

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.

FALL 2018

NEWS FROM FRIENDS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



The old and the new live side by side in Yorkville, seen here with neighboring buildings at 240 and 244 East 86th Street.

In 1982 Halina Rosenthal, FRIENDS' first President, looked around our neighborhood and saw,

"a proliferation of assorted needles, slivers, splinters and other such skyward oriented structures which – if unchecked – will [create] sort of a pin-cushion aerial view of the city."

What do you suppose she would say today about the "supertalls" that are now towering

over Midtown, and threatening other neighborhoods like ours? What evocative words would she use to describe them?

Thirty-six years later, we can be sure she would be fighting them at every level, defending the "architectural legacy, livability, and sense of place of the Upper East Side." FRIENDS' leadership knew from the very beginning that the relatively new tools of historic preservation would not, by themselves, be enough to protect the quality of life and sense of place of our entire community. The Landmarks Preservation Commission was

designation was never going to apply to the entire community encompassed by FRIENDS' mission.

In 2017, as we celebrated the opening of the Second Avenue Subway, we also continued to prepare for the changes it might bring, good and bad, including the potential arrival of supertall skyscrapers. And so again, we focused on zoning, planning, and most especially the legal tools we would need to challenge the new development that is underway. These efforts continued into this year, as described on pages 2 and 4. We also launched our Development Tracker, an

In 2017 FRIENDS began to challenge such strategies, including gerrymandered zoning lots, oversized floor-to-floor heights, and enormous voids that have no purpose beyond raising the height of a building.

still young, and despite the affirmation of our Landmarks Law by the United States Supreme Court, it was clear that the real estate industry would continue to oppose preservation. In 1982 there were only 44 historic districts in the entire city (today, there are 142). These included the newly designated Upper East Side District, as well as Treadwell Farm, designated in 1967, Henderson Place in 1969, Carnegie Hill in 1974, and the Metropolitan Museum district in 1977. Clearly landmark

online map that locates all of the development sites we know of, and links them to whatever public information is available on each.

The density of potential development sites illustrated by the Tracker is startling, with large assemblages particularly susceptible to developer's "loopholes," questionable strategies that inflate a new building's size in ways not envi-

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FRIENDS on the Front Lines Contesting Overdevelopment



FRIENDS continues its fight against out-of-scale developments that threaten neighborhood character and exploit loopholes and strategies never intended by the Zoning Resolution to achieve super-tall status. FRIENDS is actively involved in three challenges to buildings that have used these manipulations to skirt various portions of New York City's Zoning Code.

At 180 East 88th Street (at the corner of Third Avenue), in addition to the use of 16-foot floor-to-floor heights for residential units and a 34 foot intra-building void to further boost the overall building height, the developer DDG has further skirted zoning regulations by annexing a small portion of the lot's 88th street frontage into a separate, unbuildable micro-lot. In doing so, the developer argues for an interpretation of zoning rules that has been supported by the Department of Buildings (DOB), that the building does not "face" East 88th Street, and therefore does not need to comply with tower-on-base zoning requirements. This novel interpretation has allowed the construction of a tall tower surrounded by a private plaza, the building form that was expressly prohibited when tower-on-base zoning was adopted

following community advocacy in the 1990s. FRIENDS is currently challenging the DOB's approval of this building to the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA), along with co-applicant Carnegie Hill Neighbors, with legal representation by John Low-Beer and Michael Gruen. If the BSA sanctions this practice, it will set a dangerous precedent for evasion of zoning rules citywide. The first BSA hearing to appeal the DOB's approval of 180 East 88th Street despite its avoidance of zoning regulation was on July 17, 2018. A second hearing at the BSA will be on October 30, 2018, so stay tuned for more updates on the progress of the challenge.

At the intersection of the Upper East Side and East Harlem, Avalon Bay and the Educational Construction Fund have proposed a massive redevelopment of the entire block between 96th and 97th Streets and First and Second Avenues that would overtake the Marx Brothers Playground, a 1.5 acre park located at the western end of the block. In order to build the staggering 710 foot tower as part of the 1.3 million square foot development, the City has proposed to give away the public playground and sports field via the State alienation process to the private de-

veloper in order to use the park's development rights toward the new tower. Not only would the Marx Brothers Playground be replaced with an unmapped replacement devoid of the protections afforded to Public Parkland, this project would overturn the foundational principle that parks do not have development rights. Such a precedent would threaten the integrity of over 250 small parks and playgrounds citywide that would be at risk for development. In recognition of this concern, Governor Andrew Cuomo has asked NYS Parks Commissioner Rose Harvey to investigate whether the City's actions are consistent with the State's alienation rules.

In December 2017, FRIENDS filed a lawsuit in partnership with a unique coalition of organizations including Carnegie Hill Neighbors, CIVITAS, and the Municipal Art Society of New York to prevent the City from alienating this public park on behalf of a private developer. Oral arguments in the case will likely be heard in December 2018, and the project will remain halted through this time.

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A NEW PATH FOR THE FRICK COLLECTION



Rendering of LPC-approved design for the Frick Collection.

Courtesy Selldorf Architects.

tate new spaces for offices, art conservation laboratories, education, and visitor amenities such as a gift shop and café.

The new proposal received mixed reviews from artists, conservators, historians, preservationists, and neighbors of the Frick. The LPC public hearing on May 29, 2018 lasted nearly four hours, including more than two hours of public testimony. FRIENDS wholeheartedly supported the Frick's institutional mission, and their wish to adapt space for modern needs, and praised the design team's selection of sensitive materials and commitment to retain the Russell Page Garden, while also questioning the necessity and appropriateness of the vertical expansion and loss of the music room. The application was ultimately approved at an LPC public meeting on June 26th.

Since the approval of the proposal, a request for the evaluation of the music room as an Interior Landmark has been submitted to the LPC. The Frick must also head to the Board of Standards and Appeals to seek a variance for the increase of height and bulk on the property. ♦

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

continued from page 1.

sioned or intended by the city's zoning. Along with colleagues across the city, in 2017 FRIENDS began to challenge such strategies, including gerrymandered zoning lots, oversized floor-to-floor heights, and enormous voids that have no purpose beyond raising the height of a building.

At the same time, we turned our attention to the architectural legacy of our unprotected neighborhoods, particularly Yorkville. There we could read in its buildings a whole history of previous periods of development, the first one following 1878 when elevated trains opened on Second and Third Avenues. On the flip side, in the mid-20th century came the development that followed the demolition of the "elevateds," creating the characteristic Yorkville streetscape where the historic and the modern are side-by-side. This fall we will com-

plete two projects that celebrate the ever-evolving history of Yorkville, as described on page 4.

In 2018, as was the case at the time of FRIENDS' creation in 1982, the essential ingredient to our success is your support. Although the demolition of Pennsylvania Station is often cited as the event that launched the preservation movement, it was really the passion and activism of people in neighborhoods like ours that drove the effort. That continues to be essential today, not just your financial support, but most especially your enthusiasm and devotion. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Franny Eberhart".

Franny Eberhart

IN MEMORIAM: ERIN GRAY



Erin Gray (right) changing the hands of the Yorkville clock with Margot Gayle (left), April 2000 (Photo courtesy Bill Perlmuter).

The Board of Directors mourns the recent passing of Erin Gray in July after a seventh month battle with cancer. Erin was a devoted Board Member of FRIENDS, a seasoned historian of architecture, and a partner with her husband Christopher in the Office for Metropolitan History. At FRIENDS, Erin was particularly devoted to the efforts to preserve the cast iron Yorkville Clock at 1501 Third Avenue. She will be greatly missed, especially twice yearly at Daylight Savings when Erin would dutifully appear with a key to change the time on the clock's great hands. ♦

“SHAPED BY IMMIGRANTS” IN PRINT AND ON FILM!



A still from the “Shaped by Immigrants” mini documentary series.

In 2018 FRIENDS has completed two projects that have resulted from a multi-year effort to research and document the rich immigrant history of Yorkville, east of Lexington Avenue. As a companion to our new book, *Shaped by Immigrants: A History of Yorkville*, an illustrated history of the neighborhood’s evolution, we are also launching a short documentary film on the same subject. Funded generously by Council Member Ben Kallos and the Department of Cultural Affairs’

Cultural Immigrant Initiative, the films are divided into three episodes intended to capture the unique character of the streets of Yorkville and examine the indelible marks various immigrant populations have left on its built environment. FRIENDS conducted interviews with several scholars, lifelong Yorkville residents, and business owners who shared their perspectives on the development of Yorkville and the significance of its enduring immigrant cultures. The cul-

mination is a visually-rich retelling of the development of Yorkville from the early days of its Irish, German, Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian roots. The book and the film together document and illustrate both changes and notable survivors as they exist to the present day. ♦

We can’t wait to share this exploration of the indelible traces that Yorkville’s immigrant community has left on the neighborhood in the form of its character, its institutions, and most importantly, its surviving buildings. We hope you visit our website www.friends-ues.org/yorkvillebook to purchase a copy of *Shaped by Immigrants* and view the full documentary. Be one of the first to enjoy the finished product for your yourself, or as a gift to one of the many Yorkville fans in your life. ♦

MAKING STRIDES TOWARD COMMON SENSE ZONING REFORM



FRIENDS has gained a number of allies in our citywide campaign to reform zoning loopholes leading to overdevelopment not only on the Upper East Side, but in residential neighborhoods across the city. In January, in response to a question from FRIENDS’ Executive Director Rachel Levy at a mayoral town hall held by Council Member Ben Kallos, Mayor de Blasio and Marisa Lago, head of the Department of City Planning publicly committed to addressing the mechanical void loophole by the end of the year. This commitment was reinforced this summer, in a letter to the Department of City Planning from Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and Council Speaker Corey Johnson, with the support of the entire delegation of the City Council, calling on the agency to address and prevent the full suite of loopholes being exploited by developers. These loopholes contribute to megatowers that defy predictability, do nothing to alleviate our city’s housing pressures, and flout zoning regulations meant to guide development. Our local elected officials specifically recognized the work of community stakeholders like FRIENDS in bringing these issues to light. FRIENDS continues to be the mouse that roars as a leader in this citywide battle, and we will remain in close conversation with DCP and our elected officials to help shape effective solutions. ♦

Council Member Ben Kallos, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, and FRIENDS Executive Director Rachel Levy on the steps of City Hall at a rally concerning 180 East 88th Street.

THIRTY-FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING & AWARDS

FRIENDS held its Thirty-Fifth Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony on March 28, 2018 at The Cosmopolitan Club. Each year, FRIENDS highlights outstanding restoration, new construction, public art and advocacy work on the Upper East Side, both within and outside of the historic districts. FRIENDS Board of Advisors Member Hermes Mallea led the evening with an engaging presentation on the awardees, showcasing the inspiring work of each project. Following the awards ceremony, guests gathered for a cocktail reception in the club's beautiful ballroom. ♦



Distinguished Leadership Award winner Hon. Daniel R. Garodnick and Joan K. Davidson, President Emeritus, J.M. Kaplan Fund.



ERFA Board Member Alan Kersh and FRIENDS Board Member Ronda Wist.

Advocacy Award

East River Fifties Alliance

Presented by Ronda Wist, Wist Preservation Associates

Distinctive Achievement Award

MTA Arts and Design:

Second Avenue Subway Art

Presented by Ronay Menschel, Phipps Houses

Excellence in New Design

Cornell Tech

Presented by Robert Watson,

Ecotech International

Distinguished Leadership Award

Hon. Daniel R. Garodnick

*Presented by Joan K. Davidson,
President Emeritus, J.M. Kaplan Fund*

Renaissance Award

P.S. 158

Presented by Sarah Chu,

*Member of Manhattan Community Board 8
and FRIENDS' Board of Directors*

FRONT LINES *continued from page 2.*

Recently, the Parks Committee of the New York City Council held an oversight hearing about the state of the City's 250+ Jointly Operated Playgrounds, including Marx Brothers Playground. Council Members expressed concern that playgrounds and open spaces in their neighborhoods lack the same protections as dedicated parkland, and FRIENDS and fellow advocates discussed the harmful precedent for these neighborhood parks set by the proposed development at Marx Brothers. Open spaces and parks like Marx Brothers Playground are not luxuries; they are critical to our well-being, the well-being of our city, and the quality of life in our community.

Finally, Inverlad's development at 249 East 62nd Street and Second Avenue, steps away from the Treadwell Farm Historic District, is a prime ex-

ample of the manipulation of zoning loopholes by developers in order to maximize building height and profit. Rafael Viñoly Architects' design for the 32-story residential tower includes a 150 foot-tall hollow octagonal core intended to raise the upper residential floors. Unlike other cities, NYC's Zoning Resolution contains an exemption for spaces categorized as mechanical, but there is no limit on these spaces, and no verification process to assess the necessity of these spaces for valid mechanical uses.

On November 3, 2017, FRIENDS, working with urban planner George Janes, filed a Zoning Challenge with the Department of Buildings, questioning the agency's approval of the plans. In the challenge, FRIENDS argued that 249 East 62nd Street subverts the intent of the City's zoning, which requires a tower-on-base building form on the Upper East Side Avenues. The inclusion of the massive intra-building void,

vastly larger than necessary for any legitimate mechanical usage and entirely exempt from its floor area calculation, produces an unpredictable building form, which zoning is supposed to prevent. DOB's endorsement of the developer's tactic to game the system for additional height and the agency's unwillingness to enforce the intent of zoning, underscores the need for a legislative solution to close the loopholes in our Zoning Resolution that contribute to overdevelopment. FRIENDS filed a Community Appeal challenging the DOB's inadequate response on May 11, 2018.

FRIENDS' sustained advocacy toward zoning reform has gained traction in talks with the Department of City Planning, which has led to a commitment from the agency to address unnecessary voids in supertall towers. If, when, and how the agency will make good on this commitment remains to be seen. ♦

NYSCA NEWS!



FRIENDS Executive Director Rachel Levy (center) presenting awards to the winners of our Yorkville Scavenger hunt co-sponsored with Urban Archive and the Historic Districts Council.

In 2018, for the first time, FRIENDS received a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to enhance support of our public programs. This is an enormous nod to the quality of our work, and it has enabled us to expand the diversity and range of our programming and events. In addition to a newly redesigned brochure which debuted earlier this year, FRIENDS offered a full schedule of programming in the summer for the very first time. Recent events have included a VIP tour of the new Cornell Tech Campus on Roosevelt Island, an exploration of often overlooked tenement details and design, and a walking tour of sites related to some of the most illustrious art collections on the Upper East Side. We have also pursued collaborations with outside organizations including the Municipal Art Society, Historic Districts Council, Landmark West!, and the Lower East Side Jewish Conservancy to expand our network and audience. Keep an eye on your inbox for more exciting programming coming soon! ♦

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR YOUNG FRIENDS



A Deco-tastic creation by one of our students.

The 2017-2018 school year was an exciting one for Young FRIENDS. We taught our programs to a record 2,421 students – and unique to this past year – 30 seniors. We have partnered with new groups and look for more chances to engage in our community in the future.

Last summer, we met with the Carter Burden Luncheon Club and Senior Program in the heart of Yorkville at the Jan Hus Church to present a slide show and talk on the neighborhood's immigrant past. Many longtime residents of Yorkville contributed with personal anecdotes and a lively discussion ensued. It was interesting and important to gain the perspective of our seniors.

During the winter, we had the opportunity to work with Nightingale-Bamford's 8th grade students on a tour of Yorkville. As most of our programs are with elementary aged children, both

the session at Carter Burden and the tour with Nightingale were wonderful ways to look at our material and methods through a different lens and gain new perspectives on teaching Upper East Side architectural history.

The spring of 2018 brought a unique chance to partner with the Art Deco Society of New York (ADSNY) in piloting an Art Deco lesson for elementary aged students. Director of Education Heidi Carey and ADSNY Arts Educator Christine Stoddard paired up to teach at P.S. 267 on East 63rd Street, the East Harlem School at Exodus House on East 103rd Street, and P.S. 83 on East 109th Street. Our pilot lesson included a brief introduction to Art Deco and its time period, a look at various examples of the style, and the creation of a Dream Cityscape of decorated Art Deco buildings displayed on a large paper background. The students at P.S. 267 had the added opportunity to visit the Lowell Hotel on East 63rd Street and hunt for its Art Deco architectural features.

As we dive into another school year, Young FRIENDS hopes to build on reaching audiences of all ages, and to enrich our offerings with new programming. . . . As in architecture, the sky's the limit! ♦

FRIENDS WELCOMES A NEW STAFF MEMBER

FRIENDS recently bid farewell to staff member Elizabeth Fagan, who was with FRIENDS for nearly 5 years first as an intern and later as Director of Preservation, and has taken a position at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. In March 2017, FRIENDS welcomed Sara Kamillatos as our new Preservation Associate. Sara joined FRIENDS in October 2017 as an intern, having recently completed her M.Sc. in Architectural Conservation at the University of Edinburgh's Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies. She is excited to return to New York City, where she graduated from Fordham University and has worked in monuments conservation for the Central Park Conservancy. Welcome, Sara! ♦

LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION UPDATES

This spring the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) held a public hearing to address proposed changes to the text of the agency's regulatory rules, an important document that determines whether alteration applications are handled internally by LPC staff or receive full public review before the LPC Commissioners and the public. The new rules were met with significant criticism from preservationists, advocacy groups, and residents who felt that the rules were too permissive, and would cut the public out of the review process. Amid the public conversation about the rules process, Meenakshi Srinivasan stepped down as Chair of the LPC in June. Sarah Carroll, a veteran LPC staff member and most recently its Executive Director, has been appointed Chair by Mayor de Blasio.

The LPC has significantly revised the text of its initial proposed Rules Amendments, and the public will have another opportunity to weigh in on the proposal this fall. In response to public comments, many of the most controversial elements of the plan are being reconsidered, including staff-level material selection for restoration work, oversight of vault light removal, and authorization of certain rear yard and rooftop additions. In addition, potentially harmful language regarding the treatment of "no-style" and "non-contributing" buildings has been removed from the proposed rules.

This course change from the LPC is evidence that thoughtful advocacy makes a difference! Our collective comments have resulted in the LPC taking a critical second look at the proposed rules changes and altering them to better serve our city's tremendous historic building stock and the public who so dearly cares for it. FRIENDS reviewed the amended proposal closely and expressed our comments at the October hearing. ♦

ACCOLADES FOR FRIENDS LEADERSHIP

FRIENDS' President Franny Eberhart was feted by the Preservation League of New York State at its Pillar of New York Awards Gala this spring, in recognition of her years of dedicated service to many of the City's preservation groups, including the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, Historic House Trust, Municipal Art Society, and of course FRIENDS, where she has served as President since 2013. Franny was honored alongside Silman Engineers and Michael Bruno. We could not think of a better, or more deserving recipient of this honor. Congratulations, Franny!

Rachel Levy, FRIENDS' Executive Director, was also recognized as a "Woman of Distinction" by State Senator Liz Krueger and Assembly Member Rebecca Seawright in two separate ceremonies this spring, including one at the State Capitol in Albany. The awards recognize women in New York State doing impactful work to enrich quality of life in their communities. ♦

FIRST AVENUE ESTATE UPDATE – IS THE BATTLE FINALLY OVER?

The neighborhood fight to protect and preserve the City and Suburban Company's First Avenue Estate has been long and tireless, but we have achieved yet another victory! In May 2018, the New York State Appellate Division ruled to uphold the Landmarks Preservation Commission's denial of hardship to the owners, meaning that the buildings will remain standing, and protected by landmark designation.

As you may recall, Stahl York Avenue, who owns the property, illegally defaced these historic structures and subsequently submitted an application to the LPC for their demolition in an attempt to make way for a new high-rise tower. The property, originally designated as an individual landmark in 1990 alongside the City and Suburban York Avenue Estates, was built as a Progressive-era Model Tenement to provide open, sanitary, modern conditions for the middle and working classes in the early 20th Century, and it still provides the neighborhood with affordable housing.

This ruling in favor of the LPC has affirmed New York City's right to regulate, and more importantly, preserve its landmarks to the highest standards. This ruling upholds that of the lower court, and is reinforced by the refusal of the United States Supreme Court to take on the federal case. But the story may not end here... the City expects Stahl to appeal to the Court of Appeals, the highest court in New York State. You can be sure that FRIENDS will remain involved in this prolonged battle, mobilizing our colleagues near and far as needed, including all of our local elected officials, U.S. Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, on behalf of the First Avenue Estate site. ♦

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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IN GRATITUDE

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