



IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated June 27, 2019, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the Women’s Liberation Center (Block 770, Lot 17), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on June 18, 2019 (Designation List No. 513/LP-2633), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 4.

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 June 18, 2019, the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Women’s Liberation Center, located at 243 West 20th Street (Block 770, Lot 17) as a City landmark. The landmark site is located on the north side of West 20th Street between Seventh and Eighth avenues, within Manhattan Community District 4.

The Women’s Liberation Center is one of six buildings that the LPC designated as individual landmarks for their historical significance to the LGBT community. On the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots and coinciding with World Pride NYC, LPC recognized these sites as places associated with groups and individuals that helped move forward the LGBT civil rights movement by creating political and community support structures and by bringing LGBT cultural expression into the public realm.

The Women’s Liberation Center is located at 243 West 20th Street in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, in a former firehouse designed in 1866 by Charles E. Hartshorn. From 1972 to 1987, this building housed numerous lesbian and feminist organizations, and became an epicenter for women’s engagement in the LGBT civil rights movement. In the Women’s Liberation Center, activists in both the lesbian and feminist movements found common cause, joining together to provide community services and to push for political action.

The Women's Liberation Center was formed just as the women's liberation movement was gaining traction in New York City. The center was volunteer-run and organized as a collective, made up of a range of feminist social service groups, general women's political committees, and lesbian organizations. After briefly operating in a building on West 22nd Street, the Women's Liberation Center moved into larger quarters at 243 West 20th Street, where it began to draw greater numbers of lesbian activists, who began separating from male-dominated LGBT political organizations.

The Women's Liberation Center also housed the Lesbian Switchboard, a volunteer-staffed telephone service that provided peer counseling, referrals, and information about local events. During a time when the LGBT community was frequently stigmatized and suppressed, this service provided much-needed mental health support and a sense of kinship among New York City's lesbians. Other groups that used the building included the Lesbian Lifespace Project, the Radicalesbians Health Collective, the Radical Feminists, and Older Women's Liberation. The ground floor of the Women's Liberation Center housed a wholesale food-buying cooperative.

243 West 20th Street is a three-story former firehouse building designed in the Anglo-Italianate style by Charles E. Hartshorn in 1866. The building is located on the north side of West 20th Street between Seventh and Eighth avenues in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan on a lot measuring approximately 25 by 75 feet. The building has one primary facade facing West 20th Street, as well as a plain side facade partially visible above the adjacent building to the west.

At the time of 243 West 20th Street's association with the Women's Liberation Center, from 1972 to 1987, the building was intact to its historic 19th-century design. Since the late 1980s, 243 West 20th Street has served New York City women as the home of Nontraditional Employment for Women, a skilled- trades workforce development program. The Women's Liberation Center disbanded in 1987 and many of its organizations moved to the LGBT Community Center in Greenwich Village.

The landmark site is located within a R8B zoning district. R8B districts allow residential and community facility uses up to 4.0 floor area ratio (FAR). With a maximum allowable floor area ratio of 4.0 FAR, the 1,875-square-foot lot could be developed with approximately 7,500 square feet of floor area. The existing building on the lot contains 3,750 square feet (2.0 FAR), resulting in 3,750 square feet of unused development rights available for transfer to eligible receiving sites under the existing zoning.

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 building or one that is across the street and opposite to the zoning 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. There are five potential receiving sites available for the transfer of the landmark's unused floor area, as all eligible receiving sites are currently underbuilt.

Pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution, landmark buildings or buildings within Historic Districts are eligible to apply for use and bulk waivers upon application to the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

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 on any plans for development, growth, improvement or renewal in the vicinity of the landmark building.

MARISA LAGO, *Chair*
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DAVID J. BURNEY, ALLEN P. CAPPELLI, Esq.,
ALFRED C. CERULLO, III, MICHELLE R. DE LA UZ,
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