



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES
REGARDING DESIGNATION of the WILLIAMSBURGH TRUST COMPANY BUILDING
October 19, 2016

Good morning Chairs Koo, Greenfield and Committee Members. My name is Lauren George, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Affairs at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Williamsburgh Trust Company Building (Fifth District Magistrate's Court / Holy Trinity Cathedral) at 177-185 South 5th Street, built in 1905-6; Architect Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell, Borough of Brooklyn, Block 2446, Lot 63.

On February 8, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Ukrainian Church in Exile (Holy Trinity Cathedral) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 64). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three representatives of the building's owner testified in opposition to the proposed designation, and representatives of the American Institute of Architects and Municipal Art Society, spoke in favor of the proposed designation.

On October 8, 2015, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a special public hearing on Backlog Initiative Items in the Borough of Brooklyn, including the Williamsburg Trust Company Building (Ukrainian Church in Exile Holy Trinity Cathedral) (Item II—Borough of Brooklyn Group, C). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A representative of the owner spoke in opposition to the proposed designation. Eight people spoke in favor of the proposed designation, including representatives of Council Member Antonio Reynoso, the Guides Association of New York City, Historic Districts Council, Municipal Art Society, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Society for the Architecture of the City, and Victorian Society in America. The Commission also received seven written submissions in favor of the proposed designation, including letters or emails

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair



from Community Board 1, the Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance, and the Waterfront Preservation Alliance.

Completed in 1906, the Williamsburgh Trust Company Building is a monumental Neoclassical style bank building recalling Williamsburg's industrial prosperity of the 19th and early 20th centuries and the historic role of its surrounding area as a commercial and financial hub serving Williamsburg, Greenpoint, and Bushwick. Designed by Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell, major Brooklyn architects who designed some of the borough's most significant early-20th-century banks and park structures, it initially served as headquarters of the Williamsburgh Trust Company, which enjoyed considerable financial success following its founding in 1899. It is a superlative example of the luxurious "banking temples" constructed in Manhattan and Brooklyn starting in the late 19th century, featuring two classical porticos with acroteria on its two street facades, as well as a saucer dome recalling that of the Pantheon. Originally intended to stand in isolation, the building is remarkable for its four fully developed classical facades as well as its unusual facing material of white glazed terra cotta. The building's opulent design and prominent location at the entrance of the then-new Williamsburg Bridge drew admiration from the press, which described it as a "superb new edifice" that was both "extravagant and palatial."

Shortly after the building's opening, the Williamsburgh Trust Company was rocked by the Panic of 1907, and it served its last customer in 1910. Five years later, the building was acquired by the City of New York as part of a broad effort to reform the city's court system and improve Brooklyn's courthouses, and from 1916 to 1958, it served as Magistrates' Court for the Fifth District of Brooklyn. The building's cross-shaped plan and central dome made it attractive for conversion to an Orthodox church, and in 1961, it was acquired by the Holy Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church in Exile which renovated it to serve as its Holy Trinity Cathedral. Since then, the church has diligently and sensitively maintained the building, enabling this lavish structure to endure as one of Williamsburg's most prominent and imposing buildings. Accordingly, the Landmarks Preservation Commission urges you to affirm the designation. Thank you.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

1 Centre Street, 9th FL, New York, NY 10007 ♦ 212-669-7855 ♦ www.nyc.gov/landmarks

FOR THE RECORD

October 18, 2016
John Jurayj
429 South 5th street
Brooklyn NY, 11211

LU 0493-2016

WILLIAMSBURG TRUST CO. BUILDING (UKRANIAN CHURCH IN EXILE/HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL), 177 South 5th Street, Brooklyn
Landmark Site: Brooklyn Block 02446, Lot 0063

I unequivocally urge the City Council Sub Committee on Landmarks to affirm and uphold the designation of the former Williamsburg Trust Company Building at 177 South 5th street as an NYC individual landmark. I have worked for over ten years as a resident of the council district towards this designation, first with the former council member and now with Antonio Reynoso. The building itself has waited more than 40 years for this day. Just one glimpse of this structure and everyone is convinced of its merits. It sells itself.

The building was built in 1905 across from Continental Army Plaza, a park completed in conjunction with the construction of the Williamsburg Bridge in 1903, rendering a small patch of the City Beautiful era in this otherwise gritty intersection of bridge and city grid. As described in *An Architectural Guide to Brooklyn* by Historian Frances Morrone, “The Williamsburg Trust Company, the dome of the Williamsburgh Savings Bank, Shardy’s equestrian statue of George Washington—it is given to so few places, not only in New York but in the world, to have individual elements of such beauty in their midst, yet here there elements, so worth seeking out, are buried in steel, soot, chaos and clangor.”¹

The architect, Frank J. Helmlé, worked in the firm of McKim, Mead and White before opening his own office in Williamsburg and partnering with architects Huberty and Hudswell. The firm’s masterpiece is St. Barbara’s Roman Catholic Church in Bushwick, which is also under consideration for individual landmark designation, along with several other Brooklyn banks including the Greenpoint Savings Bank and the Williamsburgh Savings Bank. Helmlé’s later career as the Superintendent of Public Buildings of Brooklyn bestowed his gift of the Boathouse in Prospect Park, as well as commissioning 42 firehouses in New York City.

The Williamsburg Trust Company Building remains remarkably intact despite its long history of adaptive reuse. This building is one such product of development spurred by

¹ Francis Morrone, *An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn*, (Gibbs Smith, 2001), 226.

the opening of the Williamsburg Bridge, but the bank went under only 10 years later in 1915, and at that time, the building was converted to serve as the Fifth Districts Magistrates Court. When the New York City court system changed, the building was rendered obsolete for that purpose and in 1961, a Ukrainian immigrant population bought the building and has had an active congregation ever since. I understand that the congregation has some concerns about the designation and urge the subcommittee to remember that hundreds of religious structures within New York City have been successfully designated landmarks either individually or as part of historic districts without negative consequences to a congregation. In fact designation opens up air rights receiving sites that were originally unavailable and increase funding and grant opportunities for the congregation. I urge the subcommittee to designate this little piece of Beaux Arts beauty at the foot of the bridge. This building has served a variety of people and uses over the course of a century, and landmark status will secure its future as the City continues to change around it.

Sincerely,
John Jurayj

THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY

October 19, 2016

STATEMENT OF THE NEW YORK LANDMARKS CONSERVANCY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES REGARDING THE DESIGNATION OF THE WILLIAMSBURGH TRUST CO. BUILDING (HOLY TRINITY CHURCH OF UKRAINIAN AUTOCEPHALIC ORTHODOX CHURCH IN EXILE), 177-181 SOUTH 5TH STREET, BROOKLYN AS AN INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK

Good day Chair Koo and Councilmembers. I am Andrea Goldwyn, speaking for the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Conservancy is pleased to support the designation of the former Williamsburgh Trust Co. Building, Holy Trinity Church of Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church in Exile as an individual landmark. We thank the elected officials who have supported this designation, the Landmarks Commission for bringing this item forward after a long term on its calendar, and the congregation that rescued and revitalized this stunning building.

The Williamsburgh Trust Co. Building has reflected Brooklyn's history in over a century of use. Distinguished architects Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell designed the neo-Classical structure in 1906, adjacent to the recently completed Williamsburg Bridge. The bank, in the heart of the commercial section of the borough, served a growing population. Following the bank's failure, the building was converted to the Fifth District Magistrates Court in 1915, in an era of court reform. In 1961 the Holy Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church in Exile acquired the vacant courthouse; it became the Cathedral for a burgeoning post-war Ukrainian community and continues as part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA.

In the Williamsburgh Trust Co. Building, Helmle, Huberty & Hudswell employed a design meant to convey success and security. The neo-Classical style, with its terra cotta dome, Ionic porticos, and ornate trim, including balustrades and projecting anthemion, is an excellent example of the "banking temples" of this era, which recalled ancient Greece and Rome. The low-scale bank was originally set in a larger, unbuilt lot, which left room to show off its four finished sides. This gesture would have given the impression of a sanctuary for wealth.

These elements served the building well in later incarnations. The classical allusions were a natural fit for a courthouse; the cross-shaped plan and dome are typical of Orthodox churches. Despite these evolving uses, the building is largely intact with few exterior alterations. While there were a series of interior changes and a period of vacancy following the closure of the court, the current owners have been excellent stewards of the property. The congregation took on a restoration of the property when they took title in 1961 and have been keeping it in fine condition ever since.

We understand that the Church opposes landmark designation now, as it did when the building was first calendared in 1966 on the same day as its landmark neighbor, the Williamsburgh Savings Bank. Among the earliest groups of items brought to the Commission's calendar, it is clear that this building has great significance to Brooklyn and the City.

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The Landmarks Conservancy works with the owners of historic buildings across the five boroughs and with historic religious properties across New York State. We recognize the difficulties that congregations face in addressing the routine maintenance of their extraordinary buildings, especially in light of critical mission needs. However, we have seen that it is very possible for these buildings and these congregations to thrive and take pride in their landmarked buildings.

Over 30 years, our Sacred Sites Program has made approximately 1,400 grants totaling \$9.6 million to 750 congregations. The size of our grants varies, from the very small to up to \$100,000. This does not address all of a congregation's needs, but it can be the wellspring for phased work, larger projects, and can inspire additional funding. The grants have leveraged \$615 million in restoration expenditures.

Our funding is not just a check in the mail. Grants always come with assistance from our professional staff, which can include answers to technical questions, referrals to skilled contractors who have experience working with religious properties, or long-term, hands-on project management. In addition, we have worked with congregations to convert LPC designation to listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, which can access State grants of up to \$500,000.

We appreciate the commitment that this congregation has shown to its building, and hope that landmark designation will rightly celebrate and laud both a fine building and a worthy institution.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Conservancy's views.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Urban Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Singer Sanyal

Address: 232 E. 11 St

I represent: HPC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren George

Address: _____

I represent: Landmarks Pres. Commission

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Owen

Address: _____

I represent: Landmarks Pres. Commission

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10/19/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Goldwyn

Address: _____

I represent: N.Y. Landmarks Conservancy

Address: 1 Whitehall St NYC

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10/19/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RICHARD LOBEL

Address: SHELDON LOBEL, P.C.

I represent: HOLY TRINITY CATHEDRAL

Address: 177-185 SOUTH 5TH STREET, BROOKLYN

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10-19-16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ANDREW OLONIMYR WRONSKY

Address: 2 BANK COURT GREENLAWN, N.Y. 11740

I represent: Holy Trinity Cathedral

Address: 177-185 South 5th St Brooklyn, 11211

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms