



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

GALE A. BREWER
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer
Landmarks Preservation Commission Hearing on 21 West 95 Street
June 10, 2104**

My name is Gale A. Brewer, and I am the Borough President of Manhattan. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Landmarks Preservation Commission today. I am here to support the resolution passed by Community Board 7 regarding 21 West 95 Street, New York, New York 10025. I hope you disapprove the rear yard addition. In full disclosure, I also live on the block in question and have done my due diligence and contacted the Conflicts of Interest Board and been told that there is no conflict with my testimony here today.

The resolution, in summary, approves the roof top addition but finds the design of the rear yard addition to be inappropriate to the historic character of the building and the historic district.

In general, I join those who are concerned that a growing pattern of development threatens a particular characteristic of our landmarked neighborhoods on the Upper West Side, and elsewhere. The historic and beautiful garden spaces behind the brownstones in landmarked districts are a distinctive feature of the community-oriented brownstone neighborhoods. These “green spaces” or “donuts” are a special and treasured feature of all that makes these neighborhoods appropriate to be “landmarked.” These spaces provide beauty, a quiet space for residents to meet and talk, greenery that improves the environment, permeable surface area that absorbs rainwater and a habitat for birdlife.

Prior to being elected Borough President, I served for twelve years in the City Council, and during my time I strived to strengthen the laws protecting landmarks and preserve the “donut”. My office worked with such experts in the field as Evan Mason from the group Sustainable Yards to find effective ways to incentivize property owners to retain this important green space. There has been legislation introduced in New York State to establish a green tax abatement for removing impermeable surfaces and replacing them with soil or vegetation. We should be looking for ways to encourage this type of development, not the opposite.

I hope that LPC takes these concerns into consideration while deliberating this particular item.

The new owner of 21 West 95 Street is planning an aggressive development that will intrude on the character of the treasured block. The same family owned the brownstone for 45 years, and sold it to a speculator who wants to expand the structure for re-sale value. He is planning an extension on the roof, as well as demolishing the rear and moving both into the garden and sideways to the property lines of the two neighboring brownstones.

The developer has agreed to scale back the size of the roof structure, but I hope LPC will disapprove the request for an incursion into the rear yard. At other locations, I have seen build-outs which have drastically marred the size and the appearance of the shared "donut hole" - the rear gardens shared with neighbors on both 95th and adjacent 96th Street. The back of properties are, of course, as much part of the character of the neighborhood as the streetscape.

Limiting this project will have positive implications far beyond this particular property. I believe that disapproval of the rear yard addition sends a message that preserving the special qualities of the brownstone "donuts" everywhere is important to the environment and to our city.