

FRIENDS

of the UPPER EAST SIDE
HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, founded in 1982, is an independent, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to preserving the architectural legacy, livability, and sense of place of the Upper East Side.

WINTER 2016 / SPRING 2017

NEWS FROM FRIENDS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The long-awaited opening of the Second Avenue Subway comes with a variety of feelings. Many of us in the neighborhood exhaled with a sigh of relief that it is finally complete, followed by pleasure at how sleek and clean it is, and delight in the artwork. Parts of the city that took several transfers are now incredibly quick and easy to get to, and commuters into Yorkville are finding their journeys appreciably shorter.

At the same time, there is some apprehension about the changes that may follow. We see the supertall at Park Avenue and 56th Street, and think about the one proposed for Sutton Place that is being hard fought by residents there. We notice large vacant lots along our eastern avenues, and see new construction beginning on many of them. We wonder what's happening to our mom-and-pop stores, and why there are so many drug stores. And what about that huge building proposed for 88th Street and Third Avenue, which may be permitted by a zoning determination that is being challenged by our colleagues at Carnegie Hill Neighbors? Can there be more of those?

FRIENDS has been anticipating this threshold moment since 2014. We commissioned a comprehensive analysis of the neighborhood, completed in September 2015, entitled *The Upper East Side: A Framework for the Future of Five Neighborhoods*, available on our website. The study identifies the essential elements that determine neighborhood character, and sets out broad goals to retain it.

The question now, for all of us to consider together, is how to take what we have learned and decide what zoning, urban design, and other specific strategies will best protect what we love about the Upper East Side, especially Yorkville, which is almost entirely unprotected by landmark designation. I think we can all agree we don't want "supertalls," but if development is going to happen, how can we make sure it is appropriate? Is a height limit possible, like the one on Park Avenue? Might there be a new zoning designation that would shape new buildings in compatible ways? How do air rights transfers affect new and old buildings? To help us address these questions, FRIENDS has engaged

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR FALL EVENTS



The Art Deco doors of 7 Gracie Square were one of many sites to admire on our "East River Vistas" walking tour led by Francis Morrone. We partnered with the Historic Districts Council for this event – Yorkville was one of HDC's Six to Celebrate Neighborhoods!



Upstairs at our favorite neighborhood pub Ryan's Daughter, author Esther Crain shared some lesser known stories about the Gilded Age featured in her new book, The Gilded Age in

New York, like that of the opulent mansion above which became known as "Clark's Folly."



FRIENDS was lucky to get a tour the Museum of the City of New York's new exhibit, New York at Its Core, all to ourselves! This fascinating new exhibit chronicles our city's history, while also looking toward the future. Here we are sharing our "What If's..." for the future!

INTRODUCING THE UPPER EAST SIDE'S 129TH INDIVIDUAL LANDMARK!

The Landmarks Preservation Commission voted on December 13, 2016 to designate the wooden house at 412 East 85th Street as the newest individual landmark on the Upper East Side, and the designation was confirmed by the City Council on March 1, 2017.

As residents of the Upper East Side, we are well aware of the enormous development pressures facing our neighborhoods – from the rapid pace of high-rise construction, to the escalating commercial rents that are shuttering many of the small businesses that define our community. Against this backdrop of the ever-changing city, our landmarks are more critical than ever before. And occasions when a new landmark joins the ranks is cause for true celebration!

The small wooden house at 412 East 85th Street, nestled into the midblock as a welcome surprise for the passerby, joins several landmarked wood-frame houses on the Upper East Side. In addition to Gracie Mansion within Carl Schurz Park, the houses at 120, 122, and 160 East 92nd Street are each designated individual landmarks, while 128 East 93rd Street was designated as part of the Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District.

Preserving this charming wooden house at 412 East 85th Street is the latest success in FRIENDS' goal to recognize and celebrate the culture and history of Yorkville, and to preserve the unique character of our

neighborhoods while promoting balanced growth. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram for updates on our activities, and fun photos of the neighborhood, like the one you see below! ♦



SPOTLIGHT: EAST RIVER FIFTIES ALLIANCE

As you may have read in the news, our neighbors to the south in Sutton Place are facing the threat of supertall development, including the potential for a nearly 1000-foot tall tower. Unlike the Upper East Side, the midblocks of Sutton Place are not protected by contextual zoning or height caps. This means that the developer seeking to build the proposed 3 Sutton Place tower along East 58th Street, a narrow side street, can build as tall as possible as-of-right.

In response to this potential development, residents of the area formed the East River Fifties Alliance (ERFA) in 2015, which seeks to reform the zoning in their neighborhood. Led by ERFA's president, Alan Kersh, this grassroots organization has the support of 45 neighborhood co-op and condominium buildings, as well as over 2,000 individual donors. In order to safeguard the neighborhood from future out-of-scale development, ERFA engaged an A-list team of lawyers and planners to write a community-based rezoning proposal, which was submitted to the New York City Department of City Planning. Some key elements of ERFA's rezoning proposal include: imposing building height limits of up to 235 feet, incentivizing affordable housing by offering development bonuses to buildings which provide 20 percent affordable units, and requiring certain street frontage design elements in order to create architectural interest on the streetscape.

The rezoning proposal has the support of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer, Council Member Ben Kallos, Council Member Dan Garodnick and State Senator Liz Krueger, who have all signed on as co-applicants to the proposal. The plan is also endorsed by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and Assemblyman Dan Quart. ERFA's proposal is currently awaiting "certification" by the Department of City Planning (DCP). Certification is an official acknowledgment by DCP that the application is complete and begins the formal review process. ♦

ANNOUNCING “BUILDING FUN BASICS,” OUR NEW YOUNG FRIENDS PROGRAM



A student works with building shapes.

Arriving just in time for the city’s roll out of Universal Pre-Kindergarten programming, we are excited to announce our latest Young FRIENDS offering: Building Fun Basics, which is geared toward younger students. Building Fun Basics uses interactive lessons to introduce young learners (kindergarten and pre-kindergarten) to architecture through the concepts of color, shape, size, and texture.

Learning is reinforced with hands-on materials. Children use colorful tiles in different shapes to design a simple two-dimensional building, play with blocks to experiment with size, touch brick, limestone, clapboard, and glass samples to experience various material textures, and take part in a treasure hunt for shapes and colors in the architecture around them.

We have taught Building Fun Basics to 450 students this school year to date, and hope to reach even more by June. We have visited many Upper East Side and East Harlem schools, including the Addie Mae Collins Early Childhood Centers, Boys & Girls Harbor, the Ella Baker School, the Graham School at Echo Park, the Manhattan Schoolhouse Preschool, the New York International School, PS 50, PS 102 and St. Ann School.

FRIENDS is grateful for a grant from the Selz Foundation, which has allowed us to continue outreach to new schools, with a special emphasis on our neighbors in East Harlem. We are also proud to also offer three other programs: Building Fun, Yorkville Immigration, and Landmarks & Preservation to schools who are old friends – and ones who are new to us as well. If you would like to bring Young FRIENDS programs to a school near you, contact Director of Education Heidi Carey today! ♦

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

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urban planner George M. Janes & Associates to illustrate our options and lead the discussions. This is an exciting opportunity to shape the future of our neighborhood. JOIN US! We can meet with small groups upon request, and have scheduled a **public workshop on these issues for Saturday, May 13th at St. Jean Baptiste High School beginning at 10:00 am.** Check our website or call the office for details.

Sincerely,

Franny Eberhart

Franny Eberhart

FIRST AVENUE ESTATE: THE BATTLE CONTINUES

FRIENDS continues to press on in the campaign to ensure lasting protection and preservation of the City and Suburban Homes Company, First Avenue Estate, a full block model tenement development between First and York Avenues and East 64th and East 65th Streets. The 15-building complex is a pioneering example of affordable housing, constructed between 1898 and 1915 by the City and Suburban Homes Company, which built modest apartments around innovative light courts in order to maximize light and ventilation within each unit. The light court model was a departure from earlier cramped and dark “dumbbell” style tenement buildings. Home to longtime tenants of modest income,

these buildings continue to be a source of affordable housing on the Upper East Side.

In the nearly thirty years since the First Avenue Estate was designated an individual landmark in 1990, its owners have exercised almost every possible method of disputing its landmark status in order to redevelop the site, despite repeated decisions from the Landmarks Preservation Commission, City, and State affirming its designation and historical value.

For the past two years, Stahl has pursued dual cases at the state and federal levels, this time

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Case Study: Partial Facade Demolition Allowed By Landmarks Commission on East 78th Street



The two rowhouses at the right, circa 1965.



The proposed plans, including the new rooftop additions.

Like many private schools occupying historic buildings in our neighborhood, Allen-Stevenson School along East 78th Street has been working toward the renovation and expansion of its facilities. Located in the Upper East Side Historic District between Park and Lexington Avenues, the main school building at No. 132 dates to 1924. Allen-Stevenson also owns the two adjacent Italianate style rowhouses, at No. 126 and 128 East 78th Street, which were built in the 1860s.

In 2015 the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) approved an application to retain the facades of the two rowhouses and demolish everything behind them to create a new unified building. As FRIENDS expressed in the public review process, we appreciated the choice to retain the individual character of the two buildings, if only at the facade.

During construction last year, FRIENDS noticed a portion of the historic facades

had been demolished, leaving a truck-sized hole spanning the width of the two row houses. According to publicly available information, the alteration permit was amended internally by LPC staff over a year after its approval. The amended per-

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mit allowed demolition of the two townhouse stoops and portions of the facade to “facilitate construction.” Although the permit stipulates that the reconstruction will use salvaged brownstone or cast stone, the material integrity of two significant facades has been irreversibly compromised.

FRIENDS is deeply troubled by the fact that LPC staff approved the partial demolition of these buildings without public review. Many projects change between approval at a public hearing and when the permit is issued

contingent on submission of full plans. But this approval quietly permitted the destruction of significant parts of two buildings in the district – including the segmental-arched openings and stoops mentioned in the designation report – with zero oversight from the public. While many projects are amended after the public hearing and vote, we have not come across an amendment as impactful and egregious as this one.

We have expressed our concerns to the LPC, but the agency has remained firm in its position that the work qualified for a staff-level amendment because the reconstructed facades will closely match the historic condition. But historic fabric is now gone forever, and a replica can never truly approximate historic material. In addition, there are numerous examples of projects of similar scope elsewhere in our historic districts where applicants did not resort to

demolishing significant historic features, but found creative solutions to facilitate construction within the tight confines of the urban grid.

As the steward of the architectural, historical, and cultural heritage of our city, the LPC should not allow for such impactful, damaging actions to be approved at staff level. FRIENDS will continue to closely monitor this project and advocate for more thorough oversight of staff level approvals at the Landmarks Commission. ♦

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL AMBASSADOR TO THE UPPER EAST SIDE AWARD DINNER

On Wednesday, September 28th, over 200 friends from around the city gathered to honor O. Kelley Anderson at our Thirteenth Annual Ambassador to the Upper East Side Award Dinner. Kelley has been a member of FRIENDS' Board for over two decades, serving as Treasurer since 1996, and has contributed enormously to protecting this community's historic character and quality of life. In everything he does, from his professional life as a founder of The Art Show at the Park Avenue Armory, to his vital leadership of the Knickerbocker Club, Kelley is both an erudite embodiment of the best qualities of the Upper East Side, and a tenacious street fighter for its landmarks and historic districts.

Special thanks to our Benefit Committee who ensured the success of the evening, especially Chairs Tina & Steve McPherson, and Vice-Chairs Gillian Blake & Oscar Anderson, Carol & Richard Miller, Ildiko & Gilbert Butler, and Ashton Hawkins & Johnnie Moore Hawkins. It was a wonderful and festive evening for all! ♦



FRIENDS' Executive Director, Rachel Levy; Board Member Alice Concagh and Kevin Concagh; Board President Franny Eberhart; Board Member Margot Wellington.



A fabulous night honoring Kelley!



Kelley Anderson with his wife, Brenda, and their children.

FIRST AVENUE ESTATE

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claiming that designation amounts to an unconstitutional taking and seeking once again to redevelop a portion of the site. They even requested permission to appeal the federal

In the decision, Judge Stallman clearly stated that Stahl had no viable taking claim and similarly upheld the Landmarks Commission's denial of the hardship application.

case to the United States Supreme Court, which was swiftly denied, officially closing the federal chapter — another preservation victory in this ongoing battle! The most recent news in the state case also favored the City's position. In the decision, Judge Stallman clearly stated that Stahl had no viable taking claim and similarly upheld the Landmarks Commission's denial of the hardship application. Despite the numerous decisions supporting New York City's preservation law and the landmark value of this site, Stahl continues to appeal, now to the New York State Appellate Division. Once again, the City of New York will defend the resolution of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, and once again, FRIENDS has mobilized a coalition of our elected officials and colleague preservation groups to amplify the City's case in an *amicus curiae* brief in support of the City. As a signature FRIENDS issue, we will continue to monitor the ongoing developments in this case — stay tuned! ♦

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FRICK UPDATE

In October, The Frick Collection announced that after a year of consideration, Selldorf Architects has been chosen to design an upgrade, enhancement, and expansion of the museum's facilities. The Frick states that the new design will work within the museum's existing footprint while preserving the domestic scale and aesthetic of the original home and gardens. The Frick has also engaged Beyer Blinder Belle as executive architect to work with Selldorf Architects.

In June 2014, The Frick Collection announced plans to expand the institution, which included the replacement of the prized Russell Page garden with a new, out-of-scale tower. FRIENDS, among many other groups like Unite to Save the Frick, opposed these inappropriate plans. After much criticism, the Frick withdrew its proposal the following year. FRIENDS, which has been involved with and spoke out against this proposal in the past, looks forward to seeing the revised designs in the winter of 2017. ♦

OUR MISSION

FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, founded in 1982, is an independent, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to preserving the architectural legacy, livability, and sense of place of the Upper East Side. In addition to monitoring the Upper East Side's seven historic districts and 129 individual landmarks, FRIENDS has also been a leader in successful efforts to improve the zoning laws governing the area's avenues and residential side streets. Through effective advocacy and successful educational programs, FRIENDS acts as a steward safeguarding the future of all Upper East Side historic districts and the designated and contributing buildings that make those districts special.

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