

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND
MARITIME USES

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October 6, 2009
Start: 11:00am
Recess: N/A

HELD AT: Committee Room
City Hall

B E F O R E: JESSICA S. LAPPIN
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Maria Del Carmen Arroyo
Charles Barron
Leroy G. Comrie, Jr.
Elizabeth Crowley
John C. Liu
Annabel Palma
Gale Brewer

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

Jenny Fernandez

Director, Intergovernmental and Community Relations
Landmarks Preservation Commission

2 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Good morning
3 and welcome to the Land Use Subcommittee of
4 Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses. I'm
5 not sure who I'm talking to, but welcome.
6 Welcome, Chairs. We are joined today by Elizabeth
7 Crowley, from Queens; Leroy Comrie from Queens;
8 Maria Arroyo from the Bronx; Gale Brewer from
9 Manhattan; Annabel Palma from the Bronx and
10 Charles Barron of Brooklyn. We have two non-
11 controversial items on the agenda; one is in
12 Council Member Brewer's District, which is why she
13 has been nice enough to join us today. I am going
14 to open the hearing on that time, which is the
15 Mickey Mantle Public School, but it's a
16 landmarking, not a public siting. It is item
17 number 1239. And I wanted to offer Council Member
18 Brewer the opportunity to make some remarks.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you,
20 Madam Chair. This is a school that stands right
21 on 82nd and West End Avenue. It is a school that
22 has always been a school. For many years it was
23 for students who were not successful in other
24 environments, and now it is a school, part of the
25 District 75 community, that focuses on young

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2 people in wheelchairs and young people who have
3 physical challenges. It has a wonderful ramp that
4 goes up the side, there's a side door, and
5 actually a beautiful experience--very wheelchair
6 friendly when you get inside. It is recently
7 called the Mickey Mantle School, because he
8 himself had challenges, and the Mickey Mantle
9 family is actually very supportive of the school
10 and once a year comes up and meets with the
11 students, many of whom really wouldn't have an
12 opportunity without it. But the architecture is
13 what we're here for today. And it does stand as a
14 beautiful recognition of Architect Snyder. And I
15 think you can all read about it. And it's also,
16 and the Chair knows this, on an avenue, West End
17 Avenue, that is hopefully going to be considered a
18 historic district from 70th Street to 107th, along
19 with some side streets, by Landmark Preservation
20 Commission. So, to me this is exciting and
21 positive, because it's an example of the
22 architecture you'll read about, but also part of
23 our attempt to make that entire area more
24 historically significant and let people know that
25 that's what it is. So the entire community is

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2 supportive, and we look forward to its
3 designation, and thank you very much.

4 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Thank you,
5 Council Member Brewer. It is quite a beautiful
6 building. I think you mentioned, maybe if you
7 didn't, built between 1894 and 1896. And what's
8 interesting about it is one of the few remaining
9 19th century institutional buildings on the Upper
10 West Side. And I am looking forward to having a
11 larger discussion about the historic district on
12 West End Avenue. Do any of my colleagues have any
13 comments? Okay, seeking nobody here signed up to
14 testify, this hearing on this item is closed.

15 Thank you very much, Council Member Brewer, for
16 coming. It's nice when members come to talk about
17 items in their own districts. We always
18 appreciate that. The second item on our agenda
19 today is the former St. George's Syrian Catholic
20 Church, which is located at 103 Washington St., in
21 Council Member Gerson's district. Council Member
22 Gerson is in support of this. There is no
23 opposition to this landmarking. I'm going to open
24 the hearing. The item is number 1238. And I do
25 see that Jenny is here from the Landmarks

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2 Commission. We did one of the items without you
3 because it's almost 11:50. But you're here to
4 testify on the church. So if you could come up
5 and introduce yourself for the record and provide
6 testimony that would be great. And if you want to
7 submit written testimony on the Mickey Mantle
8 School, that would be great. We can submit that
9 into the record.

10 JENNY FERNANDEZ: Good morning. I
11 apologize for my lateness. We had a fire drill in
12 the municipal building and it's a public hearing
13 day as well, so. And I'm out of breath. Good
14 morning, Council Members. My name is Jenny
15 Fernandez, Director of Intergovernmental and
16 Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation
17 Commission. I'm here today to testify on the
18 Commission's designation of the former St.
19 George's Syrian Catholic Church at 103 Washington
20 St. in Lower Manhattan. On January 13th, 2009, a
21 hearing was held. The Landmarks Preservation
22 Commission held a hearing on the proposed
23 designation of the former St. George's Syrian
24 Catholic Church. A total of 11 witnesses spoke in
25 favor of the building's designation, including

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2 historian Maryann Hake DiNapoli [phonetic],
3 Historic Preservation Consultant; Mary B. Durak
4 [phonetic], co-author of The Financial District's
5 Lost Neighborhood; Joann Midvecci [phonetic], and
6 representatives of the Historic Districts Council,
7 Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in
8 America, Municipal Arts Society and the New York
9 Landmarks Conservancy. The Commission also
10 received several emails in support of designation,
11 including a message from Dr. Philip M. Kayal
12 [phonetic], chairman of the Department of
13 Sociology Anthropology at Seton Hall University,
14 Kathy Benson [phonetic], Curator of a 2002 exhibit
15 on Arab Americans in New York City at the Museum
16 of the City of New York; and scholar of Arab
17 American History, Paula Hajar [phonetic]. No
18 witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The
19 building's owner testified but did not speak in
20 favor or in opposition to the building's
21 designation. On July 14th, 2009 the Commission
22 voted to designate the building a New York City
23 landmark. The former St. George's Syrian Catholic
24 Church is the most significant remnant of the
25 Lower Manhattan Immigrant enclave known as The

Syrian Quarter, the mother colony of Syrians and Lebanese in America. Immigrants from the former Ottoman province of Syria, which included modern day Syria and Lebanon, began coming to this country in the 1880s and over the next 40 years thousands of them settled on or around lower Washington Street in a neighborhood that was their commercial and cultural center in the United States. Nearly half of these immigrants were Melchite Greek Catholics, who recognized the primacy of the Pope, but worshipped using the Byzantine rite. In Lower Manhattan in 1889 they formed America's first Melchite Parish. By 1925, as St. George's Syrian Catholic Church, they moved into this building, which had been purchased for their use by George E. Bardwell [phonetic], an importer of fine linens and embroideries. In 1929, the church engaged Harvey F. Casab [phonetic], a young Lebanese-American draftsman, to design a new façade for the building. Casab's vibrant neo-gothic composition executed in bright white terracotta features a polychrome relief of St. George and the Dragon and remains remarkably intact today. The building that housed the former

2 St. George's Church was constructed around 1812,
3 three stories high with a peaked roof. It served
4 as an immigrant boarding house by the 1850s. In
5 1869 it was raised to its present five-stories and
6 continued to function as a boarding house and
7 tenement until Bardwell's purchase and its
8 conversion to a church. With the decline of Lower
9 Manhattan's middle eastern population after World
10 War II, St. George's was converted to a Roman
11 rites church for a period and in 1982, the
12 building was sold to Chapel Moran Inc. [phonetic],
13 which operates a restaurant on the ground floor
14 and maintains the building and unique Washington
15 Street façade for the past 27 years. The building
16 remains Lower Manhattan's most vivid reminder of
17 the vanished ethnic community once known as the
18 Syrian Quarter and of the time when Washington
19 Street was the main street of Syrian America. The
20 Commission urges you to affirm the designation.

21 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: I didn't know
22 that history on Washington Street. That's very
23 interesting. Any questions? Okay. Thank you
24 very much, Ms. Fernandez.

25 JENNY FERNANDEZ: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: The hearing on
3 this item is now closed. Any discussion? Great.
4 I'm going to ask for the Counsel to call for a
5 vote and recommend a favorable vote on both items.

6 CAROL SHINE: Carol Shine, Counsel
7 to the Subcommittee. Chair Lappin?

8 CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Aye.

9 CAROL SHINE: Council Member
10 Barron.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Aye on all.

12 CAROL SHINE: Council Member
13 Comrie.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Aye on all.

15 CAROL SHINE: Council Member Palma.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Aye.

17 CAROL SHINE: Council Member
18 Arroyo.

19 [Pause]

20 CAROL SHINE: Council Member
21 Crowley.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Aye.

23 CAROL SHINE: By a vote of six in
24 the affirmative, none in the negative and no
25 abstentions, the aforementioned items are approved

and referred to the full committee.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: We're going to hold the hearing open for about ten minutes or so.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON LAPPIN: Sorry, hold the vote open for ten minutes or so, and the meeting is adjourned.

[Pause]

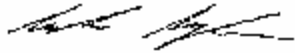
CAROL SHINE: Council Member Liu.

COUNCIL MEMBER LIU: I vote yes.

CAROL SHINE: Final vote seven in the affirmative, none in the negative and no abstentions. The aforementioned items are referred to the full committee.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Erika Swyler, 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 _____

Date October 7, 2009