



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

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December 1, 2014

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Planned Mass De-Calendarling of Buildings

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

As you know, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, the largest membership organization in Greenwich Village, the East Village, and NoHo, strongly objects to the planned mass de-calendarling of approximately one hundred structures, proposed to be voted upon without any public hearing or any discussion of the merits of each site. In addition to our fundamental objections to this action and to the process by which it is to be undertaken, we raise strong objections to the de-calendarling of the four sites that are located within our catchment area or about which we have previously commented: **57 Sullivan Street, 138 Second Avenue, 2 Oliver Street, and 801-807 Broadway, the former James McCreery & Co. Store.**

Each of these sites is eminently worthy of consideration for landmark designation, and their de-calendarling as part of a mass action with no consideration of the sites' considerable merits does a great disservice to our city's architectural and cultural heritage, which the Landmarks Preservation Commission is charged with preserving and protecting:

57 Sullivan Street is a federal style house built in 1816-1817, and is one of the oldest surviving houses in Lower Manhattan. We believe it is the oldest house in the South Village, and maintains many of the most significant features of this first architectural style of the newly-born American republic. Though altered somewhat in the 19th and 20th centuries, these alterations are typical of the era, reflect the ongoing evolution of life in New York, and are consistent with those alterations found on other individually landmarked federal houses in New York. This house was one of thirteen federal houses the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and the New York Landmarks Conservancy proposed for designation in 2002, and was heard by the Commission in 2009, after first being calendared in 1970. Designation of the house enjoyed strong support from the local community board, local elected officials, neighbors, and preservation organizations across the city. The rationale for de-calendarling this house without comments completely escapes us.

2 Oliver Street is also a federal style house, built in 1821, with a third story added around 1850. Its simple design and features reflects

characteristics representative of many such federal-era residences, and the third story addition is done in a manner quite typical for such early relics of New York's first wave of urban development. The building is additionally significant for having served as the home of James O'Donnell, one of the first trained architects in America. O'Donnell worked on the nearby Fulton Street Market while living at 2 Oliver Street, and later moved to Montreal to design the Basilica of Notre Dame. Like 57 Sullivan Street, 2 Oliver Street was one of thirteen federal houses proposed for landmark designation by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and the New York Landmarks Conservancy in 2002, and like 57 Sullivan Street, this proposed designation enjoyed strong support from local elected officials and preservation organizations. There is absolutely no rationale we can see for de-calendaring this building at this time, and would instead urge the Commission to move ahead with a vote to landmark.

138 Second Avenue, also a federal-style house, was built in 1832 by Thomas E. Davis, a prolific developer of grand, late-federal style houses in the East Village, few of which survive today. Of those which do survive, Nos. 4 and 20 St. Mark's Place have both also been designated individual New York City landmarks. 138 Second Avenue bears much in common with these houses, including the handsome and elaborate Gibbs door surround, the Flemish bond brickwork, and the impressive scale of the house. 138 Second Avenue was, according to a 1916 New York Times article, the home of the League of Foreign-Born Citizens, a "non-racial, non-sectarian organization, founded in 1913, for the purpose of interesting the immigrant in civic affairs and inspiring those who had not been naturalized to take steps towards making themselves American citizens... owing to the gift of \$1,500 from Mrs. Vincent Astor...the League...is enabled to move into a new clubhouse [at 138 Second Avenue]... from the old headquarters with only one-fifth that capacity at 82 Second Avenue." The building was actually proposed for landmark designation by the Commission itself in 2009, and has since been beautifully restored. 138 Second Avenue is a rare intact link to the days when this stretch of Second Avenue was one of the premiere residential addresses in New York. Its alteration with added stories when converted to multi-family use, and small commercial addition in front, reflects the Lower East Side's transformation by immigrants, and the emergence of Second Avenue in the early 20th century as the "Yiddish Rialto," one of New York's most vibrant entertainment centers. At the time of the hearing in 2009, the proposed designation of 138 Second Avenue enjoyed strong support from the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and other local East Village and preservation organizations.

The former James McCreery & Co. Store at 801-807 Broadway is a cast-iron loft building constructed in 1868, which carries considerable significance not only as one of New York's most prominent and luxurious commercial emporia of the 19th century, but as facilitator of the transformation of Lower Manhattan in the late 20th century from manufacturing district to residential neighborhood. Designed as one of

New York's most opulent Second Empire structures, through the early 20th century 801-807 Broadway housed one of the city's most fashionable and prestigious dry goods stores serving upscale female consumers. As a result of this layer of the building's architectural and cultural significance, in 1966 it became one of the first structures in New York City to be considered for individual landmark designation by the Commission. But in 1971, before a vote on designation took place, a fire spread through nearly the entire structure. Fortunately, true to its reputation, the building's cast iron facades were able to withstand the blaze. Plans were nonetheless announced to demolish the lofts and replace them with a high-rise, spawning protests from neighbors and preservationists such as Margot Gayle's Friends of Cast Iron. In response, the Board Standards and Appeals granted variances that, for the first time, made adapting a cast iron structure such as this to residential use feasible and legal, thus paving the way for a slew of similar such conversions in Lower Manhattan and throughout New York that would follow. The residential adaptation utilized the original large, arched windows, interior Corinthian cast iron columns, and high ceilings, creating 144 apartments, each of which was unique. While the building lost its Second Empire Mansard roof through this process and gained a new, setback rooftop addition, much of the structure's original cast-iron façade from the 19th century remains intact. At the same time, the late 20th century alterations reflect one of the most consequential and influential building transformations in Lower Manhattan and New York of the last half century, thus making 801-807 Broadway arguably of even greater significance now than when it was first calendared by the Commission in 1966.

To de-calendar any of these four buildings would be incomprehensible, especially if done in the proposed manner. But the merits of these four structures also speak to the broader shortcomings of the proposed mass de-calendaring, and its failure to include and consider input from the public or even the individual merits of each site.

I therefore urge you in the strongest of terms not to de-calendar these four items, and to instead move ahead with consideration of them for individual landmark designation. I further urge you to set aside the entire proposed mass de-calendaring action, and instead pursue a case-by-case consideration of the merits of each of these sites, allowing public input and affording appropriate advance notice to enable the concerned public to participate in a full public hearing and review process.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

Cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
City Councilmember Margaret Chin
City Councilmember Corey Johnson
City Councilmember Rosie Mendez
Community Boards 2, 3, & 4, Manhattan
New York Landmarks Conservancy
Historic Districts Council