



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

1 Centre Street, 19th floor, New York, NY 10007
(212) 669-8300 p (212) 669-4306 f
431 West 125th Street, New York, NY 10027
(212) 531-1609 p (212) 531-4615 f
www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov

Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer
New York City Council
Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses
L.U. No. 576 Excelsior Steam Power Company Building, 33-43 Gold Street,
New York, NY; L.U. No. 577 Bergdorf Goodman Building, 754 Fifth Avenue,
New York, NY; L.U. No. 578 412 East 85th Street House, 412 East 85th Street,
New York, NY; and L.U. No. 580 Loew's 175th Street Theater, 4140
Broadway, New York, NY
February 27, 2017**

My name is Gale Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in favor of the Individual Landmark Designation of: L.U. No. 576 Excelsior Steam Power Company Building, L.U. No. 577 Bergdorf Goodman Building, L.U. No. 578 412 East 85th Street House, and L.U. No. 580 Loew's 175th Street Theater.

These sites represent the final four of the ten Manhattan backlog items that the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) had prioritized for designation in 2016 and completes an 18-month public process. This is a fraction of what was originally on the LPC backlog docket which was comprised of over 90 sites that had sat on the designation calendar for 5 years or more. In aggregate, the 27 sites citywide the LPC has ultimately designated as part of their "Backlog Initiative" were the subject of multiple rounds of review by commission staff, public hearings and consideration at the LPC and at the City Planning Commission.

Today I am testifying in support of the Manhattan designations. This hearing represents the completion of a great undertaking by the LPC and I wish to take a moment to again thank Chair Srinivasan and her staff for their work. They took time to meet with us, and they listened. My recommendations that were incorporated into the backlog process followed months of discussion with the landmark advocacy groups and REBNY on how to address the backlog while respecting prior efforts and remaining mindful that items should not sit in limbo for decades. The recommendations for transparency, borough focused hearings, and a fixed timeframe for public

input allowed for robust discussion of the backlog items. These four items today have met a very high threshold for designation, and we should celebrate this work by affirming their landmark status.

Our Landmarks Law is a key element in ensuring the physical and cultural diversity of Manhattan and our city. As the first of its kind it served as the model for municipalities across the country. It withstood legal challenges all the way to the Supreme Court, which explicitly told the nation that landmarks matter and cities can and should preserve them. Without our city's Landmark Law protecting the historic neighborhoods, districts, and exceptional buildings of Manhattan from Tribeca and below to Harlem and above, our borough would not be the well-preserved, ordered, and aesthetically distinguished mix of old and new that makes it a wonder of the world.

Thus I also want to acknowledge the huge effort undertaken by the Commission in this process, and in its historical oversight of the landmarks law. The diligence and resolve shown by the LPC throughout its history has created a great legacy of which we can all be proud.

We should also be mindful that this effort reflects decades of work by neighborhoods and advocates. Some of the sites you are reviewing today may have been initiated up to 40 years ago. In November 2014, when the issue of how to eliminate the backlog first arose, my staff (particularly Basha Gerhards, Deputy Land Use Director) and I visited every building on the Manhattan backlog list over the Thanksgiving weekend. Based solely on the exteriors we believe that some of these are true landmarks, as well as beloved neighborhood gems that are worthy of designation on architectural merit and historical significance alone.

In my earlier testimony to the LPC at the Manhattan backlog hearings, I spoke on behalf of designation for the Excelsior Power Company Building, IRT Powerhouse, Bergdorf Goodman, St. Michael's Episcopal Church Complex, St. Paul's Church and Rectory, St. Joseph's Church, and Loew's 175th Street Theater.

Of today's Manhattan items, the Loew's Theater at 175th Street, also known as the United Palace, deserves special mention and has been a priority of mine as Borough President. It

features a breathtaking interior and exterior. The good condition of the structure is testament to current management. But, as we are all too aware, owners' are not forever, and priorities change, and without landmark status we can lose the very sites that make our neighborhoods special. This theater is among the best examples of how the Landmarks Law is meant to preserve neighborhood history and architecture. In addition, I support designation of the Loew's Theater because we must have more landmarks in northern Manhattan. We have and should continue to pursue landmarking in neighborhoods that have been traditionally overlooked.

Therefore, I am pleased to speak today in favor of designating these four sites. All four sites have Community Board support for designation, have been recognized by our citywide landmarks advocacy organizations as meritorious, and, per the City Planning Commission report, do not conflict with zoning.

Thank you to Chair Greenfield and Council Member Koo for holding this hearing and proceeding with this important designation process.