



Community Board 12 - Manhattan Washington Heights & Inwood

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Eleazar Bueno, Chairperson
Ebenezer Smith, District Manager

January 29, 2021

Hon. Sarah Caroll, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
David N. Dinkins Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

Re: Resolution calling upon the Landmarks Preservation to ensure Greater Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in its Designation of Buildings, Structures and Historic Districts

Dear Chair Caroll:

At the General Meeting on Tuesday, January 26, 2021, Community Board 12, Manhattan, passed the following resolution with a unanimous vote of 43 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions, and 0, not voting, calling upon the Landmarks Preservation Commission to engage in ongoing dialogue and partnership with Community Board 12-Manhattan and community residents to advance the designation of historic districts and structures in Washington Heights and Inwood; urging the Landmarks Preservation Commission to ensure that the history, culture, contributions and legacy of people and communities of color are recognized; supporting the designation of the Dorrance Brooks Historic District.

Whereas: In January 2015 Community Board 12-Manhattan ("CB12M") passed a resolution requesting the Landmarks Preservation Commission ("LPC") to engage in ongoing dialogue and partnership with CB12M and community residents to advance the designation of historic districts and structures in Washington Heights and Inwood. Since 2009 CB12M passed at least 10 resolutions that evidence its support for historic preservation including resolutions supporting the designation of new historic districts and structures, modifications to designated structures and the evaluation of proposed historic districts and structures. To date, LPC has not communicated with CB12M to act on the request; and

Whereas: New York City's Landmarks Law (the "Law") was established in 1965 and stipulates that a building, structure, or district must be at least 30 years old and have cultural, historical or architectural merit to be eligible for designation. Notwithstanding the Law's intent to preserve the aesthetically and historically important buildings, structures, and other objects that make up the urban fabric of New York City, including history, culture, and overall historical sense of place, LPC routinely advances an elitist approach to preservation that favors architectural merit over historical /socio-cultural merit; and

Whereas: Upper Manhattan is underrepresented regarding historic preservation and designation. Also, of the approximately 151 New York City historic districts and extensions thereto, none is named in honor or commemoration of a person of color; and

Whereas: In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, the Department of City Planning ("DCP") outreached to community boards to express its support for the Black community, acknowledged that zoning and planning policies have acted for decades as bulwarks against fairness, inclusion, and integration,

Hon. Sarah Caroll, Chair

Re: Resolution calling upon the Landmarks Preservation to ensure Greater Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in its Designation of Buildings, Structures and Historic Districts
January 29, 2021

Page 2

played a role in perpetuating racism against Black and Brown New Yorkers and committed to work towards greater equity and inclusion in these policies. In September 2020 CB12M's Land Use Committee ("Land Use" or the "Committee") engaged with DCP representatives to discuss its commitment to greater equity and inclusion. In contrast, Land Use is not aware of any outreach by LPC to communities and community boards to express any commitment to increasing diversity and inclusion in the deliberations on which buildings, structures, and districts merit designation; and

Whereas: In November 2020 CB12M passed a resolution supporting the Request for Evaluation ("RFE") submitted to LPC for the Harris-Newhouse Home (aka 857 Riverside Drive), an 1851 wood frame structure built and once owned by Dennis Harris, a hero of the Underground Railroad, and subsequently owned by Judge John Newhouse, his friend and colleague. Each were ardent abolitionists, civic-minded entrepreneurs, pivotal figures in the growth of Washington Heights, and active in the creation of a church congregation on 158th Street and Amsterdam Avenue that was actively anti-slavery. It is thought possible that 857 Riverside Drive may also have sheltered fugitive slaves. LPC rejected the RFE without serious consideration citing as its reason architectural alterations to the building while completely ignoring the fact that its historical context and original owners merit recognition, preservation, and designation; and

Whereas: In January 2021, Keith Taylor, President of the Dorrance Brooks Property Owners and Residents Association, briefed the Land Use Committee on efforts to obtain LPC designation of the Dorrance Brooks Historic District, located in Central Harlem, the proposed Dorrance Brooks Historic District is named for Private First Class Dorrance Brooks. A native of Harlem and the son of a Civil War veteran, Brooks was an African-American soldier who died in France in 1918, shortly before the end of World War I. Brooks distinguished himself as a faithful and patriotic soldier and was praised for his bravery in leading the remnants of his company after his superior officers were killed. Its significance is already recognized by the National Park Service and the NYS Historic Preservation Office. If its designation is approved by LPC it will become the first NYC historic district named for an African-American; and

Whereas: Although the Dorrance Brooks Historic District is not located in Manhattan Community District 12, CB12M is keenly aware of the ground that would be broken by this designation. New York City would finally have a historic district named for a person of color, one that is located, appropriately, in historic Harlem and Upper Manhattan; and

Whereas: In the process of evaluating the designation of buildings, structures, and districts, LPC must give consideration to the history and contributions of all the people that have contributed to New York City's development equal to the consideration given to the architectural significance and integrity of buildings and structures. The history of Washington Heights and Inwood is linked to the earliest period in our nation's history and to an important era in the development and the urbanization of the island of Manhattan. Its place in the history of this city and nation, not solely the place of architecturally important buildings and structures, deserves more attention, respect, and acknowledgement. Now, therefore, be it

Hon. Sarah Caroll, Chair

Re: Resolution calling upon the Landmarks Preservation to ensure Greater Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in its Designation of Buildings, Structures and Historic Districts

January 29, 2021

Page 3

- Resolved: Community Board 12-Manhattan again calls upon the Landmarks Preservation Commission to engage in ongoing dialogue and partnership with Community Board 12-Manhattan and community residents to advance the designation of historic districts and structures in Washington Heights and Inwood; and be it further
- Resolved: Community Board 12-Manhattan urges the Landmarks Preservation Commission to ensure that the history, culture, contributions and legacy of people and communities of color are recognized, acknowledged, and preserved and to implement policies and procedures to increase the diversity and inclusion in its designation of buildings, structures, and historic districts; and be it further
- Resolved: Community Board 12-Manhattan supports the designation of the Dorrance Brooks Historic District and looks forward to the designation of additional buildings, structures and districts that recognize and honor people of color, and be it further
- Resolved: Community Board 12-Manhattan calls upon the Mayor, City Council and Borough Presidents to ensure that persistent and good faith attention is given to equity, inclusion, and diversity in the City's actions, policies, and procedures regarding the designation of historic districts, building and structures throughout the City.

Sincerely,



Eleazar Bueno
Chairperson

cc: Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor
Hon. Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate
Hon. Scott M. Stringer, Comptroller
Hon. Brian Benjamin, State Senator
Hon. Robert Jackson, State Senator
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President

Hon. Al Taylor, Assembly Member
Hon. Carmen De La Rosa, Assembly Member
Hon. Ydanis Rodriguez, Council Member
Hon. Mark Levine, Council Member