Candlelight Vigil – Former First Church of Christ, Scientist (361 CPW)
Monday, May 23, 2016

Kate Wood Remarks

Neighbors. Fellow New Yorkers. Everyone of us who cares about the well-being of our neighborhoods, the integrity of our government, and the laws designed to protect the quality of our lives. Thanks to all of you for coming out tonight.

I am Kate Wood, speaking on behalf of the Upper West Side grassroots advocacy group LANDMARK WEST!. We’re here, in solidarity with neighbors and colleagues from near and far, to honor and call attention to this building, the former First Church of Christ, Scientist, a designated New York City Landmark, designed by the architects Carrere & Hastings, who also gave us the main branch of the New York Public Library. For over 100 years, this building has stood proud on this corner, a beacon in our community, a gift we received from generations past that we are responsible for passing down to our children.

Not everyone sees it this way. Developers bought this building and now seek to stuff it full of condominiums—34 condominiums, to be precise, the equivalent of a high-rise within these walls, with penthouses on the roof. Original stained glass attributed to important 19th-century artists will be removed. That window up there will be blank glass. New windows will be carved into the façade, most extensively on the façade directly facing neighbors’ existing windows, less than 10 feet away in some cases.

You may ask, how is this possible? How can a Landmark like this be at risk of such desecration by speculative development? The fact is, such development is not possible, except through the exploitation of the so-called “hardship” process. This developer claims that there is absolutely no way to make reasonable use of this building without a slew of exemptions from laws intended to protect our quality of life and rights as citizens.

Not that this developer even tried to find a reasonable use. Instead, he hired the City’s top grossing lobbyist and political donor—Capalino + Company—to influence City agencies and commissioners appointed by Mayor de Blasio—to get approvals, the nonexistent merits of the case be damned.

With us here tonight are neighbors, elected officials, members of the congregation who feel that this church was sold out from under them and want to come home, and colleague groups who not only care about the fate of this Landmark, but also the future of our city. Nearly 1,000 of you have signed the petition—if you haven’t, do it tonight. Find someone with a clipboard. Together, we say, “Enough!” to the kind of business as usual, pay-to-play politics that destroy our neighborhoods and make it nearly impossible for communities to fight back against greed.

I say “nearly” because this isn’t a done deal. There is a public hearing on June 2—we hope the last, there have been many. The decision about whether this project goes forward is in the hands of the Board of Standards & Appeals. They can do the right thing and deny this. Thank you for being here tonight to help us underscore why this decision is so important.