**Attorney Michael Hiller**

Thank you very much. I’ve been a land use and zoning attorney representing communities and neighborhoods in the city of New York for the last 20 years. And when I started out, we got phone calls and complaints from residents once every three or four months until Mike Bloomberg became mayor. At which point, the calls and complaints started to increase in frequency to once every week or two. When de Blasio won the mayor’s office, we were convinced that everything would change and it did. But, not the way we expected. Today, we get phone calls everyday from residents of the city of New York concerned about over-development, out-of-control development, and concerns that political payoffs have impacted land use and zoning decisions in their neighborhoods. My friends, whatever lofty goals and aspirations that Mayor de Blasio may have had when he ran for mayor, he seems to have abandoned them now that he has the office. The concern we had about the privatization of public assets and how he would fight the real estate developers to prevent the privatization of public assets, that fight is not being taken up by the City of New York today. My friends, that fight has to be taken up by each and every one here today and each member of every community in the City of New York. We have to stand together, and we have to fight because my friends, we are the ones who have to make it happen. The fight my friends begins tonight and I can’t think of a better place than this beautiful and revered religious institution: The First Church of Christ, Scientist.

As we heard from Charles Warren, the eminent, architectural historian, this is a very, very special church. Designed by Carrère and Hastings, it was designated an individual landmark in 1974, and for its entire existence, it has had one purpose: it has been a church. It has provided for the religious and spiritual needs of its congregation and congregants for the past hundred plus years, and it must remain that way. So, why are we here? Thank you. So why are we here? We are here because two developers have convinced the Landmark Preservation Commission that this building can be used for only one purpose. For the first time in a hundred years, they have decided it can only be used for one thing: residential, luxury condominiums. That’s all it can be used for. Let’s leave aside the fact that it’s never been used for that purpose ever before. How did that come about? Well after mayor de Blasio took office, the Landmark Preservation Commission approved a plan to convert this building. My friends, this would be an absolute disaster. And what really concerns me is how it came about because, as was pointed out earlier tonight, lobbyists on behalf of these two developers have been instrumental not only in affecting land use and zoning decisions at this location, but also at Rivington House downtown, and also at Long Island College Hospital, and 346 Broadway where the oldest clock tower of its kind left in the world received an approval from the Landmark Preservation Commission to convert that building, including the clock tower itself, into residential, luxury condominiums. The first time that’s ever happened in the City of New York. Thank goodness that the people of that neighborhood fought, and won, and stopped that development, and stopped that conversion. And we have to do the same here. We have to stand together. It’s not going to be enough for all of us to get on social media, to go on Facebook and talk to our friends and say ‘isn’t this terrible.’ We need to do more than that. In the great words of Robert F. Kennedy, “It is not enough to understand or to see clearly. The future will be shaped in the arena of human activity by those willing to commit their minds and their bodies to the task.” So I ask all of you to commit your bodies and minds to the task. On June 2nd, before the Board of Standards and Appeals, I will be there. The Central Park Neighbors Association will be there. LANDMARK WEST! will be there. The people from Fresh Start, New Beginnings, the congregation that should be in this church will be there. We will all be there, standing together to fight this variance. And let me tell you something, I have been doing this for 20 years, I have never seen a variance as weak as this one is. It meets none of the legal requirements. That’s why they had to hire that lobbyist, because they can’t win it on the law. We have to win it by our power, by the political might of this community, by great leaders like Mark, like LANDMARK WEST!, Charles Warren. We have to stand together, and fight this. The fight begins tonight and it continues on June 2nd. I hope that you’ll all be there. Thank you very much.