

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & MARITIME USES

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November 23, 2009

Start: 11:45 am

Recess: 12:03 pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:
LEROY G. COMRIE, JR.
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Charles Barron
Annabel Palma
Rosie Mendez
Maria del Carmen Arroyo
Elizabeth Crowley
John C. Liu
Jessica S. Lappin

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Jenny Fernandez
Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations
Landmarks Preservation Commission

Theodore Renz
Executive Director
Ridgewood Local Development Corporation

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 3
MARITIME USES

2 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Good morning,
3 today is November 23rd, I am Leroy Comrie, I'm
4 Acting Chair for the Subcommittee on Landmarks,
5 and today we have with us Council Member Charles
6 Barron who was here first, Council Member Annabel
7 Palma from the Bronx-

8 [Off mic]

9 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Yeah--

10 MALE VOICE: Yes, please.

11 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: --Council
12 Member Annabel Palma from the Bronx, Council
13 Member--

14 FEMALE VOICE: When did she get
15 here?

16 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: She got here--

17 FEMALE VOICE: Not first.

18 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: --in a tie
19 with the other Council Member from the Bronx that
20 was here, and then Council Member Rosie Mendez
21 from Manhattan.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: And the
23 other Council Member--

24 [Pause]

25 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Huh? I know,

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 4
2 MARITIME USES

3 I was just messing with her.

4 FEMALE VOICE: Oh, okay.

5 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: So I was just-

6 -

7 [Off mic]

8 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: I was just
9 messing with Council Member Arroyo because I said
10 everybody else's name, so I just wanted to see if
11 she was awake.

12 Today we have two items that are on
13 the docket for consideration. One item is the
14 Ridgewood North Historic District and the other
15 items are all in Staten Island for 11, 13, 15, and
16 17 Westervelt Avenue House, known as Horton's Row.

17 We'll hear from Jenny Fernandez
18 from the Landmarks Preservation Commission who
19 will come and testify on the Staten Island project
20 first as we are waiting for the Council Member
21 that represents Ridgewood who is downstairs in
22 another hearing.

23 In your package you should have a
24 letter from Council Member Mitchell supporting the
25 project.

[Pause]

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 5
MARITIME USES

2 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Why don't you
3 just read 417 since the owner is here.

4 [Off mic]

5 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Yeah.

6 [Pause]

7 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: You can put
8 in--yeah, in consecutive orders and then end up
9 with 417.

10 [Off mic]

11 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Okay. And
12 turn on the mic when you're ready.

13 JENNY FERNANDEZ: Okay. Good
14 morning, Council Members, my name is Jenny
15 Fernandez, Director of Intergovernmental and
16 Community Relations for the Landmark Preservation
17 Commission. I am here today to testify on the
18 Commission's designation of 411, 413, 415, and 417
19 Westervelt Avenue in Staten Island.

20 On August 11th, 2009, the Landmarks
21 Preservation Commission held a public hearing on
22 the proposed designation as a landmark of 411,
23 413, 415, and 417 Westervelt Avenue Houses,
24 Horton's Row. Eleven people spoke in favor of
25 designation, including Council Member Kenneth

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 6
2 MARITIME USES

3 Mitchell, and representatives of the Historic
4 Districts Council, Four Borough Neighborhood
5 Preservation Alliance, and Preservation League of
6 Staten Island. In addition, the Commission
7 received one letter in support of designation.
8 The Commission previously held a public hearing on
9 this building and these buildings on October 1st,
10 1991.

11 On September 15th, 2009, the
12 Commission voted to designate 411, 413, 415, and
13 417 Westervelt Avenue individual landmarks.

14 Horton's Row, constructed between
15 1880 and 1882 by Harry L. Horton, is located at
16 the periphery of Fort Hill in northeastern Staten
17 Island at the outskirts of the villages of New
18 Brighton and Tompkinsville. Horton was a
19 prominent resident of Staten Island and had
20 established a successful banking and brokerage
21 firm in Manhattan. He was involved in Staten
22 Island's water supply and rapid transit companies
23 and was a president of the village of New
24 Brighton. Horton's Row consisted of twelve
25 identical attached masonry row houses that were
built as affordable rental houses for middle-class

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 7
2 MARITIME USES

3 families. Numbers 411, 413, 415, and 417
4 Westervelt Avenue are the only four intact houses
5 that survive.

6 The vernacular style red brick
7 houses have neo-Grec style elements and feature
8 full-width front porches, angled bay windows, and
9 cornices with dentils. The row is built on a
10 slope with each building rising higher than its
11 neighbor to create a stepped pattern of
12 architectural elements on the brow of the hill.
13 Most of the dwellings built in the 19th century
14 Staten Island were free-standing single-family
15 frame houses and so Horton's Row represents a rare
16 housing type on Staten Island--attached masonry
17 row houses.

18 The Commission urges you to affirm
19 these designations.

20 [Pause]

21 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: And the
22 designations for the properties are for the
23 exterior only?

24 JENNY FERNANDEZ: That is correct.

25 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: And you said
that they are multi-family houses now or...?

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 8
MARITIME USES

2 JENNY FERNANDEZ: Yes, they're
3 multi-level, multi-family houses, attached rows.

4 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: But each one
5 is owned by an individual or rented out?

6 JENNY FERNANDEZ: They're owned by
7 individuals and I believe there's rentals among
8 the different buildings.

9 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: And none of
10 the owners spoke in opposition [off mic].

11 JENNY FERNANDEZ: Not at the public
12 hearing.

13 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Okay. And
14 have you received any notice to your office about
15 any opposition from any of the owners after the
16 public hearing?

17 JENNY FERNANDEZ: There is one
18 owner that owns two of the houses who expressed
19 opposition verbally through conversations, but
20 didn't--there was no documented opposition to the
21 Commission, and did not testify at the hearing.

22 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Okay. All
23 right. And question? [Pause] No, I was just
24 going to ask if there are any questions, I was--

25 MALE VOICE: Oh, do you--

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 9
MARITIME USES

2 [Pause]

3 MALE VOICE: Eighteen thirty?

4 [Pause]

5 [Off mic]

6 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Eighteen
7 thirty, 1820, 1812, no record of Native Americans
8 or Africans, enslaved Africans--

9 [Crosstalk]

10 JENNY FERNANDEZ: On--

11 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: --on the
12 island?

13 JENNY FERNANDEZ: --on the island,
14 yes, of course, I'm sure there's significant
15 information. For these particular houses, there
16 was no evidence that they were attached in any
17 way.

18 [Crosstalk]

19 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: 'Cause those
20 are around 1865 for this--

21 JENNY FERNANDEZ: They were
22 constructed between 1880 and 1882.

23 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Right, which
24 is much later.

25 JENNY FERNANDEZ: Yeah, which is a

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 10
MARITIME USES

2 little later for that period.

3 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Okay. Thank
4 you. Okay, did the homeowner--did you want to say
5 anything? No? So you're in favor. Oh, okay,
6 I'll take that as a grudging yes. All right.
7 Well seeing no opposition then we can close.

8 We've been joined by Council Member
9 Crowley.

10 So we'll just hear the testimony
11 on--or we could--

12 [Off mic]

13 [Pause]

14 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Yes.

15 [Off mic]

16 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Four 17.

17 MALE VOICE: Four 17--

18 [Off mic]

19 [Pause]

20 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: All right,
21 then we can hear the testimony on the Ridgewood
22 North Historic District.

23 We've been joined by Council Member
24 Liz Crowley. Ms. Fernandez.

25 Well did you have an opening

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 11
MARITIME USES

2 statement, Council Member? You want to wait for--

3 [Off mic]

4 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Okay.

5 JENNY FERNANDEZ: Thank you. For
6 the record, again, good morning, Council Members,
7 my name is Jenny Fernandez, Director of
8 Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the
9 Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here
10 today to testify on the Commission's designation
11 of the Ridgewood North Historic District in
12 Queens.

13 On December 16th, 2008, the
14 Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public
15 hearing on the proposed designation of the
16 Ridgewood North Historic District. Six people
17 spoke in favor of the proposed designation,
18 including City Council Member-elect Elizabeth
19 Crowley and representatives of the Historic
20 Districts Council and New York Landmarks
21 Conservancy, Society for the Architecture of the
22 City, Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic
23 Association, and Greater Ridgewood Restoration
24 Corporation. There were no speakers in opposition
25 to the proposed designation. In addition, the

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 12
2 MARITIME USES

3 Commission received three letters in support of
4 this designation from City Council Member Diana
5 Reyna, the Municipal Arts Society, and the
6 Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in
7 America.

8 On September 15th, 2009, the
9 Commission voted to designate Ridgewood North a
10 New York City Historic District.

11 The Ridgewood North Historic
12 District is significant as an intact grouping of
13 structures that reflects the development of model
14 tenements in Ridgewood in the early 20th century.
15 A contiguous district in both typology and style,
16 it is composed of 96 buildings, primary three-
17 story brick tenements, that encompass almost
18 eight--I'm sorry, eight square acres in southwest
19 Queens. The tenements were constructed between
20 1908 and 1914, mainly by the G.X. Mathews Company.
21 Known as Mathews Model Flats, these new law
22 tenements had larger rooms and more adequate
23 sanitary facilities than their 19th century
24 predecessors. Built in long rows of repeated
25 designs that create a sense of place, the facades
retain a high degree of integrity and are

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 13
2 MARITIME USES

3 distinguished by their buff- and amber-colored
4 brick facades, carved-stone details, ornate
5 pressed metal cornices, and stoop and areaway
6 ironwork.

7 In addition to being innovative in
8 plan, the tenements are striking in appearance.
9 Built after 1905 when fire codes in Ridgewood
10 began requiring masonry construction for attached
11 rows, the buildings have load-bearing masonry
12 walls constructed of light-colored Kreisler
13 brick. Using mainly buff- and amber-colored
14 brick, the buildings have fine detailing in the
15 Romanesque- and Renaissance-Revival styles,
16 including corbelled, projecting, contrasting, and
17 geometric patterned brickwork, brick pilasters,
18 and contrasting brick or stone string coursing.
19 With mainly flat facades, the mid-block buildings
20 are recessed from the street wall of the corner
21 buildings, adding further interest to the row,
22 while 66-22 to 66-42 Forest Avenue feature angled
23 projecting bays. Some buildings, like those on
24 Grandview Avenue and Palmetto Street have
25 Romanesque Revival-style round and segmental
arches of contrasting brick, while others feature

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 14
2 MARITIME USES

3 carved-stone door and window lintels. Other
4 handsome details include Classically-inspired
5 carved-stone entablatures and friezes, pressed
6 metal cornices and original ironwork at the stoop
7 and areaway. The buildings facing Fairview and
8 Grandview Avenues have commercial storefronts at
9 the first floor and apartments on the second and
10 third floors, while those on the side streets are
11 completely residential. A cohesive collection of
12 speculative urban architecture, the tenements in
13 Ridgewood North Historic District retain extremely
14 high levels of architectural integrity and
15 represent an important part of the development of
16 housing in New York City.

17 The Commission urges you to affirm
18 the designation.

19 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Councilwoman
20 Crowley?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you,
22 Acting Chairman. I would urge my colleagues
23 [clears throat] excuse me--to vote in favor of
24 landmarking for this Ridgewood North Historic
25 District. It's been long-awaited and it's a
victory for the people of my community. It's a

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 15
2 MARITIME USES

3 cohesive collection of innovative and stunning
4 urban architecture. The tenements in Ridgewood
5 North District retain extremely high levels of
6 architectural integrity and represent an important
7 part of the development of housing in New York
8 City.

9 The longer we wait, the more these
10 houses change, and the size of the proposed
11 district would shrink.

12 Preserving the history of Ridgewood
13 is important for developing a sense of pride of
14 our history and for the education for future
15 generations. So I hope you will join me in voting
16 to preserve these historic structures and to
17 capture the era of Ridgewood of the early 20th
18 century.

19 And I think what's truly remarkable
20 about this historic district is that it attracts
21 modest living people. It was a home to new
22 immigrants in the early part of the 19th century
23 and is still the case today. So it's a beautiful
24 part of Queens and a beautiful part of New York
25 City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Mr. McCenz

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 16
MARITIME USES

2 [phonetic], Theodore McCenz?

3 [Off mic]

4 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Did you want
5 to speak?

6 [Off mic]

7 [Pause]

8 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Yes, you can.

9 MALE VOICE: [Off mic] add much
10 more than--

11 [Pause]

12 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Okay. All
13 right, well--

14 THEODORE RENZ: Just want to
15 mention--

16 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: [Interposing]
17 You got to--if you're going to say something, you
18 got to talk into the mic. Just for the record.

19 [Off mic]

20 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: And we've been
21 joined by Comptroller-elect John Liu. Go ahead,
22 sir, just turn on--turn off the red button, when
23 the red button goes dark, then the mic is--

24 [Crosstalk]

25 THEODORE RENZ: Okay. Good

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 17
2 MARITIME USES

3 morning. Dear distinguished members of the City
4 Council and in particular, members of the
5 Landmarks Public Siting and Maritime Uses
6 Committee.

7 If I may add something for the
8 record from the last--this statement. I also
9 testified on behalf of the Ridgewood Local
10 Development Corporation at the Landmarks hearing.
11 I don't know if it's too late to be put into that,
12 but for some reason, maybe I didn't submit a
13 formal written testimony--

14 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: [Interposing]
15 Did you identify your name? 'Cause you didn't--

16 [Crosstalk]

17 THEODORE RENZ: [Interposing] My
18 name is Theodore M. Renz, I'm the Executive
19 Director of the Ridgewood Local Development
20 Corporation, a community-based economic
21 development group in the Ridgewood area.

22 And we have always supported
23 historic designation for Ridgewood. As you know,
24 Ridgewood is one of the largest federal and state
25 historic districts in the country, something like
16 sub areas, recently a number of years ago,

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 18
2 MARITIME USES

3 Stockholm Street was designated a historic
4 district, one block, and we are working on
5 Ridgewood South as well. And, of course, we also
6 would like to count the landmarks to eventually
7 landmark all of our 2,008 some-odd buildings that
8 are in the federal historic and state district
9 presently.

10 We support, along with our
11 colleagues, the Ridgewood Property Owners and
12 Civic Association and the Greater Ridgewood
13 Restoration Corporation, adding these 96 buildings
14 to the Ridgewood North Historic District.

15 Also, the Ridgewood LDC is the
16 management agent of the Myrtle Avenue Business
17 Improvement District, which represents some 340
18 business district, business and retailers in the
19 area, and about 240 property owners. We have a
20 long-standing goal of doing historic facades along
21 our avenue with people that would agree to it and
22 would want to do that.

23 So we believe this designation will
24 add something special to Ridgewood and we urge
25 your designation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: We've been

1 COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 19
MARITIME USES

2 joined by our Chairwoman, but I'll just finish up
3 for her 'cause we're almost done.

4 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Great, thank
5 you very much--

6 [Crosstalk]

7 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Seeing no
8 opposition listed on here, there no one that spoke
9 against this at any period?

10 JENNY FERNANDEZ: No, no one spoke
11 against it.

12 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: All right.
13 And since we have everyone in favor, I would ask
14 the Chair if she would want to call a vote.

15 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: That sounds
16 like a great idea.

17 CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: All right.
18 Let's do the vote then.

19 Oh, I would recommend a yes vote on
20 both items, both the Westervelt row houses,
21 Horton's Row, 411, 413, 415, and 417, Westervelt
22 Avenue, and also the Ridgewood North Historic
23 District, Land Use numbers 1274 and through 1278.
24 I recommend a yes vote.

25 CAROL SHINE: Carol Shine, Chair to

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COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 20
MARITIME USES

the Subcommittee. Chair Lappin.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: With a big
thank you to Leroy for chairing the meeting for
me, I vote aye.

CAROL SHINE: Council Member
Barron.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I vote aye
on all.

CAROL SHINE: Council Member
Comrie.

CHAIRPERSON COMRIE: Aye on all.

CAROL SHINE: Council Member Liu.

COUNCIL MEMBER LIU: Yes.

CAROL SHINE: Council Member Palma.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Yes.

CAROL SHINE: Council Member
Arroyo.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Aye.

CAROL SHINE: Council Member
Mendez.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Aye.

CAROL SHINE: Council Member
Crowley.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Aye.

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COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING & 21
MARITIME USES

CAROL SHINE: By a vote of eight in
the affirmative, none in the negative, and no
abstentions, the aforementioned items are approved
and referred to the full committee.

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Meeting
adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Tammy Wittman, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature Tammy Wittman

Date December 7, 2009