

Morningside Heights Historic District Committee

**Columbia Station
PO Box 250405
New York, NY 10025
(646) 721 4651
Morningsideheights.org**

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Good evening. My name is Laura Friedman and I am the President of the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee. Thank you for allowing us to submit testimony on behalf of the Morningside Heights community.

I am a 35-year resident of Morningside Heights and have come to know and see our area as a unique neighborhood. Morningside Heights is a diverse, historic, and architecturally rich neighborhood. The area's distinctive natural and landscaped boundaries are defined by an elevated plateau bordered by two 20th-century Olmsted-designed parks: Riverside Park as the western boundary and Morningside Park as the eastern. The south boundary is formed by 110th Street and the north by 125th Street.

As diverse as we are, our community has a long history of working together to address issues that affect our neighbors. Currently Morningside Heights is allocated to both the 7th and 9th District, separated by a wandering north-south border. In your newly drawn draft plans you divide our community along an east west corridor, up the middle of Amsterdam Avenue. We ask you to recognize that the current redistricting is an opportunity for the City to restore our community to its natural boundaries with its diverse population – and to place us in one community, in one Councilmatic District.

Morningside Heights is a vibrant and coherent neighborhood.

We live amidst many fine institutions in this area and in order to coordinate the needs that they have, an organization was formed many years ago that continues to exist today. That organization is called the Morningside Alliance, which, by its own definition, seeks to foster communication and collaboration among the more than 16 major institutions that are located, or doing work, in Morningside Heights. Among them are Columbia University, which has student housing and schools on both sides of Amsterdam, Jewish Theological Seminary which has its student housing on both sides of Amsterdam, Saint Luke's Hospital, which is entirely on the other side of Amsterdam, as is the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine.

In the northern part of Morningside Heights, and creating an amazing example for the entire city, is the Sanitation Coalition. This group has been operating for 20 years and brings together our two large housing complexes, Grant Houses (a public housing project) and Morningside Gardens (originally a Mitchell Lama). This group has worked

to bring residents together to work on issues that confront both housing complexes. I have attended events that they have sponsored and we have had reports given to us about the work they are doing. Efforts like this exemplify the spirit of collaboration in our district.

Recently a very innovative organization was formed to help community members become involved with the seniors who live in our neighborhood. This organization is entirely composed of volunteers and its founding president has been recognized and awarded for her effort and commitment. The name of this organization is Morningside Village. President Irene Zola understands that aging in place is an issue that concerns us all and we all have a responsibility to help our neighbors. Just last week I attended an event that Morningside Village sponsored called *Love An Elder Day* where seniors from all over the Heights were honored and neighbors gathered to celebrate and applaud them. The seniors receiving assistance from this organization come from every part of Morningside Heights, as do the volunteers who assist and visit them regularly.

Going back to the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee, we have members from all over the neighborhood and we are working with block associations and coops from Riverside Drive to Morningside Drive, and specifically with block associations east of Amsterdam. The goal of our organization is to achieve historic district status for Morningside Heights and to preserve and maintain the historic buildings, parks and institutions that make our neighborhood the beautiful community it continues to be. If asked, each person who resides here will proudly tell you: they live in Morningside Heights.

We have worked hard to unite our community and to maintain the bridges built by such organizations as the Sanitation Coalition, the MSH Alliance, Morningside Village and many more. Drawing a Councilmatic line up the middle of Amsterdam Avenue is the contemporary equivalent of Robert Moses' building the Cross Bronx Expressway, isolating one half of a neighborhood thus creating a literal and cultural wall that segregated that area into two communities.

From our geographic layout to our dynamic community we are asking that the Commission keep us in the same council district. Please do not chop us up into political pieces, thus weakening our ability to represent our needs and making a false chasm, where it need not exist.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.