

ROSIE MENDEZ
COUNCIL MEMBER, 2ND DISTRICT

DISTRICT OFFICE
237 FIRST AVENUE, #504
NEW YORK, NY 10003
(212) 677-1077
FAX: (212) 677-1990

CITY HALL OFFICE
250 BROADWAY, ROOM 1734
NEW YORK, NY 10007
(212) 788-7366
FAX: (212) 442-2738

rmendez@council.nyc.gov



**THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

CHAIR - COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HOUSING

COMMITTEES

HEALTH
HOUSING & BUILDINGS
LAND USE
LOWER MANHATTAN REDEVELOPMENT

SUB COMMITTEE

LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING &
MARITIME ISSUES

September 17th, 2012

Hon. Robert Tierney
Chair, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, New York 10007

Dear Chair Tierney,

I am in receipt of a response by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to my August 15th letter concerning the preservation of 186 Spring Street and the proposed South Village Historic District. While I value the analysis provided by the LPC staff—as elucidated by Mary Beth Betts, Director of Research (hereinafter, the “Betts Letter”)—I strongly disagree with the conclusion reached to forego consideration of 186 Spring Street as an individual landmark. Given an entire spectrum of dispositive reasons, highlighted below, I respectfully urge you to reconsider your decision and move immediately to preserve 186 Spring Street.

The historical value of the building is unquestioned by all parties, including the LPC which acknowledges such historical significance in the body of the Betts Letter. This historical value is not found in the fact that the building is an example of a federal style house that has been altered—but in the fact that the house, in the 1970’s and early 1980’s served as a singular and vital enclave for the LGBT civil rights movement that so fundamentally shaped and profoundly affected our history. On this fact alone, I believe the building merits full consideration as an individual landmark. Notably, under this same rationale, the New York State Division for Historic Preservation determined that 186 Spring Street is individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to this *prima facie* argument, as others have pointed out—including architectural historian Andrew S. Dolkart—186 Spring Street retains the very same architectural characteristics and integrity that were present during the period of historical and cultural significance in the 1970’s and early 1980’s. This should be the uniform baseline upon which the application for individual landmark status must ultimately rise or fall; however, according to the Betts Letter, this is not the standard that is being applied by the LPC at present.

A more appropriate and applicable standard, as suggested by Mr. Dolkart and others, can be found in the LPC's designation of the Louis Armstrong House. In this case—as you are doubtlessly aware—the house was designated as a landmark because of the historical and cultural significance during the time that Mr. Armstrong lived there, not because of any remnants of original architectural integrity that may have remained after periods of substantial alteration.

If we view 186 Spring Street from this “period of significance” standard we see a house that tells an amazing and compelling story concerning the courage, fortitude, determination and formation of the LGBT movement. Many of the early pillars of LGBT activism—including Jim Owles, Arnie Kantrowitz and Bruce Voeller—called 186 Spring Street home and the seeds that would bear the dream of equality were planted and sowed from this location. The first “gay rights” bill in the country was conceived by those living at 186 Spring, groundbreaking anti-discrimination legislation flowed from this location and the first delegation of gay rights leaders travelled from 186 Spring to the White House on a day in 1977 when history was made. Stated clearly, New York City was then—and is now—the center of the LGBT civil rights movement—and 186 Spring is the singular birthplace from which the movement emanated and expanded over the past five decades.

The LPC was created with an important and visionary mission to safeguard our heritage, encourage civic pride and to educate others. Prospective designation of 186 Spring Street as the inaugural site landmarked primarily for significance relating to the LGBT civil rights movement and the vibrant history contained therein—displays both uncompromising fidelity to this mission while recognizing the incalculable importance of the LGBT movement in New York City.

Therefore, I respectfully implore you and the members of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to reconsider your decision and move immediately to preserve 186 Spring Street due to its vital and singular nature as the early epicenter of LGBT activism and history in New York City.

In the interim, I remain...

Most respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosie Mendez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, decorative flourish at the end.

Rosie Mendez
City Councilwoman, District 2