

March 10, 2009

Honorable Robert B. Tierney, Chairman
NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

Re: Former IRT Powerhouse (now Con Ed Powerhouse), 600 West 59th Street
New York, NY

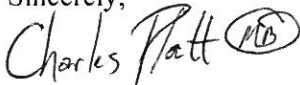
Dear Chairman Tierney,

The Preservation Committee of the Municipal Art Society supports the nomination to designate the Con Edison Powerhouse, formerly the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) Powerhouse, located on the block bounded by 11th Avenue, 59th Street, 12th Avenue, and 58th Street. The powerhouse, which has appeared before the Commission twice before, is an important reminder of an extraordinarily innovative time in the history of New York City's development, in addition to having irrefutable architectural significance. MAS specifically identified the IRT Powerhouse as a resource that "should be considered of exceptional historic and architectural significance" in the scoping comments of the Riverside South Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, and we believe it should be protected as a NYC individual landmark.

This monumental building, composed of two great halls, was designed to generate and supply electrical power for the IRT, the city's first subway line. In spite of its purely utilitarian function, the lavishly detailed powerhouse was designed by acclaimed architect Stanford White, of McKim, Mead & White. Since its completion in 1904 the building has been in continual use, providing power for the IRT, the New York City Subway, and it is currently in the service of Con Edison. The ornate Beaux-Arts details on the exterior of the building extol not only the progressive ideals of the contemporaneous City Beautiful movement, but they also pay tribute to the sophisticated technical uses of this great industrial building.

MAS has made a longstanding commitment to the preservation of New York City's industrial heritage. Unfortunately, the city has recently lost the Waterside No. 2 Power Station and the Kent Avenue Power Plant, historic structures equally noteworthy as the IRT powerhouse. MAS' Preservation Committee supports the request to recognize the historic and architectural significance of the IRT Powerhouse and to protect it from demolition and insensitive renovations. We are particularly concerned about the extant original circa-1904 smokestack which we understand Con Ed may soon dismantle. We therefore urge the commission to ensure, without delay, the protection of one of the last remaining buildings of this type and scale left in New York City.

Sincerely,



Charles A. Platt
Co-Chair
MAS, Preservation Committee



Judith Saltzman
Co-Chair
MAS, Preservation Committee