

Landmarks and Preservation Commission

Opening Statement – Erasmus Ikpemgbe

I would like to extend greetings to the speaker, Chair Powers, and all other council members for the opportunity to sit before this Committee. I am honored to be considered as a candidate for the New York City Landmarks and Preservation Commission.

Growing up west of the Hudson in New Jersey, I can always remember wanting to be an architect. My journey began with a bucket of Lincoln Logs given to me by my father as a child. That was followed by a formal education in the arts, and over the years I progressively gained more knowledge about the design world. During my graduate studies, I spent two consecutive summers embedded in the urban landscapes of Europe exploring art and architecture. Neighborhood fabrics, place making, cultural influence, the convergence of new and old, and adaptive reuse were major themes. These experiences greatly influenced my understanding of the built environment and assisted me in developing the necessary tools to critically examine it. Today, I identify a bit of architecture in everything and use it to help me assess the world around me. This multi-faceted profession allows for an expression that is creative, structured and aesthetically acute – which also explains my decision to reside in the culturally and architecturally rich neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn.

Currently, I run the Architectural Department at the engineering and architecture firm of Sabir, Richardson, and Weisberg. There I oversee matters specific to various disciplines, provide direction for project delivery, function as an expert technical resource, distribute information for professional development, and facilitate quality control procedures. With two decades of diverse architectural experience, I apply my competencies to a wide range of project types including transportation, institutional, mixed-use, resiliency and building assessments.

I pride myself as an interdisciplinarian and most importantly a problem solver. With these skills, I hope to bring real world knowledge about the built environment to the Commission. I am confident that my work within the public sector and with our city's infrastructure will benefit New Yorkers. I have inspected hundreds of city-owned properties, provided data for capital improvements, and worked on complex infrastructure-based projects that reside in the confines of inflexible budgets. I believe that these types of practical cost implications should be considered when making determinations that affect our city and its 8 million plus inhabitants.

I am also no stranger to the Landmarks Preservation Commission process. I converted a historically important Modernist single-family residence on the upper east side, located at 32 E. 74th Street, into a triplex residence. Working with a staff preservationist and the Commission, we were able to maintain the aesthetic integrity of the property while providing a rooftop addition and massaging the front entry to accommodate an ADA compliant elevator. Most notably, we salvaged existing steel windows, on the front and rear facades, thus celebrating their delicately articulated profiles. At the completion of the project, we were able to preserve the building's cultural significance as being one of the first Modernist structures in the city.

In 2021, I completed a six-year stint as a board member and Parliamentarian for the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA). There I focused on its mission to foster justice and equity in communities of color through outreach, community advocacy, professional development, and design excellence. Prior to that appointment, I worked tirelessly in NOMA's local New York Chapter. There we crafted valuable programming for our membership and curated introductory camps for children like Project Pipeline, a NOMA National initiative, designed to increase the number of black architects in the nation, currently at a steady 2%, by showcasing architecture as a viable career path to children who would otherwise never be exposed to the profession.

Again, it is an honor to be considered as a candidate for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I believe my diverse experience and variable skills would add value to the already illustrious Commission. If appointed, I look forward to championing the Commission's charge to protect architecturally, historically, and culturally significant buildings and sites within New York City and ensure they can meet the challenges of the future. Thank you for your nomination, and I look forward to fielding your questions.