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President
David Mulkins

May 17, 2018

Vice Presidents
Michele Campo
Jean Standish

Why the LPC needs a qualified Chair that respects its mission to safeguard the city's historical, cultural and architectural heritage

Secretary
Sally Young

Dear Mayor de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Glen and Speaker Johnson,

Treasurer
Jean Standish

Landmarks Committee Chair
Mitchell Grubler

My name is David Mulkins. In addition to teaching high school history in NYC for 25 years, I'm a 37-year resident of the Lower East Side and co-founder of the **Bowery Alliance of Neighbors**, a non-profit grassroots organization working to protect residents, small businesses and the historic character of the Bowery, which is New York City's oldest street. BAN formed in 2007 in reaction to out of scale development and the destruction of some of the area's oldest structures. In addition to getting the Bowery Historic District listed on both the State and **National Register of Historic Places**, we recently launched *Windows on the Bowery*, a highly praised series of 64 historic signage posters displayed in storefronts up and down the Bowery.

Co-Founders
Anna L. Sawaryn
David Mulkins

Board of Advisors:

Simeon Bankoff
Executive Director
Historic Districts Council

In September 2017, the Bowery Alliance of Neighbors, with support from Historic Districts Council; author Anthony C. Wood (*Preserving New York*), Andrew Dolkart (Prof of Historic Preservation, Columbia University) and former LPC Chair Kent Barwick, submitted an RFE to the LPC for a modest 2.5 block stretch of the Bowery. The Bowery is New York City's most architecturally diverse and historically significant streetscape. Encapsulating hundreds of years of history, it was a Native American footpath, Dutch farm road, site of the city's first free African American homesteads, Washington's triumphal march route during the British Evacuation, and site of Lincoln's epochal anti-slavery speech at Cooper Union. Stretching 1.5 miles from Chatham Square to Cooper Square, the Bowery was the multi-cultural stomping ground for gangs, gays, the working class, and immigrant Irish, Italian, Chinese, Germans and Jews. It has seminal links to tap dance, vaudeville, Yiddish theater, Stephen Foster, Irving Berlin, Harry Houdini, modern tattooing, community gardening, Abstract Expressionism, Beat literature, improvisational jazz and punk rock.

Kent Barwick
President Emeritus
Municipal Arts Society

Leo Blackman
Architect

Kerri Culhane
Architectural Historian

Doris Diether
Zoning Consultant

Eric Ferrara
Historian & Director
Lower East Side History Project

Pi Gardiner
Executive Director
Merchant's House Museum

Michael Geyer
Architect

Bob Holman
Poet & Proprietor
Bowery Poetry Club

Rich in historical and cultural information along with an architectural survey, our RFE reflected the social and cultural landmarking priority that Chair Srinivasan herself laid down in 2016:

Joyce Mendelsohn
Historian/Writer/Educator

Mick Moloney
Musician, Historian

Luc Sante
Historian

“We protect historic sections of the city not only for their architecture but for their social and cultural patterns that give insight into New York City’s development history.”

More recently, Chair Srinivasan also said this:

“One of the things that I’m very proud of is that we’ve put more emphasis on cultural landmarks. That’s been very important to me, because it has given us the ability to talk about more abstract things that are not necessarily related just to buildings, but are really important to the history of New York.”

We were thus deeply dismayed that our RFE on NYC’s oldest street was rejected in just a short week’s time. We are dubious that our RFE was reviewed at all or passed down to the staff for input. We know for a fact from staffers who were in the room when Chair Srinivasan instructed them to “take off their preservation hats”, that standard operating procedure under Chair Srinivasan is that she manages the “pool” of designation applications, with the Commissioners and staff often left in the dark on matters large and small. We strongly believe the Bowery rejection was one of the results of Chair Srinivasan’s autocratic acts, most recently involving the rule change proposal to move much of the LPC’s work behind closed doors and out of the hands of the Commissioners and public purview.

While we are happy that Srinivasan—who has no experience in preservation—has stepped down, it is absolutely imperative that Mayor de Blasio appoints a Chair who not only is qualified in the field of historic preservation, but who will also not break the rules and work behind the scenes to bury applications. It is for this reason we strongly recommend current Commissioner Michael Devonshire to replace Srinivasan, on both an interim and permanent basis as Chair.

I have attended many LPC hearings, and Commissioner Devonshire is always the first to speak about prioritizing restoration and respecting the historical context and integrity of buildings and districts. Being a practicing architectural conservator—whose work includes the Morris-Jumel Mansion and the Merchant’s House Museum—he is the most knowledgeable about the city’s unique architectural resources and the intricate process of restoring old buildings. Also, as a professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture and Planning and Historic Preservation, Commissioner Devonshire has enormous depth of knowledge regarding all of NYC’s historic properties. The last thing NYC needs is another unqualified leader of the LPC who will continue Srinivasan’s legacy of opposing the recommendations of the expert preservation groups like Historic District Council, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation etc. Please consider our recommendation for Chair of the LPC and help us get a new Chair who has expertise in the field of historic preservation and who will play by the rules, respect transparency, and carry out the LPC’s mission to preserve NYC’s historical and architectural heritage.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Mulkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being more prominent than the last name "Mulkins".

David Mulkins
President, Bowery Alliance of Neighbors

cc:

City Council Land Use Chair Rafael Salamanca
City Council Landmarks Subcommittee Chair Adrienne Adams
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
Erik Bottcher