

Davis Brody Bond Aedas

26 June 2009

Hon. Robert B. Tierney, Chair
New York Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street
New York, New York 10007

Re: West 59th Street IRT Power Station

Dear Commissioner Tierney:

On behalf of the Partners and Principals of Davis Brody Bond, I am writing to express support for the proposed landmark designation of McKim, Mead and White's Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) power station. Built in an expansive period of New York's growth, this structure represents an important milestone in the City's consciousness of its infrastructure. The development of the City's mass transit system was a democratic act, enabling its citizens freedom of movement previously limited to the wealthy, and enabling the continued expansion of the city's urban core and residential neighborhoods. The IRT's founders dignified their system with structures that reflected their ambitions, which has been recognized by the Landmarks Preservation Commission through its earlier designations of the Heins & La Farge's control houses at 72nd Street and at Battery Park, and of twelve of the original underground stations of the system.

As a piece of the urban fabric, the Powerhouse stands as a reminder of a time when Manhattan was a working harbor, its riverfronts lined with piers, and with industrial buildings lining its banks. Now, much of that history has disappeared, as high rises take over rail yards, and neighborhoods reach out toward the river and to the amenities it offers. But just as the High Line further downtown has been re-purposed, celebrating its industrial past and invigorating its surroundings, the Powerhouse could do the same for this area of the West Side. Located between the island's edge and the residential neighborhood to the north and east, the Powerhouse stands poised to serve as both a physical and a metaphorical connection to the revitalized riverfront.

As a structure, the Powerhouse's sheer size guarantees its importance to the cityscape, even with the removal of its original smokestacks. In recent years we have lost other examples of buildings of this era and building type, making the case for the Powerhouse's designation more poignant and essential. The exterior, designed in 1902 by Stanford White, expresses, in architectural terms, the importance of this building to both its owners, and to the public it served. It is a significant and unusual work of an architect whose contributions to the City's fabric are more often thought of in terms of individual gems for the elite. White took on this commission and brought a human scale to this massive building through his mastery of classical architecture. Its interior spaces include grand halls, once lined with generating equipment, but now ripe with possibilities for civic uses.

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As this building's industrial purposes wane, the potential which it offers to the City grows. Its location, its vast interior spaces, and its embodiment of the spirit of its age, all provide opportunities for the Powerhouse to be an amenity not only to the residential neighborhood now surrounding it, but to the City as a whole. Examples of industrial buildings which have been adapted to new uses are celebrated in cities around the world; the Tate Modern in London, the Gare d'Orsay in Paris, and the Ferry Building in San Francisco are just a few examples. As New York celebrates PLANYC 2030, adaptive re-use of this enormous structure would represent a significant contribution to the City's sustainable future. The protection of the building will preserve these civic benefits, and I urge the Commission to designate the Powerhouse.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Hoyt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "N" and "H".

Nathan Hoyt, FAIA

Principal / Director of Interiors