

MAYOR MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG

On Historic Preservation and the Landmarks Preservation Commission

On August 1, 2001, then-Mayoral Candidate Michael Bloomberg appeared before an audience of over 150 preservationists to address the future of historic preservation and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. His appearance was the last in a summer-long series of breakfast forums at which each candidate appeared separately and was asked, in particular, to address the four points of the Preservation Platform (copy attached). Since April 2001, over 125 organizations from all five boroughs signed on to support the Platform.

The following selected quotes were extracted from the live recording of the Bloomberg breakfast (the full, unedited transcript is available on the LANDMARK WEST! website).

On the Importance of the New York City Landmarks Law

“This is the Big Apple. This is the center of the world. We have to think big, and we have to think forward. And thinking big and forward includes taking whole districts and preserving them.”

“We have to have the ability to protect what we already have.”

“We in America are always looking forward, and there’s nothing wrong with that as long as you understand that when you want to preserve what came before us, you have to devote some of the resources that would let you do new things ... to the old.”

“I am a permanent resident of this City, so what happens to it—particularly what happens to its landmarks and its parks and its economic development—impacts me directly. I live in a landmark building, a townhouse on 79th Street on the east side...”

On the Need to Encourage Citizen Support of Historic Preservation and the Landmarks Law

“Preservation is not just sitting there and designating a building and saying this is great, this is our heritage, this is what we should save. Preservation is also about the practical aspects of maintaining buildings and doing the kinds of preventive things that are very easy to postpone, particularly in economic down turns.”

“I am not in favor of preserving every single building at the expense of economic development nor am I on the other side of that, but I certainly am in favor of having a set of laws that people can understand, have some input in their development and then enforcement ... my message, I guess, is we’ve got to find some balance.”

“... in the end what government has to do is to find ways to attract private capital to build in this City, and to be the watch dog to make sure that you protect neighborhoods; that you get great architecture ...”

On the Importance of a Well-Funded and Independent Landmarks Preservation Commission

“Landmarks is like your top management and organization, that’s where you really want to spend your money. If you’ve great people and structures at the top, it filters all the way down.”

“We have to support Landmarks. We have to give Landmarks a budget that will give them some enforcement capability. All of the rules and regulations that everybody talks about always leaves

me cold when I then go out to the streets and see that it is totally meaningless. ... The implementation is what's hard."

"Landmarks has one inspector for a city of 8 million people ... and we just have to do something about that."

"My main objection to Landmarks is any organization that can't enforce it's rules and regulations is just not contributing the way it should be ... all you need to know about Landmarks is that they've got one inspector for the whole city. Unless there's an enormous amount of waste which is kind of hard to believe, given this group, you really do have to give them some money and it's not going to be, in the grand scheme of things, anything that's going to bust the budget."

"I think there's a whole bunch of small agencies that we've cut back—Landmarks is certainly one of them—where we've been penny wise and pound foolish. They're small things that don't really have any great impact on the budget and you can argue that they're symbols and everybody should bear the pain, but there are certain things which like this you're doing a lot of damage long term, so you could increase Landmarks budget at the same time you deal with a fiscal crisis. Hopefully we won't have a fiscal crisis. As economic times get worst and tourism is down ... that's the time you want a strong Landmarks ..."

On the Need for Tax Incentives to Building Owners for Restoration Work on Historic Properties

"You've got to give tax rebates ... I'm in favor of Pataki's Bill [the Historic Home Rehabilitation Assistance Tax Credit].... You've got to find an incentive for people to do what we'd like them to do."

On the Need for Zoning Reform that Reinforces and Complements Historic Neighborhoods

"We've got to make sure that the zoning laws of this City are consistent with what organizations like Landmarks want to do. We've got to make sure that the tax policy encourages the kind of activities that we'd like. We've got to constantly measure and make sure that the policies that we're trying to implement are actually working."

On the Qualifications of a Future Chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission

"I think that you have to have somebody running Landmarks that has the respect of the constituency that they serve. Any Mayor who puts somebody in the position where there're not liked and respected, just is asking for an organization to not work ... in the end the Mayor has to pick somebody who they agree with philosophically and who they think is a team player. ... I would make sure that the person I picked ... [would be a] team player, smart person, somebody whose philosophy I agree with. Somebody who certainly is knowledgeable. You have to have somebody that knows the subject, and it doesn't have to be a preservationist, for example, but if you don't have a good knowledge of this City and the issues and the importance of preserving what's right, balanced and being able to work with the economic development people, you've got the wrong person."