



## Community Board 12 - Manhattan Washington Heights & Inwood

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Shahabuddeen A. Ally, Esq., Chairperson  
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December 1, 2016

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan  
Chair/Commissioner  
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
David N. Dinkins Municipal Building  
1 Centre Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor - North  
New York, NY 10007

**RE: West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row House Historic District**

Dear Commissioners Srinivasan:

At the General Meeting of Community Board 12- Manhattan, held Tuesday, November 22, 2016 the following resolution passed with a unanimous vote of (35) In Favor, (0), Opposed, (0) Abstaining.

- Whereas: In May 2009 Community Board 12-Manhattan ("CB12-M") passed a resolution (the "2009 Resolution") supporting the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission's ("LPC") recommendation to designate the Audubon Park Historic District ("Audubon Park"), and also urged the LPC to diligently and expeditiously undertake the work necessary to recommend the designation an adjacent historic district that includes a group of late-1800s row houses on West 158<sup>th</sup> Street ("626 – 648 West 158<sup>th</sup> Street" or the "West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses") and the designation of an expansion of Audubon Park that includes the buildings on Riverside Drive north of West 158<sup>th</sup> Street, and the City Council and Department of City Planning to approve LPC's recommendation for Audubon Park, and once LPC makes its recommendation, to approve the additional historic district designations. While Audubon Park was designated an historic district on May 12, 2009, LPC did not subsequently act to recommend the designation of the additional historic district designations; and
- Whereas: The West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses are an architecturally cohesive group of twelve residential buildings that are located immediately adjacent to Audubon Park, and were constructed in 1896 to 1898 to designs by John P. Leo, a noted architect, builder and developer of residential buildings who was appointed Chairman of the Board of Standards and Appeals in 1921, on property that was part of the Audubon estate. They are older than the apartment buildings included in Audubon Park; and
- Whereas: The 2009 Resolution states that, in the course of its review of Audubon Park, Land Use suggested to LPC that the district's boundaries be expanded from those included in a 2003 request for evaluation for Audubon Park prepared by neighborhood residents in order to encompass a broader geographic area that includes the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses and apartment buildings on Riverside Drive north of West 158<sup>th</sup> Street, an area that is at times referred to as the Upper and Lower drives. CB12M's advocacy for expanded boundaries for Audubon Park was also supported an April 19, 2009 NY Times article by Christopher Gray -

"In Audubon Park, a few surviving Oriels" - that discusses the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses and by comments made by members of the public who attended a public meeting hosted by Land Use at which LPC's Chair and senior staff provided an overview of Audubon Park and the historic designation process; and

- Whereas: In May 2016 CB12M passed a resolution (the "2016 Resolution") supporting a Request for Evaluation (the "RFE") submitted to LPC by residents of the Audubon Park and the Riverside Oval Association for the expansion of the Audubon Park to include 626-648 West 158<sup>th</sup> Street and an adjacent vacant lot located behind the eight of these row houses. The RFE was submitted in response to ever-increasing development pressure in Washington Heights and throughout Upper Manhattan and the potential for a developer to purchase one of the row houses that abut the Vacant Lot, combine the two zoning lots and build a new, out-of scale, out-of-context and architecturally inappropriate structure; and
- Whereas: Despite CB12M's consistent support for designation of the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses, LPC, in its response to the RFE and the 2016 Resolution, declined consideration of expanding of Audubon Park to include the buildings. LPC's stated reason for declining is that Audubon Park is a cohesive landscape of 19 large apartment buildings and one free-standing duplex house indicative of the areas transformation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century into a densely developed residential neighborhood and that the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses were intentionally omitted as they are a different typology and do not relate to the district's main artery, Riverside Drive. LPC also states that the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses may merit further study, as they relate to other similar rows, as a possible independent district; and
- Whereas: While CB12M acknowledges LPC's observation that the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses are of a different typology than the apartment buildings that characterize Audubon Park, it notes that LPC is missing the critical point that the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses are as much a part of the transformation of the area in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century into a densely developed residential neighborhood spurred by the extension of Riverside Drive and the #1 IRT as the apartment buildings included in Audubon Park. In fact, they serve to document a more complete and accurate story of the competing patterns of urban development in upper Manhattan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Historic Designation can be based on architectural, historical and/or cultural considerations. The architectural differences between the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses and Audubon Park's apartment houses in no way diminish their place in the history of the urbanization of the former Audubon estate, Washington Heights and New York City; and
- Whereas: Although the 2016 Resolution specifically addresses expanding Audubon Park to include the subject row houses, the 2009 Resolution requests that LPC designate an adjacent historic district. The primary focus of CB12-M's resolutions is not whether the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses should be included in an expansion of Audubon Park or in an adjacent, independent historic district. Rather, it requests that LPC honor and act upon the spirit and intent of the support it has repeatedly expressed for designation of the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses; and
- Whereas: On November 2, 2016 Land Use was briefed on a proposal to request designation of an expanded West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row house district including 18 buildings on the north and south sides of West 158<sup>th</sup> Street built between 1896 and 1898, including the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses, to commemorate architect and developers John P. Leo and John Lilliendahl; now, therefore, be it

Resolved: Community Board 12-Manhattan supports the designation of the West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row Houses and of an expanded West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row House District, and urges the Landmarks Preservation Commission to work in partnership with Community stakeholders and Community Board 12-Manhattan to diligently and expeditiously undertake the work necessary to recommend the designation of the an expanded West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row House District; and be it further

Resolved: Community Board 12-M again urges the City Council and Department of City Planning to approve, once it is hopefully made, the Landmarks Preservation Commission's recommendation to designate a West 158<sup>th</sup> Street Row House Historic District.

We look forward to working with the Landmarks Preservation Commission to advance this proposed designation.

Sincerely,



Shahabuldeen A. Ally, Esq.  
Chairperson

cc: Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Letitia James, Public Advocate  
Hon. Charles Rangel, Congressman  
Hon. Bill Perkins, State Senator

Hon. Herman D. Farrell, Jr., Assembly Member  
Hon. Guillermo Linares, Assembly Member  
Hon. Ydanis Rodriguez, Council Member  
Hon. Mark Levine, Council Member  
Hon. Adriano Espaillat, State Senator