



# CITY OF NEW YORK MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10

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**Hon. Marquis A. Harrison**  
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## **RESOLUTION TO SUPPORT OPPOSITION TO THE DESTRUCTION OF LANDMARKED BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES IN MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10**

**WHEREAS** On October 6, 1964, The New York Times revealed that “a bill to preserve the city’s architectural heritage had been introduced into the City Council.” On December 3, 1964, the legislation was introduced in a public hearing by its three sponsors, Councilman Seymour Boyers, Robert Low, and Richard S. Aldrich; and

**WHEREAS** In April 1965, the New York City Landmarks Law was signed and enacted to establish the creation of a permanent New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission to protect historic landmarks and neighborhoods from precipitate decisions to destroy or fundamentally alter their character, under the leadership of Mayor Robert F. Wagner. This was in itself a landmark piece of NYC legislation that pioneered local protections of individual buildings and districts of historic, aesthetic, and architectural significance; and

**WHEREAS** The National Historic Preservation Act was signed into law on October 15, 1966. This law increased the scope and responsibilities of the National Park Service with regard to the preservation of cultural resources. The National Historic Preservation Act charges the National Park Service (through authority delegated by the Secretary of the Interior) to establish and administer a national historic preservation program and to develop and promulgate standards and guidelines for the treatment of historic properties; and

**WHEREAS** The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation Projects were first issued in 1978. In 1979 they were published with Guidelines for Applying the Standards and reprinted in 1985. The Standards were revised in 1992, when they were retitled The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The Standards were codified in the Federal Register in 1995, the same year that they were published with guidelines as The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings. These Standards and Guidelines provide a critical part of the framework of the national preservation program. They are widely used at the federal, state, and local levels to guide work on historic buildings,

and they also have been adopted by certified local government and historic preservation commissions across the nation; and

**WHEREAS** The office of Technical Preservation Services (TPS) in the Cultural Resources directorate of the National Park Service is responsible for developing and promulgating preservation standards and guidance specifically as it relates to historic buildings. TPS has produced an extensive amount of technical, educational, and policy guidance on the maintenance and preservation of historic buildings; and

**WHEREAS** TPS developed the original and current versions of The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings. The many technical publications and web features on preserving historic buildings prepared by TPS are well known, especially the Preservation Briefs and the Preservation Tech Notes series. Materials developed by TPS are available in printed form and/or online from the TPS website at <https://www.nps.gov/tps> (or search for Technical Preservation Services at <https://www.nps.gov>); and

**WHEREAS** TPS administers the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program, which encourages private sector investment in the rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings; and

**WHEREAS** Preservation is defined as the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction. The limited and sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional is appropriate within a preservation project. The Standards for Preservation require retention of the greatest amount of historic fabric along with the building's historic form; and

**WHEREAS** Rehabilitation is defined as the act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values. The Rehabilitation Standards acknowledge the need to alter or add to a historic building to meet continuing or new uses while retaining the building's historic character; and

**WHEREAS** Restoration is defined as the act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period. The limited and sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional is appropriate within a restoration project. The Restoration Standards allow for the depiction of a building at a particular time in its history by preserving materials, features, finishes, and spaces from its period of significance and removing those from other periods; and

**WHEREAS** Reconstruction is defined as the act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location. The Reconstruction Standards establish a limited framework for recreating a vanished or non-surviving building with new materials, primarily for interpretive purposes. The Guidelines are introduced with a brief overview of the primary materials used in historic buildings; the exterior and interior architectural features and systems; the building's site and setting; code

compliance requirements regarding accessibility and life-safety resilience to natural hazards; sustainability; and new additions and related new construction; and

**WHEREAS** The guidelines for choosing an appropriate treatment for historic buildings are intended to promote responsible preservation practices that help protect the nation's irreplaceable cultural resources. They cannot, for instance, in and of themselves be used to make essential decisions about which features of the historic building should be saved and which can be changed.

But, once a treatment is selected, these standards and guidelines provide a consistent philosophical approach to the work; and

**WHEREAS** Deteriorated portions of a historic building may need to be protected through preliminary stabilization measures until additional work can be undertaken. Stabilizing may begin with temporary structural reinforcement and progress to weatherization or correcting unsafe conditions. Although it may not be necessary in every preservation project, stabilization is nonetheless an integral part of the treatment preservation; it is equally applicable to the other treatments if circumstances warrant. Stabilizing deteriorated historic materials and features should be taken as a preliminary measure; and

**WHEREAS** Harlem existed for 250 years as a farming community: densely forested, with large plantations and a few small villages. During the 19th Century, as immigration and economic development caused the population of New York to skyrocket, residential development moved further and further uptown. Transportation improvements allowed the city to expand geographically and led to the rapid development of Harlem between the years of 1876 and 1920. Harlem was built almost all-at-once – a dense metropolis built on empty fields and felled forests in less than a generation; and

**WHEREAS** Central Harlem has a high concentration of century old buildings, all built during a short period of time around the turn of the 20th century. There are many blocks that are worthy of designation that currently have no protection in place to preserve this architectural legacy. Considering the number of historic and architecturally significant buildings in Central Harlem, the current historic districts are far from sufficient; and

**WHEREAS** Currently most of Manhattan CB 10 is residentially zoned R7-2 with commercial C1- 1 and C2-2 overlays along the avenues. These designations include 'height factor' options

that encourage development of tall towers set back from the street. This form of building is inconsistent with the low- to mid-rise character of the district that is typified by consistent street walls and cornice lines. The existing zoning, most of which has not been updated since 1961, does not protect the character of the brownstone areas because of a lack of height and the ability to transfer unused development rights to neighboring parcels; and

**WHEREAS** In 2010 and 2011, the Land Use and Landmarks Committees of Manhattan Community Board 10 (CB 10) met with the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), the Department of City Planning (DCP), the Historic Districts Council, and the Landmarks Conservancy to familiarize themselves with the method, process, and benefit of historic preservation. In the summer of 2011, a special CB 10 197-a Taskforce, in consultation with the Department of City Planning, met to discuss how to move forward with a 197-a Plan. A recommendation was made, at that time, to develop a comprehensive planning document focusing on historic preservation; resulting in the April 2012 creation of the CB 10 Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan; and

**WHEREAS** In 2023, five of the eighty-three Manhattan historic districts designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission lie within Manhattan Community Board 10 boundaries:

- Central Harlem-West 130th-132nd Street Historic District
- Dorrance Brooks Square Historic District
- Mount Morris Park Historic District
- Mount Morris Park Historic District Extension
- St. Nicholas Historic District

**WHEREAS** The historic Hotel Olga located at 695 Lenox Avenue was demolished after unsuccessful attempts to save the storied building for adaptive reuse. Sadly, the building was demolished in 2019, erasing any physical evidence of the Hotel Olga and the importance it had to the African American community and Harlem. The hotel, which was built in 1898, rose to fame in the 1920s and 1930s as a safe haven for African Americans to stay during the time of Jim Crow segregation; and

**WHEREAS** In 2021 a three-story brick row-house at 28 West 130th Street, built in 1883 and part of the historic "Astor Row" block on West 130<sup>th</sup> Street between Fifth and Lenox Avenues was demolished due to deterioration. The city designated it as an historic landmark in 1981 along with its 27 neighboring buildings, praised at the time by historic preservationists for their Victorian style wooden porches; and

**WHEREAS** After a November 2022 building inspection found it was at risk of collapsing onto the sidewalk, the city tore down the three-story building at 186 Lenox Ave., which had stood since 1887 between West 119th and 120th streets. The building had been in distress for a ten-year period and was cited with numerous violations. The owner did not make the necessary repairs even after court orders to do so; and

**WHEREAS** The LPC does not require restoration or force owners to return buildings to their original condition. The LPC only regulates proposed work on designated structures. It may, however, make recommendations for restorative treatment when other work is undertaken to the property; and

**WHEREAS** The LPC's website maintains Historic District Maps which are drawn to conform to the New York City base map (NYCMAP), with address ranges shown on the maps based on data available at the time the map was drawn,

**THEREFORE** Manhattan Community Board 10 requests that NYC Department of Buildings open violations and enforcement actions be included on the LPC Historic District Maps as well as LPC agency warning letters or other agency communications regarding conditions of buildings to provide better public notice of potential demolitions of historic buildings to allow community members and elected officials sufficient time to respond to and help save landmarked buildings.

**WHEREAS** The LPC executes its legal responsibilities to require owners of designated landmark to maintain the building's exterior "in good repair," and to secure Commission approval before any exterior alterations are made,

**THEREFORE** Manhattan Community Board 10 requests that the Commission create a program similar to NYC Department of Housing Preservation's 7A Administrator program to allow administrators appointed by the Court (pursuant to New York State Law) to operate privately owned landmarked buildings in serious disrepair which are dangerous to the tenants' or neighbors' lives, health and safety, to include financial assistance to repair or replace major systems or make other repairs which the owner cannot or will not make.

**WHEREAS** The LPC currently provides historic preservation grants for exterior façade restoration grants to nonprofits and income-eligible property owners,

**THEREFORE**, Manhattan Community Board 10 requests that the LPC update its current technical assistance programs and funding criteria to establish a new fund to help economically challenged owners to repair and restore their landmarked properties, in return for rent stabilization on rental units or capping resale value through a lien on the property (i.e., if a property was fully restored and then sold at market value, the government restoration grant would need to be repaid with interest). This fund would support historic neighborhood economic inclusiveness with a specific goal and outcome of total property restoration as well as technical, capacity, and financial assistance to historic landmarked building owners in low-income communities with significant economic challenges.

**WHEREAS** Deficient or illegal construction of landmarked buildings can contribute to the demolition of landmarked buildings,

**THEREFORE** Manhattan Community Board 10 requests that the LPC provide historic district residents updated lists of contractors who have received permits to work on landmarked

buildings; as well as provide increased and more transparent oversight of complex construction and renovation projects within historic districts which if left unaddressed could lead to the undermining of landmarked buildings, especially neighboring construction of attached buildings;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** That Manhattan Community Board 10 adamantly opposes the destruction of landmarked buildings and historic structures in Central Harlem. These demolitions particularly detract from the historic ambience created due to the Harlem Renaissance which established Harlem as an internationally acclaimed 20th century bastion of African American culture. Manhattan Community Board 10 strongly recommends that the LPC and other relevant city agencies utilize all available and appropriate resources to ensure that owners of landmarked buildings are prevented from neglecting historic housing stock in Central Harlem to the point where they become dilapidated and warrant destruction.



Marquis A. Harrison  
Chairperson  
Manhattan Community Board 10



Hon. Keith Taylor  
Committee Chair  
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