



## Community Board 12 - Manhattan Washington Heights & Inwood

530 West 166<sup>th</sup> St. 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10032  
Phone: (212) 568-8500, Fax: (212) 740-8197

Katherine Diaz, Chairperson  
Ebenezer Smith, District Manager

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June 2, 2023

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 Supporting the Landmarks Preservation Commission's proposal to designate 935 St. Nicholas Avenue as a Landmark Building.

Dear Chair, Caroll:

At the General Meeting on Tuesday, May 23rd, 2023, Community Board 12, Manhattan, passed the following resolution with a vote of 38 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions, and 0 not voting, supporting the designation of 935 St. Nicholas Avenue as an individual landmark, acknowledging the NYC Landmark Preservation Commission's efforts to identify sites throughout the city of importance in African American history and of cultural significance, and urging LPC to continue to identify and designate sites of importance to the city's diverse communities of color.

Whereas: On April 4, 2023, Public Meeting of the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission ("LPC"), 935 St. Nicholas Avenue ("935 St. Nicholas"), located in Washington Heights, was calendared to be considered for designation as an individual landmark building (the "Proposed Designation"). On June 6, 2023, LPC will hold a public hearing to receive testimony and to consider the Proposed Designation. If LPC recommends designation, the City Planning Commission and the City Council must then consider its recommendation; and

Whereas: 935 St. Nicholas is architecturally and culturally significant. It was identified by LPC staff as part of LPC's survey work in Harlem and throughout the city to identify sites important to African American history with cultural significance. It was prioritized for consideration because of its intact and distinctive architecture and its long association with both Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington and Noble Lee Sissle, two celebrated African American pioneers of jazz musicians who were among the most prolific composers, musicians, and bandleaders in American history. 935 St. Nicholas, which was the first apartment building on the west side of Saint Nicholas Avenue north of West 155<sup>th</sup> Street, is an excellent example of the late Gothic Revival style, retains the integrity of its original architectural design, and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 for its association with Duke Ellington; and

Whereas: 935 St. Nicholas is an elevated apartment building with a brick, limestone, and terracotta façade. It is located at the southwest corner of West 157<sup>th</sup> Street and St. Nicholas Avenue and was designed in 1915 by Gronenberg & Leuchtag, a prolific architectural firm active in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that specialized in residential projects in New York City. Examples of the firm's work can be found in various New York City historic districts including the Upper East Side and Extension, Expanded Carnegie Hill, NoHo, and Greenwich Village Historic Districts; and

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Whereas: Duke Ellington resided at 935 St. Nicholas from 1939 to 1961. Ellington was an American [jazz pianist](#), composer, and leader of his [jazz orchestra](#) from 1923 until his passing in 1974. He was known for his inventive use of the orchestra, or big band, and wrote or collaborated on more than 1,000 compositions. His extensive work is the largest recorded personal jazz legacy, and many of his pieces have become standard. The Smithsonian National Museum of American History holds a collection of documents on Ellington's career. In addition to standards, Ellington also composed musical suites consisting of pieces linked by subject matter and created music for film and television. He debuted the *Black, Brown, and Beige* suit at Carnegie Hall in 1943. While other jazz musicians had played at Carnegie Hall before, none had performed anything as elaborate as Ellington's work. In 1956, while in residence at 935 St. Nicholas, Ellington was on the cover of *Time* magazine. In 1966 he was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. In 1969 he was awarded the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#), the highest civilian award in the United States of America. In 1973 he was awarded the [Legion of Honour](#) by France, its highest civilian honor. In 1999 he was posthumously awarded the [Pulitzer Prize Special Award](#) for music. Ellington was an inspiring leader of his musicians, established a standard for elegance and charm, eloquently championed African American culture through his compositions, fought musical pigeonholing and racial stereotyping, set an example by taking control of his copyrights and music publishing, and conducted unofficial and official cultural diplomacy for the United States by performing in 65 countries throughout the world; and

Whereas: Noble Sissle also resided at 935 St. Nicholas, from 1950 to 1972. He was an American [jazz](#) composer, lyricist, bandleader, singer, and playwright, and a veteran of World War I ("WWI"). Sissle and his friend, pianist, and composer Eubie Blake, another jazz luminary, helped to organize a regimental band for the 15th Colored Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard that would later become the [New York 369th Infantry "Hell Fighters" Regiment](#) that served nobly fighting in the French military (because African Americans were only allowed to work for and not fight with American troops in WWI), after which they received France's highest military honor, the Croix de Guerre. After WWI, Sissle and Blake worked on the jazz musical revue [Shuffle Along](#), which, when it premiered in 1921, became the first hit musical on [Broadway](#) written by and about African Americans, and was the first show with an all-black cast to reach the Broadway stage in over a decade, and included a teenage [Josephine Baker](#) among the performers. Sissle founded the Negro Actors Guild of America in 1937 and served as its president until 1957. In 1931, Sissle was featured on a broadcast from the Park Central Hotel, effectively breaking the hotel's color barrier. In 1950, while a resident at 935 St. Nicholas, Sissle he succeeded Bill "Bojangles" Robinson as the "honorary Mayor of Harlem". He played at President Dwight D. Eisenhower's inauguration in 1953 and once performed with the Prince of Wales, who was a guest drummer at a London concert in 1930; and

Whereas: In 2008, Community Board 12-Manhattan ("CB12M") and the City College Architecture Center completed a neighborhood planning and land use study of Washington Heights and Inwood which considers various matters including historic designation. 935 St. Nicholas is included in

Whereas: the study as a building that merits being considered for designation as an individual landmark; and The Proposed Designation was discussed at the May 3, 2023, Land Use Committee meeting. It acknowledges the architectural heritage of Washington Heights, honors the history, contributions, and legacy of two noted African Americans, and adds further recognition to a building listed on the National Register of Historic Places almost a half-century ago; and

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Whereas: In January 2015, CB12M passed a resolution urging 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 and, in January 2021, CB12M passed a resolution to once again urge LPC to engage in ongoing dialogue and partnership with CB12-M and community residents to advance the designation of historic districts and structures in Washington Heights and Inwood and 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. The Proposed Designation begins to address the requests made in CB12M's resolutions, now, therefore be it

Resolved: Community Board 12-Manhattan supports the designation of 935 St. Nicholas Avenue as an individual landmark, acknowledges the NYC Landmark Preservation Commission's efforts to identify sites throughout the city of importance in African American history and of cultural significance, and urges LPC to continue to identify and designate sites of importance to the city's diverse communities of color.

Sincerely,



Katherine Diaz  
Chairperson

cc:

Hon. Eric Adams, Mayor

Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President

Hon. Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate

Hon. Brad Lander, Comptroller

Hon. Adriano Espaillat, Congressman

Hon. Cordell Cleare, State Senator

Hon. Robert Jackson, State Senator

Hon. Alfred Taylor, Assembly Member

Hon. Manny De Los Santos, Assembly Member

Hon. Carmen De La Rosa, Council Member

Hon. Shaun Abreu, Council Member