

TESTIMONY OF THE REAL ESTATE BOARD OF NEW YORK, INC. IN OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED WEST END-COLLEGIATE HISTORIC DISTRICT EXTENSION.

Presented by Michael Slattery, Director of Research

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The Real Estate Board of New York, Inc. (REBNY) is a broadly based trade association of over 12,000 owners, developers, brokers and real estate professionals active throughout New York City. We oppose the proposed West-End Collegiate Historic District Extension, running generally from West 70th Street to West 79th Street generally from Broadway to Riverside Drive that is the subject of today's hearing and we question the designation process for the entire "West End Avenue Study Area" that is currently under review by this Commission.

We believe that the Commission is taking an unwarranted broad-brush approach with these proposed designations. These proposed extensions incorporate numerous buildings that lack merit. They completely disregard the basis for earlier designations and graft new buildings on to existing districts that is indefensible. We cannot support this type of process.

We want to focus on the most objectionable aspect, namely the inclusion of the buildings on Broadway and particularly the inclusion of 2161-2169 Broadway on the northwest corner of 76th Street and Broadway.

Our analysis of this proposed West End-Collegiate Historic District Extension is similar to that of the Riverside-West End Historic District Extension 1 which we discussed in our testimony in March. The existing West End-Collegiate District was designated in 1984 and is focused largely on townhouses and rowhouses (with some apartment buildings) located along Riverside Drive and West End Avenue and the side streets. Quoting from the 1984 Designation Report, "On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this area, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the West End-Collegiate Historic

District contains buildings and other improvements which have a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value and which represent one or more periods or styles of architecture typical of one or more eras in the history of New York City and which cause this area, by reason of these factors, to constitute a ***distinct section of the City***. "(emphasis ours).

It's unclear why it's now believed that the previous Commission was so wrong in establishing the boundaries for this district as a distinct section of the city and that they would have managed to miss 219 buildings.

For instance, in the original West End Collegiate Historic District only one half block area was designated on the east side of West End Avenue and the boundaries of the district end at midblock and do not extend to Broadway. In leaving out 2161-2169 Broadway, the Commission made a decision in drawing the boundary that this property which abuts the existing district did not contribute to the distinctiveness of the West End Collegiate Historic District and omitted it from the designation. We believe that this decision correctly distinguished between the strong residential character and architectural quality of the buildings on West End Avenue and Riverside Drive, the mundane aspects of 2169 as well as the more mixed use commercial area along Broadway.

It is our position that all of buildings that front on Broadway and do not reach back to West End Avenue should be removed from the district as inconsistent with the character of the district. We urge that Broadway should also be removed from the other sections of the so-called "West End Study Area." None of the existing districts include Broadway buildings and we support a continuation of that policy. In the case of this West End-Collegiate plan, only four buildings of the proposed 219 fall into this category and we recommend that they be removed from the extension.

At the public hearing in March, you heard from opponents including small property owners, co-op boards, non-profit institutions, a preservation professor and

those wishing to invest in property. We strongly encourage that the compelling arguments they offered against designation of individual properties be counted in your deliberations and that their individual objections be closely studied.

We also recommend that the Commission, rather than just take a blanket vote, look at each and every building in the proposed extension whether on a side street or an avenue. It's unfair to keep including buildings that are significantly altered or that might be classified as utilitarian or no-style and that lack major architectural or historical importance. Any buildings that fall into these categories should be excluded even if that requires redrawing the boundaries.

As we stated in our previous testimony, there are indeed worthy buildings that should be looked at for designation in the West End Study area, but this broad brush approach, especially on Broadway, is unwarranted. Its inclusion in the designation would be an impediment to the continuing evolution of this vibrant commercial corridor and to the growth and vitality of our city. Thank you.