

## THE LANDMARKS OF NEW YORK, 1965–2011

*I pray let us satisfy our eyes—with the  
memorials and the things of fame that  
do renown this city.*

—William Shakespeare

For most of our history, Americans have been fervent believers in progress, which has often meant, in the realm of architecture, tearing down the old and building again—bigger, bolder, and taller than before. This is particularly true of New Yorkers, whose city, in its ceaseless ebb and flow, is a monument to transience, a moveable feast. New York City's quintessential characteristic is its quicksilver quality, its ability to transform itself not just from year to year, but almost from day to day. Cast your eyes upward almost anywhere in the city: a forest of cranes challenges the sky. The French architect Le Corbusier saw New York as a "white cathedral" that is never finished, "a geyser whose fountains leap and gush in continual renewal." He said of our city: "It has such courage and enthusiasm that everything can be begun again, sent back to the building yard, and made into something greater. . . . A considerable part of New York is nothing more than a provisional city. A city which will be replaced by another city." This is New York: its motion perpetual, its details a blurred collage.

Yet amidst this constant change, we have managed to preserve at least part of the city's legacy of great architecture. Until recently, it seemed that this would not be possible. During the first three centuries of the city's existence, many of its fine buildings were destroyed. Not until the 1960s did an urban preservation movement emerge with the objective of conserving the best of our past—architecturally, historically, and culturally.

Preservationists have long argued the intangible social benefits of protecting the past from the wrecker's ball. By conserving our historical and physical heritage, preservation provides a reassuring chain of continuity between past and present. And a sense of continuity, an awareness that some things last longer than mortal existence, is important to people. Cities, as the greatest communal works of man, provide the deepest assurance that this is true. This reality may

be the city's most valuable cultural function. Lewis Mumford put it most succinctly when he said, "In the city, time becomes visible."

Through the centuries, many of mankind's greatest buildings have been destroyed: some by acts of vandalism, others by not-always-benign neglect. The ongoing saga of destruction and construction, the endless clash between old and new, between tradition and progress, has always engaged poets and politicians. But in the last few decades, the delicate mesh that weaves the new into the old, continuing the layering process that creates a culture, has captured the interest of a far larger, and still-growing, number of people. Public attention has been focused not only on the protection of our fast-vanishing wilderness, but also on the urgent need to protect our architectural environment—from its irreplaceable structures to its cherished open spaces and parks. These natural and cultural resources, it has been said, are inherited from our ancestors and borrowed from our children. We are challenged to honor this pact and protect our legacy from human, industrial, and aesthetic pollution. Fortunately, we Americans have grown in our appreciation of our historical environment as being both beautiful and useful. For nearly a century, a dedicated army of women and men, some holding official positions in public and private preservation organizations, others laboring in far less visible capacities, has had a remarkable impact on the character and appearance of our cities.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The need to protect and preserve our cultural resources was first recognized by various groups of private citizens in the early 1800s, when voices began to be raised against the demolition of buildings identified with the nation's history. Perhaps the most significant nineteenth-century effort was the fight to save Mount Vernon, spearheaded by Ann Pamela Cunningham, a remarkable, dedicated, and persevering woman. Her success in saving that national monument inspired other efforts to protect and preserve historic sites and gave rise to a number of pioneering organizations and societies. In 1888, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities was formed to protect Jamestown. Such societies as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America began to center their efforts on preservation of notable historic structures of national importance before the turn of the twentieth century. The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, begun in 1910, rescued many important landmarks in that region. The idea of preserving larger areas also gained ground. John D. Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg, which began in 1926, is an early, yet imperfect, model.

Although pioneering for its time, it was later subject to revisionist criticism, as it created a wholly contemporary reconstruction from the incomplete, existing building footings and a single original chair.

The first actual federal legislation resulted from the Antiquities Act of 1906, which authorized the nation's president to designate as national monuments those areas of the public domain containing historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and objects of historical importance that were situated on federal property. A decade later, in 1916, the National Parks Service was created to protect historic and national parks. Local governments, too, started to enact preservation laws authorizing the designation and preservation of local buildings and neighborhoods of historic significance: first Charleston in 1931, followed by New Orleans in 1937, and San Antonio in 1939. State governments also began to support preservation efforts.

With the Historic Sites Act of 1935, the U.S. Congress proclaimed "a national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance." Unfortunately, the declared national policy was by no means the standard national practice, and despite it, precious structures were demolished. Aware that its earlier efforts had been inadequate, Congress chartered the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949, to foster awareness and advocacy. In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act called for preserving the integrity of cultural property of national, state, and local importance. At the same time, the National Register of Historic Places was created to encourage the identification and protection of the nation's historic structures through an ongoing inventory of such landmarks.

Preservation's coming-of-age was most evident in the expansion of activity at the local government level. By 1966, approximately one hundred communities had established landmarks commissions or their equivalents. Two decades later, the figure rose to 1,900 local preservation commissions, and today, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions estimates that there could be nearly 5,000 local preservation commissions. Clearly, preservation has come a long way from the early days of limited, *ad hoc* activity.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN NEW YORK CITY

As far back as 1831, New Yorkers had begun to express concern that many important structures were being destroyed in order to make way for new ones. In March of that year, the *New York Mirror* carried a picture of an old Dutch house on Pearl Street, in Lower Manhattan, with the caption: "Built in 1626, Rebuilt 1647, Demolished 1828," accompanied by a ringing editorial criticizing

the destruction. Just seven years later, Mayor Philip Hone had this to say about the city's penchant for tearing itself apart: "The city is now undergoing its usual metamorphosis; many stores and houses are being pulled down and others altered to make every inch of ground productive to its utmost extent. It looks like the ruins occasioned by an earthquake." Not a bad way to describe the situation more than 176 years later.

In its early history, the city grew by moving uptown in Manhattan, and outward in the other boroughs. But by the early 1900s, the land, at least in Manhattan, was largely filled. In most cases, the only way to build something new was to tear down something else, or to build on top of it. At first, most New Yorkers accepted the destruction of the past as the price to be paid for progress. They had little use for Victor Hugo's injunction: "Let us, while waiting for new monuments, preserve the ancient monuments." Instead, they relished what Walt Whitman referred to in the mid-1840s as the "pull-down-and-build-over-again" spirit, which seemed to epitomize their city, and all of America.

Yet some citizens fully endorsed Mayor Hone's appeal to resist the temptation to "overturn, overturn, overturn." During the prosperous post-Civil War years, Americans who had traveled throughout Europe on the grand tour came home with a new awareness and appreciation of the indigenous American culture that had taken root, particularly its architecture. In 1904, Henry James returned from Europe to find that his home in Boston had been demolished. "This act of obliteration had been breathlessly swift," he wrote, "and if I had often seen how fast history could be made, I had doubtless never so felt that it could be unmade still faster." About the same time, the writer Edith Wharton warned that if New York kept tearing down its great old buildings and putting up inferior replacements, one day it "would become as much a vanishing city as Atlantis, or the lowest layer of Schliemann's Troy." In the October 23, 1869, issue of *Harper's Weekly*, a caption read: "In a city where new construction is constantly in progress, demolition of the old and the excavation of the site are a commonplace to which New Yorkers have long been accustomed."

Indeed, much of older New York's most treasured architecture—in SoHo, in parts of Greenwich Village, and in Bedford Stuyvesant—has survived solely by chance. At critical moments, the development climate simply was not vigorous enough to make it worthwhile to knock down the older buildings in those areas and put up new ones. In fact, we owe it to accident, or benign neglect alone, that some of the most valuable artifacts of our past have survived. But

accidents are, by definition, sometime things. The sad truth is that of all the works of architecture in this country still standing in 1920, that we would now find worth saving for historic or aesthetic reasons, almost 90 percent have been wantonly destroyed. Today, preserving our built environment—not just the exteriors of structures but their interiors, as well—is less a matter of chance. All about us in New York are buildings that have been saved, in large measure due to the dedication of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, Municipal Art Society, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, and the vigilant work of citizen activists and neighborhood associations.

The emergence of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission came about as the result of years of work by concerned citizens and grassroots organizations. Among them were members of two groups that helped to educate the public about the city's architectural heritage—the Municipal Art Society and the New York Community Trust—as well as advocates from such community organizations as the Brooklyn Heights Association. The postwar boom in development put pressure on the surviving historic resources that remained untouched, and the concern for preserving elements of the city's past grew. While New Yorkers had for a long time agreed that specific sites associated with the early historic past of the city and country or architectural monuments deserved to be recognized, the widespread redevelopment occasioned by new highways, and urban renewal—in particular Robert Moses' plan for a Lower Manhattan Expressway and changes to the New York City Zoning code in 1961—directly threatened historic neighborhoods in the same way that commercial development was impacting Lower Manhattan and Midtown commercial buildings. Between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s, the city lost some of its finest architecture to large governmental projects designed to modernize flagging urban centers, as one glass-and-steel tower after another threatened to obliterate whatever old and good structures remained. Public concern was so manifest that the late modernist architect Philip Johnson, one of the leading practitioners of the International Style, joined other marching protesters to mourn the loss of Pennsylvania Station in 1963.

Other important buildings were lost during the same period, but it was the destruction of Pennsylvania Station that accelerated the creation of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. The original Pennsylvania Station, one of the acknowledged monuments of our century, was designed by

Charles Follen McKim, of the preeminent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White, and modeled after the Roman baths of Caracalla and the basilica of Constantine. “In our history there was never another building like Penn Station,” wrote Philip Johnson. “It compares with the great cathedrals of Europe.” In 1962, its fate was determined when the financially ailing Pennsylvania Railroad sold the air rights above the station to permit construction of a new Madison Square Garden (a building utterly lacking in distinction or quality). The station was torn down and replaced with a new, “smaller” one. What planners did not imagine at that time was that inter-city and commuter rail service would revive and that, in fewer than twenty years, the new station would be impossibly congested. The current Penn Station facility has undertaken a long series of renovations to accommodate its increasing number of daily passengers. The result does not suffice at peak periods, and even at regular levels, traffic is impeded by access ways that do not function. Since 1999, there has been a proposal to convert the Farley Building, the central post office adjacent to the Garden site, and its underground spaces to serve as a new station to be known as Moynihan Station (in honor of the late senator, Daniel P. Moynihan, who championed its construction), which would recall the grandeur of the lost 1910 structure. According to Nicolai Ouroussoff, of the *New York Times*, a new Pennsylvania Station would be a big step toward rectifying one of the greatest architectural tragedies in the city’s history: “the 1964 [sic] demolition of McKim, Mead & White’s glorious 1910 Pennsylvania Station, a monument to American democratic values, and its replacement by the dark, claustrophobic present-day station, one of the most dehumanizing public spaces in the city.” In October of 2010, the Moynihan Station project broke ground with a recent federal grant of \$83.3 million in place to kick off the \$267 million first phase of this ambitious multiphase project, which is scheduled to be completed in 2016. This welcome step forward inaugurates the long delayed plan designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, which will preserve the Farley Building’s main façade, with its grand staircase and row of Corinthian columns, and incorporate the current post office into a larger and much needed transit hub for the 550,000 people who daily use the current station complex.

Preservationists, architects, and humanists were stunned that a desecration such as the destruction of Pennsylvania Station could take place. By the time they had rallied to save the building, however, it was too late. No legal mechanism existed, nor was sufficient public pressure generated, to fight for its

survival. The *New York Times* on October 30, 1963, wrote a wry farewell: “Until the first blows fell, no one was convinced that Penn Station really would be demolished or that New York would permit this monumental act of vandalism. . . . Any city gets what it admires, will pay for, and ultimately deserves. Even when we had Penn Station, we couldn’t afford to keep it clean. We want and deserve tin-can architecture in a tin-horn culture. And we will probably be judged not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed.” In reply to mounting public criticism, the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company wrote a letter to the *Times* asking, “Does it make any sense to preserve a building merely as a ‘monument?’” As Nathan Silver states in *Lost New York*, “The station was sacrificed through the application of real estate logic that often dictates the demolition of the very building that makes an area desirable.” The absurdity and the iconoclasm of the act were noted by many constituencies: how could a city as civilized and culturally oriented as New York permit the annihilation of one of its most important physical legacies?

Soon thereafter, the most important legislative and regulatory institution to preserve New York City’s built heritage was born. On April 19, 1965, Mayor Robert F. Wagner signed the legislation that created the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. The vision of preserving our past found permanence in the Landmarks Law, which has since its inception played a key role in shaping the evolving face of the city. Despite the fact that a hundred cities were already ahead of it, having established preservation commissions by 1965, New York became the leader in the preservation of its landmarks, its work encompassing a wide range and quality of architectural and historic resources. It is now the largest municipal preservation agency in the United States. By one estimate, New York has succeeded in designating at least four times as many landmarks and five times as many historic districts, compared to fourteen major cities whose combined population is twice that of New York. The abundance and variety of these buildings is surprising, ranging from the best efforts of our finest architects, to excellent examples of vernacular building types. New York’s landmarks encompass three centuries of urban sites which create an architectural record touching upon every aspect of life, providing evidence of our proudest achievements and a history of New York’s citizenry writ large in buildings that express their most noble aspirations and deepest values.

Numbers, of course, cannot tell the whole story. It is neither feasible nor desirable to measure the success of the preservation effort merely by the number

of old buildings that have been saved. Nor, for that matter, does it make sense to preserve structures by restricting their functions to what they had been in the past; the effect would be to create a city of mausoleums rather than one of functioning, evolving buildings that people actually use. With its mandate to conserve New York's architectural past, the Landmarks Preservation Commission is justifiably proud that it "has not wanted to make museums of all its historic treasures," but has vigorously promoted the repurposing of carefully selected buildings instead. The fact that landmark structures have undergone significant renovation work or important additions and, in historic districts, new construction, approved by the Commission, testifies to the Landmarks Law's ability to accommodate changes in use, to adapt to the needs of commerce and modern technology, and to grow with, and respond to, the needs of a building and the people whom it is meant to serve. It proves, with little doubt, that Landmarks are far from "frozen in time." For example, at least five new uses were proposed for the Astor Library, but it was theater producer Joseph Papp's vision and imagination—in combination with the New York City landmarks preservation ordinance—that in the mid-1960s succeeded in saving the elegant structure from destruction, and transforming it into the Joseph Papp Public Theater, a thriving cultural institution, which in 2011, more than forty-five years later, was again being adapted to revitalize its nineteenth landmark home for more contemporary uses and maintain one of the most vibrant theater spaces in the city. More recently, the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House (originally U.S. Custom House, built 1902–1907), designed by Cass Gilbert, which sits on the original site of the Dutch West India Company's Fort Amsterdam, the nucleus of the settlement of New Amsterdam, gained new life as the home of the George Gustav Heye Center of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, as well as the Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of New York.

#### WHAT IS A LANDMARK?

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission is charged with identifying and designating landmarks and with regulating their preservation. The identification of structures and sites is an important part of guarding New York City's rich past. Some sites represent events of historical significance, people's association with the city's history, or a certain style or period of architecture. Others are designated because they represent a way of life, a way of doing business, or a way of maintaining a community in an ever-changing world.

Among New York's landmarks are banks, bridges, apartment houses, piers, theaters, streets, churches, factories, schools, cemeteries, parks, clubs, museums, office towers, archeological sites, and even trees. As of June, 2011, designations include more than 1,136 individual exterior landmarks, 110 interior landmarks, ten scenic landmarks, and 103 historic districts, including sixteen extensions to existing historic districts—in all, over 27,000 structures. The vast majority of both individual landmarks and historic districts are in Manhattan: 909 individual landmarks and fifty-five historic districts and fourteen extensions. Brooklyn has 174 individual landmarks and twenty-five historic districts and one extension; The Bronx has eighty-four individual landmarks and ten historic districts and one extension; Staten Island has 128 individual landmarks and three historic districts, while Queens has seventy-one individual landmarks and ten historic districts. Although this may sound like a great many, it actually accounts for only 2 to 3 percent of all the property in New York City.

What makes a “landmark” a landmark? The Commission evaluates structures and neighborhoods from all five boroughs representing a wide variety of eras, styles, materials, and purposes. The New York City Landmarks Law defines an exterior individual landmark as a structure, property, or object at least thirty years old, which has “a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation.” Some examples include the Sailors Snug Harbor in Staten Island, the Wonder Wheel in Coney Island, Brooklyn, and the Second Shearith Israel Cemetery in Manhattan. The chief criterion for designating individual landmarks is architectural integrity, but, increasingly, a significant number of structures have also have been designated for their historical significance or for cultural reasons, such as being associated with celebrated people or events. The law further states:

It is hereby declared as a matter of public policy that the protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of improvements and landscape features of special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value is a public necessity and is required in the interest of the health, prosperity, safety and welfare of the people. The purpose is to effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements and landscape features and of districts which represent or reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history;

safeguard the city's historic, aesthetic and cultural heritage; stabilize and improve property values; foster civic pride in the beauty and noble accomplishments of the past; protect and enhance the city's attractions to tourists and visitors and the support and stimulus to business and industry; strengthen the economy of the city; promote the use of historical districts, landmarks, interior landmarks, and scenic landmarks for the education, pleasure and welfare of the city.

An interior landmark is defined as an interior of a structure, or any part thereof, which is at least thirty years old, that is customarily open and accessible to the public and that has special landmark qualities. Some examples include the Bartow-Pell Mansion in The Bronx, the Williamsburgh Savings Bank banking hall in Brooklyn, the Marine Air Terminal at LaGuardia Airport in Queens, and the Ed Sullivan Theater in Manhattan. However, the law prohibits the designation of the interiors of places of worship.

A scenic landmark is defined as a landscape feature, or a group of features, which is of special character or historical or aesthetic interest, and is at least thirty years old. It must also be situated on city-owned property. Some examples include all of Central Park (including every bridge, monument, gazebo, gate, lake, fountain, and walkway), Verdi Square on Broadway at 73rd Street, Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and, most recently, Morningside Park, designated on July 15, 2008 and the city's first scenic landmark to be designated since 1983.

With 25 million visitors each year to its 843 acres, which is larger than the entire Mediterranean municipality of Monaco, Central Park is the most frequently visited urban park in the United States. The Central Park Conservancy, a private not-for-profit organization that manages Central Park under a contract with the city, provides more than 85 percent of the park's annual \$25 million operating budget and is responsible for restoring, managing, and enhancing the Park in partnership with the Parks Department. Since its founding in 1980, the Conservancy has overseen the investment of more than \$500 million (more than \$110 million of public funding and more than \$390 million from private sources) to transform Central Park into a model for urban parks nationwide through a comprehensive management and restoration plan and programs for volunteers and visitors. It has set new standards of excellence in park care, emphasizing environmental excellence and thereby improving the quality of open space in the city. Through its example, numerous park

conservancies throughout the city and the nation now revitalize and restore our historic parks.

Distinct from individual landmarks, a historic district is an area that has a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest representing one or more architectural styles or periods and that constitutes a distinct section of the city or conveys a “sense of place.” Examples include: the Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District, on the site of Richmond Hall, once Aaron Burr’s estate, which contains fine Federal and Greek Revival houses; the Ladies’ Mile Historic District, the fashion center of New York’s Gilded Age, with its concentration of the city’s first department stores, including Lord & Taylor, B. Altman & Co., and Tiffany & Co.; the SoHo Historic District, with its distinguished collection of cast-iron buildings; the Prospect Park South Historic District, an example of the city’s “suburban” development in Brooklyn, with its free-standing houses in a variety of eclectic vernacular styles; and the Perry Avenue Historic District in the Bedford Park section of The Bronx, New York City’s 100th historic district, which features worker housing in the Queen Anne style.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission consists by law of eleven members, one of whom is a full-time paid chairman. The law requires that the Commission include at least one resident from each borough, three architects, one historian, one realtor, and one city planner or landscape architect. Members are appointed by the mayor for three-year terms, and the chairman and vice-chairman are selected at the pleasure of the mayor from among the commissioners. There has been, in general, an extraordinary continuity of informed and courageous leadership in the last forty-five years, thanks to the six men and four women who have chaired the Commission: Geoffrey Platt (1965–1968); Harmon Goldstone (1968–1973); Beverly Moss Spatt (1974–1978); Kent Barwick (1978–1983); Gene Norman (1983–1989), the first full-time paid commissioner; David F. M. Todd (1989–1990); Laurie Beckelman (1990–1994); Jennifer Raab (1994–2001); Sherida Paulsen (2001–2002); and Robert B. Tierney (2003–present). The Commission has also enjoyed the support of the elected leaders of New York over the last four decades: Mayors Wagner, Lindsay, Beame, Koch, Dinkins, Giuliani, and Bloomberg. The commissioners are assisted by a full-time, paid professional staff, including researchers, historians, restoration specialists, archeologists, lawyers, administrators, and support staff. In the late 1980s, the staff of the Commission peaked at approximately eighty members. Subsequent economic downturns and resulting budget cuts reduced that

number to a low of fifty. Currently, the Commission has a staff of sixty-one persons and a projected annual budget for fiscal year 2011 of nearly \$5.5 million.

The workload of the Commission has increased continuously in the past two decades. Besides new designations, renovations of existing landmarks, and new construction in the city spurred by the real estate market's upturn have increased new work permit applications alone from nearly 7,933 in fiscal year 2000 to over 9,300 in fiscal year 2010, which itself represents a 5 percent increase over fiscal year 2009. The work of the Commission's enforcement staff to ensure compliance with the law resulted in the issuance of over 1,200 warning letters in fiscal year 2010, more than a 50 percent increase in the last ten years and a 10 percent increase over the prior fiscal year. While applications for permits are dependent, to some extent, on the real estate market, interest in achieving landmark status does not wane in harder economic times, and requests for landmark status have continually risen over the past decade. The Commission held twenty-four public hearings and twelve public meetings in the fiscal year 2010, and conducted numerous informational outreach meetings with owners of buildings proposed for designation and with local community boards to help improve public understanding of the Landmarks Law. Through the use of innovative procedures, guidelines, and master plans, the Commission has been able to just keep pace with its increasing workload.

#### THE WORK OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

The work of the Landmarks Preservation Commission is divided into three main functions: (1) identification, (2) designation, and (3) regulation. The identification function consists of a survey (an ongoing inventory of all the building lots in the city's five boroughs), as well as research (evaluating requests for landmark status and determination of the histories and significance of individual buildings) leading to designation. The regulation and preservation function consists of considering and approving or disapproving changes to already designated landmark structures and districts and enforcing the application of the Landmarks Law.

#### THE DESIGNATION PROCESS

For the first decade of its existence, from 1965 to 1974, public hearings for designations were held every six months, and the Commission designated clearly important and obvious architectural works. In 1974, its jurisdiction was extended to include scenic and interior landmarks, and greater volume necessitated more frequent designation hearings. The Commission now meets several times a month to address Commission policies, establish guidelines, discuss and designate new

landmarks, and act on permit applications. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, in response to the volume of prior designations and the development climate, the work of the Commission shifted away from designation to preservation and regulation, including, most importantly, the determination of appropriateness of new and extended construction on landmark sites—thus influencing land development in New York City. With the beginning of the new millennium, a new focus on designation, particularly to increase designations throughout the five boroughs and to recognize previously under-appreciated sites of historic or cultural significance, has been at the forefront of the Commission's actions. Since 2003, under the Bloomberg Administration, the Commission has designated twenty-three historic districts plus six extensions, with sixteen of these designations in boroughs other than Manhattan, the most historic designations of any administration to date.

Buildings are designated only after a process that was deliberately designed to be as thorough and exhaustive as possible. The five stages of the designation process are: (1) identification, (2) evaluation and prioritization, (3) calendaring, (4) public hearing and further research, and (5) designation.

Sources relied upon for identification come from interested citizens, property owners, community groups, public officials, Commission staff, commissioners, public officials, and surveys of properties conducted by the Commission, such as the 22,000-building survey recently completed by the staff. Regardless of who proposes a building, the Commission staff undertakes to evaluate its significance, which often involves a field visit, photographs, and research and deliberation by a committee consisting of the chairman, the executive director, the chief of staff, the director of research, and other staff members. A letter is sent to the person who submitted the request, informing him or her of the committee's determination. After the committee recommends that a proposed historic property merits further consideration, the chairman will decide whether to bring the property forward to the full Commission for review, considering the importance of, and threats to, the resource, owner, and community, along with City Council support and agency resources and priorities. The staff then presents its findings, with its recommendations to the commissioners in a public executive session. The commissioners then decide which buildings should proceed. For proposed individual landmarks, the staff usually contacts the owner to discuss the landmark designation process and potential issues. At a subsequent public executive session, the commissioners vote on which buildings to calendar

for a public hearing. A letter of notification and printed calendars regarding the hearing are mailed to the owner, to community boards, to public officials, to the Buildings Department and the City Planning Commission, and to those members of the general public on the Commission's mailing list.

In 2008, occasioned by a seven-year wait for a definitive response to whether the Commission would move forward with a request to extend the Park Slope Historic District, a community group brought suit against the Commission to increase the transparency of the request process, arguing that the Commission had an obligation to publicly consider and render a prompt decision on every formal landmark nomination made by the public. While the trial court agreed and mandated new procedures, the New York State Court of Appeals reversed, upholding the Commission's process. In another case brought in 2010, the New York State Appellate Division reaffirmed the Commission's broad discretion to decide when and what properties to bring forward for calendaring and validated its current procedure.

The Commission conducts public hearings for all landmark designations at which the commissioners hear a staff presentation on the proposed designation, receive additional information from any other sources who testify or present written statements, and often hear the owner's point of view. A decision is not usually made at this public hearing. Rather, staff members are instructed to continue research and report back with their findings. Assuming the building or site is still proceeding toward landmark status, all of the research is then summarized in a draft of a designation report prepared by the research department that, together with information gathered at the hearing, is discussed by the Commission at a later public executive session where a vote is then taken. Six affirmative votes of the commissioners are needed to designate the proposed site a landmark. Once designated, the building or structure is fully protected by the Landmarks Law; all subsequent changes to it must be approved by the Commission before a building permit may be issued. In the last decade, the Commission received and reviewed requests from the public to designate, on average, 200 new individual landmarks and several historic districts each year, 100 of which come from the New York City 311 hotline. No information is currently available regarding the percentage of the requests received by the Commission in fiscal year 2010 to evaluate potential individual landmarks and historic districts advanced to public hearing or designation.

In recent years, the importance of the public hearing process has gradually eroded. It appears that sites with potential to generate long and acrimonious debate, and which are not certain to be designated, tend not to be calendared for public hearing. This produces a commendable success rate for the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation process, and it may have the welcome effect, for some, of abbreviating what sometimes feels like the endless process of public review. However, it may have the unintended effect of stifling debate and raises questions about the integrity of the public hearing process. Also, there is the risk that a site that deserves landmark status may not be heard for a variety of reasons, including owner objections, and therefore not be designated in a timely manner. If calendaring a site for public hearing is tantamount to designation, then the public may effectively be denied full access to the process, and potential political and economic concerns may take priority over preservation concerns, creating a climate that threatens to undermine historic preservation in New York City.

One such example is 2 Columbus Circle, the former Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art designed by Edward Durrell Stone in 1964. Long the subject of conflicting architectural assessments on its merits, and having a challenging design for adaptive reuse with its near windowless façade, Venetian-style touches, and portholes, the structure drew passionate proponents for both its immediate designation and ultimate replacement. As the site became ripe for development and requests for consideration mounted, the Commission's refusal to calendar the "lollipop building" (as it is often known for its eponymous street level colonnade) led to much criticism of the Commission from community activists and noted architects alike. This prompted the then architectural critic for the *New York Times*, David Dunlap, to question the Commission's autonomy in the face of development and political pressures, and in turn the integrity of the designation process of the city's landmarks and historic districts in a 1996 *New York Times* article. The building underwent an extensive remodeling by the Oregon architect, Brad Cloepfil, who was commissioned by the Museum of Art and Design to create its new home, which opened in 2008 with little of the original design remaining. The project stands as a monument to community defeat.

Recently, it was apparent that politics affected the outcome of the proposed designation of two buildings on Manhattan's "automobile row," both designed

by the Chicago architect Howard Van Doren Shaw: 225 West 75th Street and the B. F. Goodrich Tire Company building at 1780 Broadway. The owner, Extell, proposing to construct a fifty-story hotel project, opposed the designation and lobbied the City Council against the action, before the Commission reached a decision on the designation. While the Commission maintained that the landmark's worthiness (or lack thereof) was the primary consideration for removing the smaller building's designation, the Commission's chairman recommended the removal, which passed on a 6 to 3 vote, in light of the potential opposition from the City Council and the likelihood that the body would overturn any designation. Preservationists considered the action inappropriate.

A vote by the Landmarks Preservation Commission is by no means the end of the approval process. The City Council is the final decision-maker on designations. All landmarks decisions are required to go through a public committee process, as are any other land use matters. Within ten days of the designation, the Landmarks Preservation Commission must file reports with required city agencies and the City Council, and a Notice of Designation is sent to the property owner and registered in the appropriate land records. The City Planning Commission (CPC) also submits to the City Council a report on the designation and its potential impact, if any, on projected public improvements, and plans for development, growth, improvement, or renewal of the area involved. In the case of a historic district designation, the CPC also holds a public hearing. Next commences a 120-day period during which the City Council may, by majority vote, approve, modify, or disapprove a designation. Finally, the vote is filed with the mayor, and the designation (with any modifications by the City Council) becomes final, unless disapproved within five days by the mayor. A mayoral veto may be overridden by a two-thirds vote of the Council.

Only five times in the Commission's forty-six-year history has the City Council (or its predecessor the Board of Estimate) rejected or amended landmark designations. The Commission attributes the limited number of denials and modifications to its careful process of review, and to detailed discussions with owners before a designation is made. In 1991, the City Council overturned the designation of Dvořák House, home of the renowned Czechoslovak composer, Antonín Dvořák, where he wrote the *New World* Symphony in the 1880s. The designation was strongly opposed by its owner, Beth Israel Medical Center. In fall 2003, the City Council voted to overturn the designation of the

Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine as an individual landmark (which had also been heard for designation in 1966 and 1979). At the heart of the matter was that the designation was for the cathedral alone, not the entire 11.3-acre site, which includes other significant related structures and the close. The City Council favored landmark status for the entire complex, rather than just the cathedral itself. The City Council rejected the landmark designation. The Mayor vetoed the action but the Council overrode the veto and the result was that neither the Cathedral, nor the close and surrounding structures were designated. The diocese moved forward on a proposal to lease a part of the close to Columbia University for a twenty-story tower without commission review, and the future of another parcel, also optioned to Columbia University, is unclear. In 1992, and then again in 2005, the designation of the former Jamaica Savings Bank, a small, striking modern building built in Queens in 1968, was overturned. Also in 2005, the Council overturned the designation of the Austin, Nichols Warehouse, a 1913 Cass Gilbert-designed warehouse in the Egyptian Revival style, on the Williamsburg, Brooklyn, waterfront, which is currently slated to become luxury apartments. Most recently, in January of 2011, the Council voted to overturn the designation of the 1912 Grace Episcopal Church Memorial Hall by Upjohn and Constable, a two-story brick and limestone Tudor revival structure, one of the group of Queens landmarks approved by the commission in October of 2010. The designation of Memorial Hall completed the protection of the entire historic complex, adding to the 1967 individual designations of the Gothic Revival-style Church (Dudley Fields, 1861–62, enlarged; Cady, Berg & See, 1901–02) and graveyard (1734), which have played an important role in the Jamaica community since the congregation was founded in 1702. The congregation, which did not appear at the commission's hearing or object to the action during the entire process, successfully lobbied council members to stop the designation at the last minute citing financial constraints.

There have also been several modifications of designations, such as the Tribeca West Historic District designation in 1991, and in 1990, the Suburban Homes Company York Avenue Estate buildings, a complex of unprepossessing buildings important for their planning principles and social history. In the latter case, the Board of Estimate removed four of the fourteen buildings from the designation to accommodate Peter S. Kalikow's plan to replace a section of the complex with a very large apartment tower. A 1992 ruling by the Appellate

Division of the Supreme Court of New York rejected the Board of Estimate's action, affirming the original landmark designation as a process with reason and integrity, and not one to be diluted to satisfy the competing political demands of powerful landowners. In June of 2010, the Appellate Division again addressed the Suburban Homes Company York Avenue Estate complex by upholding the 2006 designation of two additional buildings in the complex, despite the fact that the buildings had been significantly altered with a cladding of pink-brown stucco. There has also been a single rescission of the landmark site, that of the former Knickerbocker Field Club, after the building was badly damaged in a fire and later demolished.

Over the past decade, there has been a qualitative shift in the focus of proposed designations. In the past, the majority of the Commission's designations were based on architectural or aesthetic qualities, many in combination with historic significance. Recently, there has been a move to address issues of even-handedness and geographic distribution; some would say at the expense of architectural integrity. The desire to recognize and preserve structures for historical or cultural significance and to reach broader sectors of the city, such as the other boroughs and northern Manhattan, has taken on new urgency, as many believe that place matters, and that it is important to recognize such buildings as individual landmarks. Similarly, recent historic district designations primarily fall into a few categories: neighborhoods with significant sociological importance, those that reflect cultural/historical identities, and types or styles of development from particular economic periods. These include historic districts such as Perry Avenue in The Bronx, or the Ridgewood South Historic District in Queens.

It is important to recognize the diversity of architectural, historic, and cultural resources throughout the five boroughs. Each borough has its own history, patterns of economic and cultural development, and distinct evolution to be celebrated. Among these are the early rural history of Staten Island; the suburban nature of parts of Queens, Brooklyn, and The Bronx; the development of worker housing, sea-side architecture, and industrial development; and cultural migrations from Manhattan to the other boroughs. The preservation of neighborhoods, not just buildings, is a key goal of the landmarks movement—retaining a vibrant streetscape, enhancing economic value and commercial viability, and maintaining the quality of life. Place Matters, a joint project of City Lore and the Municipal Art Society, has compiled a list of places that matter for a wide variety of reasons. They seek to promote and protect places that connect New Yorkers to the city's history and encourage awareness and understanding

of sites that recognize ongoing cultural and community traditions that keep the city distinctive. Places may be nominated by anyone. A small sample of sites are: 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in The Bronx, which celebrates the pioneers of the hip hop movement; the Kentile Sign over the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn; the Archie Bunker House on Cooper Avenue in Queens; and the site of the founding of the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters in Central Harlem. The survey also recognizes more traditional sites that are also designated individual landmarks, such as the Astoria Pool and Park, the Audubon Ballroom in northern Manhattan, the 1964–65 World's Fair Unisphere, and the Alice Austen House in Staten Island.

The central question is whether the Landmarks Law is the proper vehicle for these buildings, which foster traditions, enable important activities both historically and potentially for the future, bolster economic value, and may embody an aesthetic beauty, but are not necessarily of the architectural or historical merit traditionally accorded individual landmarks. There are those who would argue that anything over thirty years old is worth saving, a position not grounded in rigorous preservation analysis, but simply embraced because of a lack of appropriate neighborhood preservation development tools available to activists today. Indeed, the Landmarks Commission has long been a “go-to” destination due to its small size and user-friendly qualities to address issues that fall between governmental agency cracks, despite the fact that the Commission does not have the jurisdiction to address them. Examples of some of the issues that citizens bring to the Commission are noise, use, and other quality-of-life issues. There need to be new tools to influence neighborhood quality. Potentially, such historical and cultural sites and areas could be the subject of a different kind of designation that would recognize their importance and value to the community and grant protections that would ensure their survival. A neighborhood, special design, or cultural conservation district could be crafted to address contextual zoning issues, to preserve the essential spirit of an area through a combination of physical design guidelines, and to encourage the financial health of a neighborhood by qualifying for certain incentives for smart and appropriate development and community enhancement. As *Place Matters* has realized, these “[p]laces are frequently valued for several intertwined reasons that can coexist and complement each other, but also compete and cause conflict.” A current paradox of preservation today is how to resolve the competing ideas of what we value and how we determine what is universally valued for designation under the Landmarks Law? This emerging issue is a difficult one and deserves our critical thought and attention.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission has been in existence since 1965, and there is a body of opinion which contends that nearly all of the truly important historic and iconic structures and spaces (excepting those constructed in the last thirty years) have already been designated. While this position is often raised by disgruntled developers, property rights advocates, or architects frustrated by the city's development process and protections, questions have been raised by both proponents and opponents of preservation alike about the quality and quantity of current designations—in essence, how much is too much, or is there ever too much? Drawing the circle too broadly raises questions such as what will our city look like in another fifty years? Will we be a network of contiguous historic districts with development areas in between? How do we create future landmarks? Jean Nouvel's proposed "Tower Verre" for Hines Development Company, adjoining the Museum of Modern Art, engages just such a debate. The soaring design of glass façades cut with irregularly placed steel beams, which concludes in sloping needle-like spires brings new expression to the pointed skyscraper designs of the pre-war era, envisions required set backs in a smooth and inconspicuous way, and proclaims its place as a twenty-first-century building on the skyline in sharp contrast with the boxy silhouettes of the past few decades. Nouvel recently said in a *New York Magazine* article entitled "Colossus": "The most extraordinary cities create energy as they form themselves, and that energy and complexity are qualities that can't be abandoned. Our responsibility is to bear witness to our era. A city's identity is not something you preserve, it is something you create too." Yet residents and community activists, as the article's title suggests, find the proposal overwhelming and inappropriate, its potential shadow over Central Park a blight; they mourn the loss of the brownstone character this midtown block once epitomized and seek to reverse the city's scaled back approval of the project.

Where do we find the balance between change and continuity? New ideas—in architecture as much as economics—keep a city alive. As Paul Goldberger noted at a luncheon celebrating the Landmarks Law's forty-fifth anniversary at the Four Seasons Restaurant, itself an interior individual landmark now in its fifty-second year of existence (remarkably, the same age Pennsylvania Station was when it was torn down in 1963) and contained within Mies van der Rohe's designated landmark Seagram Building (1958): "a city that preserves not enough is a rootless culture, based on shifting sand, a place where time is never visible. . . . But of course a city that does not change enough is dead . . . and if there is anything we cannot ever allow ourselves to be, it is some grotesque