

Manhattan Community Board 10 Transportation, Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Committee Resolution in Support of the September 2018 New York State Historic District Application to Designate a New Central Harlem Dorrance Brooks Historic District

WHEREAS the West Harlem Preservation Organization in conjunction with the Dorrance Brooks Property Owners and Residents Association is submitting in September 2018 an application to the New York State Historic Preservation Office to designate a New York State Historic District in Central Harlem to be called the Dorrance Brooks Historic District, and

WHEREAS community meetings were held in April 2018 at the St. Marks United Methodist Church which included local residents, and representatives from the Historic District Council, West Harlem Preservation Organization, and local block associations, and

WHEREAS the proposed Historic District is approximate in scope, size and location to the April 2012 Community Board 10 Historic Preservation Plan's Historic District Study Area "#2. Edgecombe Avenue from 136th Street to 141st Street" in that the proposed District encompasses the north side of West 136th Street on the south; east side of St. Nicholas Avenue on the west; south side of West 140th Street on the north; and approximately 100 feet west of Frederick Douglass Boulevard on the east, and

WHEREAS the proposed Historic District was identified in a 1984 Harlem survey by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to be eligible for historic district status, and

WHEREAS the proposed Historic District has great significance as a neighborhood associated with the Harlem Renaissance and as a gathering place for African-American civil rights advocacy, and

WHEREAS the proposed Historic District includes an impressively diverse set of Queen Anne-style row houses and apartment buildings built before the turn of the 20th Century which still retain their original cornices and period detailing, and

WHEREAS the proposed Historic District would share the same name as the public square located within it, as the Dorrance Brooks Square is the first public space in New York City to honor an African-American serviceman, whose own father fought valiantly as a soldier in the United States Colored Troops to free African-Americans from slavery and to preserve the Union; and who died heroically while leading his company in combat while serving in the then-segregated world-renowned 369th Infantry Regiment in the First World War, and

WHEREAS the 369th Infantry Regiment was also known as the "Harlem Hellfighters," which served 191 days in front line trenches in France, more than any other American unit, and also suffered the most losses of any American regiment with approximately 1,500 casualties," even as the soldiers fought on two fronts, domestically and internationally, to show both their bravery and

patriotism to defend America as well as their efforts to have the respect and rights as full citizens free from racial discrimination, and

WHEREAS the Dorrance Brooks Square subsequently became a site of frequent protests against discriminatory practices against African-Americans in the military, labor, and housing, and the adjoining St. Mark's United Methodist Church was a significant institutional presence and contributed significantly to the cause of African-Americans in the arts, the civil rights struggle and social welfare, and provided crucial facilities for community educational and athletic programs, such as the WPA Adult Education Program, which had an enrollment of close to 5,000 in 1937, and

WHEREAS the proposed Historic District is distinctly vulnerable to destruction due to highly profitable development interests which encourage developers to maximize profits by demolishing existing historically, architecturally, and culturally significant buildings for replacement with buildings that are contextually, architecturally and culturally inconsistent with the proposed Historic District's existing buildings, an example being the recent demolition of the 1887 Queen Anne-style row house designed by William H. Boylan and built by Dore Lyon, which housed the Harlem Arts Guild at 321 West 136th Street created in 1934 by famed African-American sculptress and teacher Augusta Savage, whose guild members included historian Arturo Schomberg and painters Charles Alston and Aaron Douglas and whose students included Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden; another example being the planned demolition of the Gothic Revival-style Mount Calvary Baptist Church at 116 Edgecombe Avenue built in 1898 by Henry Anderson as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Atonement, as well as the 1897 neo-Renaissance rowhouses designed by architect Arthur De Saldern and built by Charles H. Bliss at 112 Edgecombe Avenue and 114 Edgecombe Avenue directly adjoining the church, all to be replaced with a development which will be contextually, architecturally and culturally inconsistent with the currently existing buildings, and

WHEREAS the proposed Historic District has the strong support of local organizations including the West Harlem Preservation Organization, Save Harlem Now!, local block associations and residents, and

WHEREAS Community Board 10 supports efforts to preserve the cultural, architectural and contextual integrity of Central Harlem by the creation of local historic districts through public hearings and community meetings, and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that on September 11th, 2018 the Manhattan Community Board 10 Transportation, Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Committee urges the New York State Historic Preservation Office to approve the proposed Central Harlem Dorrance Brooks Historic District with a vote of 8 in favor, 0 opposed and 0 abstentions.