

Landmarks Preservation/Parks Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday February 5, 2014 at Broadway Housing, 135th and Riverside Drive
Meeting called to order at 6:31pm

CB9 Members in attendance: Arnold Boatner (Chair), James Amodeo, Joel Mentor, Michael Wells

Public attendees: Jeffrey Chester, Michael Adams, Eric Bjerneby, Donny Furer, Jane Gallaway, Amy Rea, Yuien Chin

Adoption of Agenda
Adoption of Minutes

Presentation:

Hamilton Theater: Presentation by Ashkenazy Acquisition Corporation regarding application at LPC to close small alleyway separating theater foyer from main theater building in the rear. LPC granted landmark status in 2000. Front of building is in C14 zoning with commercial use allowed. Developers want to convert remainder of rear portion of theater to commercial use. Bureau of Standards and Appeals application has been filed. Connector will make the front lobby section and rear theater one building. Question from Arnold Boatner: Nova Theater across the street is now retail discounter. Would this be a similar configuration? Answer: Yes, it would be some type of retail establishment. Arnold Boatner cited the desire on the part of the community to have the theater restored as a theater. Yuien Chin of West Harlem Community Preservation Organization discussed the desire of the community over the years to have the theater become a community resource center. Michael Henry Adams, community preservationist and historian, suggested construction of residential towers above the theater to offset the cost of restoring the theater.

Jeffrey Chester, attorney for the developer said that the developer had made initial inquiries with the LPC about building additional space above the theater but that the LPC had been unreceptive to the idea. Michael Adams disagreed citing several examples of landmarked buildings being saved by allowing construction of new additional space across the city. Chester said it is not economically feasible to restore the theater in the full scale of its 1857 seat capacity. Boatner pointed out that the demographics of the neighborhood have changed significantly and that the theater restoration idea might be viable. There was additional considerable discussion on the viability of a performance space in West Harlem and there was also discussion on the present condition of the interior of the main theater building. The seats in the lower level of the theater have all been removed and there is a large hole in the floor. The only remaining seats are in the balcony and are in decay. There is also a considerable amount of vandalism and graffiti.

The developer will have to present to the LPC on February 19th. There will also be at least two other presentations before CB9. There will be a presentation before the CB9 Housing and Land Use Committee in about a month as well as a General Board meeting later in the process. The developer agreed to explore an alternative option that will include restoration of the theater. Landmarks and Parks Committee members voted 4 to 0 in favor of a letter of support for the construction of the closing of the alleyway between the lobby and main theater with the provision that the owners explore the option of restoration of the theater. 2 community members expressed support for the letter and two were opposed.

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Old Business:

None

New Business:

None

Meeting adjourned at 8:19 pm
Submitted by Arnold Boatner