

Dear Mary Beth:

I have read your letter of August 15, 2012 addressed to Andrew Berman relating to the proposal to hold a public hearing on 186 Spring Street. I find the letter to be puzzling and hope that you will reconsider your decision.

If the issue regarding the designation of 186 Spring Street were purely about the architectural quality of the building, I would fully agree that the building has been altered and that this raises questions about its architectural integrity and the criteria for designation.

However, in recent weeks an enormous amount of information has been assembled that attests to the cultural significance of the building, specifically to the lesbian and gay community. In your letter, you note that the staff committee has concluded that "the events and figures associated with 186 Spring Street are historically significant," yet also reiterated the fact that the building lacks the "requisite architectural integrity to warrant recommending" the building for review by the full Commission. In this case, I do not think that the two findings are related.

I very strongly believe that the conclusion that this historically-significant property has lost its architectural integrity is a misunderstanding of how such sites should be judged. Rather than looking at the architectural integrity of the building relating to its original design (which, I agree, has been compromised), one must ask if the building retains its integrity from the time when the significant historical events occurred there. The 1980 tax photo (attached) of 186 Spring Street, dating from the period when the major figures in the lesbian and gay community lived in the building and when the historically significant events took place there, shows that the building looked then almost exactly as it looks now. Thus, in relation to the historically and culturally significant events that the Commission staff has deemed significant, the building retains its integrity to a very high degree.

I think that we can draw a parallel with the commission's designation of the Louis Armstrong House. This house had lost its original architectural integrity. But this architectural integrity was not an issue of concern at all. The building was designated because of its association with Armstrong and it looked, at the time of designation, much as it had during Armstrong's life. Indeed, were 186 Spring Street designated as a landmark for its cultural significance, it would be inappropriate to undertake a restoration back to its original Federal style character.

Another issue that I am sure is of concern to the Commission is that of stepping in and stopping a development already underway. There are examples in the history of the Commission, most notably the efforts to save the Coty and Rizzoli Buildings on Fifth Avenue, when an initial decision was made not to hold a public hearing, but this was changed when new information was brought to light about the significance of the buildings (in that case, relating to the Lalique glass). I believe that this is the case with 186 Spring Street, where a great deal of information has been assembled relating to the modern lesbian and gay rights movement.

I hope that the staff committee will reassess its position on this matter, taking into consideration that the building fully retains its integrity from the period that the Commission staff agrees is of historical importance.

Sincerely,

Andrew Scott Dolkart

August 26, 2012

cc.

Robert Tierney

Andrew Berman

Councilmember Christine Quinn,

Councilmember Tom Duane

State Assemblymember Deborah Glick

Councilmember Daniel Dromm

Councilmember Jimmy Van Bramer

Councilmember Jessica Lappin