

As seen in...

REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

Wednesday July 13, 2011

REBNY Watch

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President, Real Estate Board of New York

The Real Estate Board of New York continues its opposition to the proposed Riverside-West End Historic District Extension.

This proposed district contains almost 800 buildings on the Upper West Side from Broadway to Riverside Drive and from 70th Street to 109th Street.

On June 28, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held its second public meeting on the massive proposed historic district which focused on the area from West 79th Street to West 87th Street.

REBNY testified at the meeting, like we did at the first hearing in March.

We testified that the Commission is taking an unwarranted broad-brush approach with these proposed designations which incorporate numerous buildings that lack merit.

In this proposed designation, the Commission has completely disregarded the basis for original designations and is grafting new buildings on to existing districts that is indefensible.

We pointed out that the existing districts are characterized by townhouses and row houses and some apartment buildings and that none of the existing districts extend to Broadway which is a vibrant mixed-use avenue that includes ever-changing storefronts.

Broadway does not fit in with the other parts of the district and since it was clearly excluded when the Commission studied the area in the past it should not be included in the extensions.

At the hearing, individual property owners, representing townhouses, rental apartment buildings and cooperative apartments provided pertinent testimony and compelling evidence for omitting their property from the historic district.

Back in March, the Commission's first hearing brought out a wide range of opponents including small property owners, co-op boards, non-profit institutions, a preservation professor and those wishing to redevelop property.

Collectively these individuals noted that the designation would take in many properties that do not have strong architectural or historic significance and focused on their particular property.

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These individual owners were echoing the concerns we have been raising from the beginning with this proposed designation, particularly there are too many unworthy buildings captured by this broad-brush approach.

REBNY supports land marking when it is warranted. On the Upper West Side, we could support the designation of individual buildings that are worthy of designation. However, we are against the broad-brush approach taken in this proposed district.

The extra burdens of maintaining these properties and going through the landmarks permit process fall upon the owners of these unworthy properties.

Landmarking itself can get overwhelmed by the administrative work of overseeing all the worthy property in its jurisdiction. Neither the agency nor the property owner should be needlessly burdened by regulating property that lacks merit.

It's important that owners whose buildings do not merit designation continue to make their voices heard at these public hearings as well as by contacting their elected officials.

The impetus behind this broad-brush approach is to thwart new development and to prevent new development that a handful of residents object to.

The Upper West Side has already undergone widespread rezonings to preserve the scale of buildings on the avenue and the mid-block as well as having large areas already designated an historic district.

This new effort will prevent new commercial and residential development that would enhance the neighborhood and expand the city's tax base.

As the proposed designation of the Upper West Side vividly displays, the landmarks designation process has abandoned any meaningful standards, has become isolated from larger urban planning goals and indifferent to basic citywide needs. That needs to change.

We will keep you updated on this issue.