



IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated December 23, 2016, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, West 135th Street Branch, located at 181 West 135th Street (Block 1920, Lot 7), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on December 13, 2016 (Designation List No. 492/LP-1848), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 10.

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 December 13, 2016, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building, West 135th Street Branch, located at 181 West 135th Street (Block 1920, Lot 7), as a City landmark. The landmark site is located on the north side of West 135th Street, between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Malcolm X boulevards, within Central Harlem, Manhattan Community District 10.

The YMCA Building, West 135th Street Branch (now the Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center) is a six-story Italian Renaissance Revival style building with a 75-foot wide brick and stucco façade on the north side of West 135th Street between Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell Jr boulevards (formerly Lenox and Seventh avenues, respectively).

Built in 1918-19, the 135th Street YMCA building was one of the first African-American YMCA buildings constructed in New York City and it became the center of intellectual and social life for African Americans during the first half of the 20th century. Designed by John Jackson, a specialist in YMCA buildings, the building followed design guidelines developed to give branches across the United States a uniform look. This branch is typical of branches built at that time. It is designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style, and has a high base with alternating arched and rectangular openings, surmounted

by a cornice bearing the inscription "Young Men's Christian Association." It has arched windows at the second story and the expression of an arcade at the sixth story.

The 135th Street YMCA is notable for its strong associations with many prominent literary, artistic, political and sports figures, including Paul Robeson, James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, John Henrik Clarke, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and Jackie Robinson. Many of these figures started their careers at the branch, including Robeson, who made his acting debut in the YMCA's Little Theater program in 1920. Laurie F. Leach, in her biography of Hughes, wrote that upon arriving in New York in 1921, "Hughes walked directly to the single most important address for an unconnected young black man arriving in New York after the war - 181 West 135th Street - and secured a room for \$7.00 a week." Hughes would later go on to edit the YMCA's newsletter. Ellison arrived in New York with little money and few connections; a chance meeting with Locke and Hughes in the lobby of 135th Street YMCA would change the path of his life. Hughes helped Ellison secure employment, educated him in politics, and introduced Ellison to Wright, who would help hone his writing skills. In the 1920s, there were education conferences, plays and lectures by the leading scholars of the era including Johnson and Locke. The Acme Players, under the direction of Ann Wolter, performed two of Frank Wilson's plays, *A Train North* and *The Heartbreaker*, at the West 135th Street YMCA.

After a new YMCA was built across the street, at 180 West 135th Street in 1931-32, (the YMCA Building, Harlem Branch, a designated landmark), the former West 135th Street Branch was used in 1934-36 by the NYC Welfare Department. It returned to YMCA use, as the Harlem Branch Youth Annex, in 1936. In 1936-38, the two lower floors were renovated for a larger Boys' Department and dormitory rooms on the upper floors were renovated. Together with the Harlem Branch, the two buildings provided 435 dormitory rooms, according to an ad in Crisis Magazine in June 1939. In March of 1945, a forum for the March on Washington movement was held at the West 135th Street YMCA. Speakers included representatives from the National Urban League, the Local No. 155 International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the Workers Defense League. In 1945, co-ed programs were introduced for girls from ages 14 to 17. Between

1947 and 1948, membership enrollment increased to 8,400, boys and 114,519 people attended the 4,500 program sessions either as participants or spectators. From 1993 to 2004, the foundations, electrical, plumbing, were improved and an access ramp was installed at the main façade. The ground floor and basement were renovated and the upper floors converted to apartments. Today the building is used as a child care center and community center, and the upper floors are low- and middle-income housing.

Today, the YMCA Building, West 135th Street Branch, now the Jackie Robinson YMCA Youth Center, still plays a critical role in the important civic hub of 135th Street, along with the YMCA Building, Harlem Branch across the street, and the New York Public Library Schomburg Collection for Research in Black Culture (also a New York City designated landmark).

The landmark site is located within an R7-2/C2-4 zoning district. With a maximum allowable floor area ratio (FAR) of 6.5, the 7,494-square-foot lot could be developed with approximately 48,711 square feet of floor area. The existing building on the lot contains 35,124 square feet (4.68 FAR), resulting in 13,587 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 which 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 eight potential receiving sites available for the transfer of the landmark's unused floor area, as all eligible lots comprising the potential 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.

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