



## CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

---

December 12, 2011 / Calendar No. 5

N 120098 HKM

---

**IN THE MATTER OF** a communication dated November 7, 2011, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of Westbeth (aka Western Electric Company Buildings, aka Bell Telephone Laboratories), 445-465 West Street, 137-169 Bank Street, 51-77 Bethune Street, and 734-754 Washington Street, Block 639, Lot 1), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on October 25, 2011 Designation List No. 444/LP-2439), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 2.

---

Pursuant to Section 3020.8(b) of the City Charter, the City Planning Commission shall submit to the City Council a report with respect to the relation of any designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, whether of a historic district or a landmark, to the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements, and any plans for the development, growth, improvement or renewal of the area involved.

On October 25, 2011, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Bell Telephone Laboratories Complex (Block 639, Lot 1), as a city landmark. The landmark site occupies the entire block bounded by West, Bethune, Washington, and Bank streets, in the Far West Village area of Manhattan.

The Complex was completed in stages. The vernacular Italian style Hook's Steam-powered Factory building, at 445-453 West Street was completed in 1860 and is the oldest building in the complex. It housed a number of significant manufacturers over the decades and is notable as one of the few extant 19th-century industrial buildings along the Hudson River waterfront.

The Western Electric Company built the next building in the complex, located at 455-465 West Street, 149 Bank Street and 734-742 Washington Street for use as an office and factory building for telephone-related equipment. It dates from 1896 to 1903 and was designed by Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz in a restrained neo-Classical style. After 1913, the building ceased operation as a manufacturing plant and was largely the headquarters of Western Electric's Engineering Department. In 1925, it became Bell Telephone Laboratories for research and development for both the American Telegraph & Telephone Company and Western Electric Company.

Bell Labs' facilities were expanded between 1924-26 with the construction of 744-754 Washington Street, designed by McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin. The complex was expanded further in 1929 with the construction of the Moderne style 151 Bank Street, engineered by Warren B. Sanford. The building housed a pioneering sound motion picture studio. The original 1860 Hook's Steam-powered Factory Building 1860 factory building was also incorporated into the complex in 1929.

Sections of the complex along Washington Street were altered between 1931 – 1934 to provide access for the New York Central Railroad elevated freight railway to travel through the subject buildings. The alterations were designed by the firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker.

Bell Labs vacated the property in 1966. Following Bell Lab's exit, the National Endowment of Arts conceived of the complex as a pilot project of subsidized, affordable studio living quarters for artists. The complex was converted in 1968-1970 into Westbeth Artists' Housing, the first major work by architect Richard Meier, with 383 residential and work studio units, as well as gallery, performance, and commercial spaces, and a park. Westbeth Artists' Housing continues to occupy the site. The conversion of the complex is considered one of the world's first large-scale adaptive re-use projects of an industrial building.

The landmark site is located in a C6-3 zoning district. With an allowable floor area ratio (FAR) of 10.0, the zoning lot could be developed with approximately 965,300 square feet of floor area. The Bell Telephone Laboratories Complex building contains approximately 637,555 square feet of floor area. Therefore, there are approximately 327,745 square feet theoretically available for transfer.

Pursuant to Section 74-79 of the Zoning Resolution, a landmark building may transfer its unused development rights to a lot contiguous to the zoning lot occupied by the landmark or one which is across the street and opposite to the lot occupied by the landmark building, or in the case of a corner lot, one which fronts on the same street intersection as the lot occupied by the landmark building. There are fifteen potential receiving sites available for the transfer of the landmark's unused floor area.

All landmark buildings or buildings within Historic Districts are eligible to apply for use and bulk waivers pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution.

The subject landmark does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution. In addition, the Commission is not aware of any conflicts between the subject landmark designation and projected public improvements or any plans for development, growth, improvement, or renewal in the vicinity of the landmark building.

AMANDA M. BURDEN, FAICP, Chair  
ANGELA M. BATTAGLIA, RAYANN BESSER, IRWIN G. CANTOR, P.E.,  
BETTY Y. CHEN, MARIA M. DEL TORO, RICHARD W. EADDY,  
ANNA HAYES LEVIN, ORLANDO MARIN, Commissioners

KENNETH J. KNUCKLES, ESQ., Vice Chairman, abstaining