



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

November 16, 2011 / Calendar No. 11

N 120080 HKM

IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated September 29, 2011, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the Madison Belmont Building, 181 Madison Avenue (Block 863, Lot 60), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on September 20, 2011 (List No. 448/LP-2425), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 5.

Pursuant to Section 3020.8(b) of the New York 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 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 September 20, 2011 the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Madison Belmont Building (the “Building”), located at 181 Madison Avenue (Block 863, Lot 60), as a city landmark.

The Madison Belmont Building is located between East 33rd and East 34th streets in Manhattan Community District 5. It is a transitional style building combining neo-Renaissance elements with early modern designs, incorporating many ideas from the growing European modern movement. The building was designed by the prominent and traditional New York architectural firm of Warren and Wetmore in an unusual style for this firm, showing a likely influence from the involvement of master iron smith Edgar Brandt as well as by the fact that Whitney Warren was spending considerable time in Paris where new concepts of Art Deco were taking hold. The building was constructed in 1924-1925 for the Merchants and Manufacturers Exchange of New York, a development company headed by Robert M. Catts and it was built as office and showroom space for silk companies in the developing Silk District of mid-town Manhattan. The Cheney Silk Company, with headquarters in Manchester, Connecticut, was the building’s major

tenant and had its showrooms on the first three floors of the building.

Cheney Silk, started by the Cheney Brothers in 1838, was the first successful silk manufacturer in the United States. The company had numerous ties to design developments in France and had already established a relationship with Edgar Brandt, a pioneer in the Art Deco style in Paris early in the 1920s. Brandt designed the iron and bronze framing around the large showrooms of the lower three stories as well as the entrance doors and bulkhead grilles on the exterior of the building. These lower floors have been cited as one of the first instances of Art Deco architectural design in the United States. The upper levels display more traditional ornamental motifs that have been flattened and stylized to reflect the newly emerging modern styles. The building's shaft has continuous brick piers with recessed spandrels that emphasize the building's height and a crowning cornice with upper floors marked by over-scaled terra-cotta ornament. These elements were created by the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company, a firm that worked closely with these architects, and include window-framing pilasters, putti heads and egg and dart moldings that are similar to other Warren and Wetmore buildings but executed in a more modern style. The building has a traditional arrangement of base, shaft and capital, with ornament located in traditional areas, but the broader, more stylized execution of this ornament as well as the unusual and distinctive Art Deco motifs on the three lower floors suggest the new design ideas that were just beginning to penetrate architectural circles in this country, making this an important transitional building between traditional and modern design.

Situated in a C5-2 district (max FAR 10.0 residential & 10.0 commercial), the Building's zoning lot contains approximately 233,484 square feet of floor area and 12,160 square feet of lot area. Since the lot contains more floor area than is permitted (121,600 square feet), there is no floor area 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 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. As provided for in Section 74-792 of the Zoning Resolution there are no unused development rights available for transfer.

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.

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.

AMANDA M. BURDEN, FAICP, Chair
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