



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

March 30, 2011/Calendar No. 15

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IN THE MATTER a communication dated February 10, 2011, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the designation of the Rossville AME Zion Church at 584 Bloomingdale Road (Block 7267, Lot 101), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on February 1, 2011 (Designation List 438/LP-2416).

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 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 February 1, 2011, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Rossville AME Zion Church located at 584 Bloomingdale Road (Block 7267, Lot 101), as a city landmark.

The Rossville AME Zion Church is located in the Woodrow/Rossville section of Staten Island, an area also historically known as Sandy Ground, due to the sandy soil in the area. Sandy Ground was established prior to 1779, became a settlement for both previous slaves of local residents, and free African-Americans in the early 1800s. Several African-American families from Snow Hill, Maryland, who earned their living in the oyster trade, relocated to Sandy Ground in the 1840s and 1850s because of Maryland laws that precluded them from owning and operating their own fishing boats. Staten Island had a booming and successful oyster industry throughout the 17th, 18th and early 19th Centuries.

The Rossville AME Zion Church was the centerpiece and key meeting place for the early Sandy Ground community and its influence extended to the larger African-American community to as far away as Chicago. The Rossville AME Zion Church parish was established in 1850 by William H. Pitts and five trustee members of the congregation. However, the present building

and site is not the original building and location. The present building was constructed in 1898.

The Rossville AME Zion Church was constructed by Andrew Abrams, a Swedish-born builder who settled Tottenville after serving in the US Navy. The church is a simple vernacular frame structure with a gabled entrance porch. The Rossville AME Zion Church has retained the original fenestration pattern and the original placement of windows. The church is rectangular in plan with a front gable roof and four bays along the sides of the church.

The Rossville AME Zion Church has had several renowned pastors, including William H. Pitts, who served as pastor until the early 1860s, Rev. Isaac Coleman, who served from 1864 to 1865 and Rev. Florence Spearing Randolph, who assisted the congregation during the 1916 ban on oyster fishing by stabilizing the church finances and beginning a fundraising campaign to raise money for the church. In 1983, the Rossville AME Zion Church Cemetery was designated a New York City Landmark. The church continues to serve a small congregation, many of whom are descendants of the early 19th-Century residents of the Sandy Ground community.

The landmark site is located in an R3-1 zoning district. Pursuant to Section 74-79 of the Zoning Resolution, transfer of development rights is not permitted for landmark sites located in R3-1 zoning districts. 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.

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