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CAUCUS

April 10, 2017

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: New Policy Regarding Submission of Public Comments for the Public Hearings and Meetings of the Landmarks Preservation Commission

Dear Chair Srinivasan,

I have been a sitting member of the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses since I took office in January of 2006. In the course of my work as a legislator and a member of the Subcommittee, I must say that I've rarely disagreed with decisions of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). However, during my 2014-2017 legislative term, I've been alarmed by certain LPC proposals that imply that public input is not important to the agency. I am of the opinion that LPC, as an institution, values public input from building owners, community residents and advocates. Consequently, I am confused as to why the LPC would enact rules or policies that would effectively restrict or completely eliminate the opportunity for public input on the designation of proposed historic districts, as well as the landmarking of buildings.

As a reminder in November of 2014, prior to the Thanksgiving holidays, the LPC had proposed to vote en masse to de-calendar all buildings that were under LPC consideration for individual landmark designation for more than five years. At the time, LPC was proposing to move forward with the aforementioned action:

- With little to no notice to the public,
- Without an opportunity for public testimony, and
- Without any discussion or even review by the Commissioners of the merits of the nearly one hundred buildings.

Thankfully, the LPC ultimately deferred such action. Today, the agency is aggressively tackling the backlog in a more thoughtful manner that allows for community input and a thorough review by the 11 member panel.

More recently, the LPC's sent an email on Friday, March 31, 2017 that stated that there would be a new policy for submission of testimony to the LPC. It stated that going forward all testimony for public hearings and meetings should be submitted by 1:00 p.m. on the Monday prior to LPC's Tuesday meeting. While the rationale for the 1:00 p.m. Monday deadline—to enable the distribution of public testimony to the LPC Commissioners—is a sensible administrative policy change, it has a direct and negative impact on the public testimony comment period.

It is understandable that the LPC Commissioners would need some time in advance to review materials, but such a policy cannot be implemented at the expense of public input. It is important to note that the presentation materials are usually not available on the LPC website until after business hours on the Friday prior to the hearing/meeting which then only allows the public only four (4) hours between the time the materials become available and the deadline for submitting comments. The time frame would essentially preclude community residents from submitting comments and restrict any meaningful testimony from advocacy groups who are juggling a variety of important issues simultaneously.

I respectfully request that if LPC moves forward with implementing this policy that it then be amended in some manner that would provide the public with a real opportunity to review materials and submit public comment. The LPC would therefore need to ensure that the materials are available on-line at least one full business day prior and/or change the 1:00 p.m. deadline. This would provide more than four (4) business hours and I would advocate that the public, at a minimum, be given at two (2) full business days for review and comment.

I want to thank you for your attention to this matter and I look to a resolution that will function for the Commissioners and the public. I look forward to hearing back from you on this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Rosie Mendez
Councilwoman
District 2, Manhattan

cc: Andrew Berman, Greenwich Village Society Historic Preservation
Simeon Bankoff, Historic Districts Council
Richard Moses & Carolyn Ratcliffe, Lower East Side Preservation Initiative
Members of the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Siting, and Maritime Uses