker's ball (including the relatively recent loss of Kilburn's Colonial Club on West Seventy-second and Broadway where my architectural practice was once housed), work remarkably well together. These are distinguished and robust works of architecture that well represent their time, icons of the late nineteenth century that we can ill afford to lose. They are also beautiful and urbanistically adroit, giving identity to an important corner site.

In 1990 the Commission made a serious mistake when it jagged the boundary lines of the Upper West Side-Central Park West Historic District to exclude the West Park Presbyterian Church. Fortunately, Eidlitz's and Kilburn's buildings are still here nearly two decades later, providing the Commission the opportunity to rectify that error, even as the church buildings have been allowed to deteriorate, perhaps in deliberate anticipation of a demolition that the Commission needs to prevent through its deliberative processes. I urge the Commission to act quickly and officially recognize the West Park Presbyterian Church complex for the landmark that it clearly is.

Very best,  
  
Robert A. M. Stern, FAIA