

TESTIMONY OF BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT MARTY MARKOWITZ ON BOROUGH HALL SKYSCRAPER DISTRICT BEFORE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION, DECEMBER 14, 2010

I WANT TO THANK LANDMARKS PRESERVATION CHAIRMAN BOB TIERNEY, COMMISSIONERS, AND AGENCY STAFF, INCLUDING THE RESEARCH UNIT DIRECTED BY MARY BETH BETTS, FOR ALLOWING ME TO TESTIFY ABOUT ESTABLISHING BROOKLYN'S FIRST COMMERCIAL SKYSCRAPER CENTER AS A HISTORIC DISTRICT.

I ALSO WANT TO THANK THE COMMISSION FOR HOLDING A HEARING LATER TODAY TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBLE DESIGNATION OF THE CONEY ISLAND SHORE THEATER AS AN INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK.

AND I WANT TO SEND A SPECIAL SHOUT-OUT TO THE BROOKLYN HEIGHTS ASSOCIATION — ESPECIALLY JUDY STANTON AND OTIS PEARSALL — FOR ADVOCATING ON BEHALF OF THESE SKYSCRAPERS AND BOROUGH HALL, AND FOR PUSHING TO INCLUDE THE NORTH SIDE OF MONTAGUE STREET.

IT WAS LARGELY THANKS TO OTIS, OF COURSE, THAT BROOKLYN HEIGHTS WAS DESIGNATED NEW YORK CITY'S FIRST HISTORIC DISTRICT.

THE AREA IN DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN UNDER CONSIDERATION IS A MONUMENT TO THE BOROUGH'S HISTORY, SHOWCASING MANY ARCHITECTURAL STYLES AND CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGIES.

AS THE COMMISSION CONSIDERS THE BOUNDARIES OF THIS DISTRICT, IT MUST DO SO IN A WAY THAT PRESERVES THE BUILDINGS WHILE RESPECTING THE WISHES OF THE PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS MAY BE AFFECTED BY THE CHANGES.

IN THAT REGARD, I HAVE CONCERNS REGARDING THE LANDMARKING OF 75 LIVINGSTON STREET, THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING, AND THE COURT STREET RETAIL CORRIDOR.

BASED ON WHAT RESIDENTS OF 75 LIVINGSTON HAVE TOLD ME, I DO NOT BELIEVE THE BUILDING SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THIS HISTORIC DISTRICT.

AS IT STANDS NOW, SINCE THIS DISTRICT HAS BEEN CALENDARED, ALL EXTERIOR WORK DONE ON 75 LIVINGSTON MUST BE APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION OR THE AGENCY STAFF, UNLESS THE BUILDING IS ULTIMATELY REMOVED FROM THE DISTRICT.

UNTIL THE COMMISSION MAKES ITS FINAL DETERMINATION, THIS BUILDING REMAINS IN LIMBO.

BECAUSE OF THIS, THE LANDMARK COMMISSION

MUST GIVE PRIORITY TO THOSE SEEKING TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE BUILDING — WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION PAID TO INDIVIDUAL APARTMENT OWNERS SEEKING MODIFICATIONS —

AS WELL AS A BANK THAT IS SAID TO BE INTERESTED IN OCCUPYING STREET-LEVEL RETAIL SPACE, BUT HAS NOW EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS ABOUT MOVING FORWARD WITH THOSE PLANS.

ADDITIONALLY, DURING THIS PERIOD OF LIMBO, AGENCY STAFF MUST WORK WITH THE BUILDING'S RESIDENTS TO ESTABLISH A TENTATIVE MASTER PLAN THAT WOULD GOVERN BUILDING REPAIRS.

THIS PLAN MUST REACH SOME UNDERSTANDING REGARDING THE POSSIBLE USE OF SYNTHETIC MATERIALS TO REPLACE ANY FAILING TERRA COTTA — AND MUST BE RESPONSIVE TO CHANGES ALREADY MADE TO WINDOWS.

IF 75 LIVINGSTON IS TO REMAIN IN THE DISTRICT, RESIDENTS MUST HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT ANY SUCH MASTER PLAN IS NOT FINANCIALLY ONEROUS — AND WOULD NOT ADD ADDITIONAL MAINTENANCE AND ASSESSMENT FEES.

I ALSO WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT ANY PLAN THIS COMMISSION ADAPTS ALLOWS FOR A PORTION OF THE

MUNICIPAL BUILDING TO BE CONVERTED INTO RETAIL SPACE.

FOR YEARS NOW, MY OFFICE HAS MADE IT A PRIMARY GOAL TO SUPPORT THE CREATION OF A RETAIL CORRIDOR AT COURT STREET NEAR JORALEMON ST.

THIS IDEA IS NOW SUPPORTED BY DEPUTY MAYORS ROBERT STEEL AND STEPHEN GOLDSMITH, AS WELL AS THE NEW YORK CITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.

I THINK A GOOD EXISTING MODEL IS THE GANSEVOORT HISTORIC DISTRICT.

IT IS A FINE EXAMPLE — PARTICULARLY THE BOUTIQUES AND RESTAURANTS ALONG WASHINGTON ST. — OF MODERN INFILL STOREFRONTS THAT ADDRESS VOIDS IN THE BUILDINGS, A MANNER THAT I BELIEVE WOULD WORK WELL ON COURT STREET, FROM MONTAGUE TO ATLANTIC.

WE NEED TO KNOW THAT THE COMMISSION IS WILLING TO BE JUST AS CREATIVE WITH THE RETAIL CORRIDOR ON COURT STREET — SO WE CAN ATTRACT THE FINEST RETAILERS TO THIS STRIP OF BROOKLYN.

WE ALL KNOW A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN — AND I THINK AN “APPLE” TREE COULD DEFINITELY “BEAR FRUIT” IF IT WAS PLANTED ACROSS FROM BOROUGH HALL.

THERE ARE MANY DETAILS THAT NEED TO BE WORKED OUT BEFORE THE COMMISSION DETERMINES WHAT SHOULD BE DESIGNATED.

BUT IF IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE PLAN ADDRESSES THE CONCERNS OF THE TENANTS AT 75 LIVINGSTON, AS WELL AS LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR RETAIL SPACE IN THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING AND A RETAIL CORRIDOR ON COURT STREET, THEN THIS PROPOSAL WILL BE WORTHY OF SENDING TO THE CITY COUNCIL.

I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AGAIN SOON, AND WORKING WITH YOU TO PRESERVE MORE BROOKLYN HISTORY.

I KNOW THAT IN 2011 WE WILL BE KEEPING THE COMMISSION MIGHTY BUSY, AS WE LOOK TO DESIGNATE MORE OF PARK SLOPE AS A HISTORIC DISTRICT, EXPAND CROWN HEIGHTS NORTH ONCE AGAIN, AND EXAMINE COMMUNITY PROPOSALS FOR BEDFORD CORNERS.

VICTORIAN FLATBUSH AREAS SUCH AS BEVERLY SQUARE, DITMAS PARK WEST, WEST MIDWOOD, SOUTH MIDWOOD, AND CERTAIN SECTIONS OF CARROLL GARDENS ARE ALL WORTHY CANDIDATES FOR DESIGNATION.

WHATEVER AREA COMES UNDER CONSIDERATION NEXT, I AM CONFIDENT THAT WE CAN FORMULATE A PLAN THAT PRESERVES BROOKLYN'S RICH HISTORY WHILE SERVING AS A MODEL CITY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS — AND A HEALTHY NEW YEAR.