

# Riverside South Planning Corporation

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March 10, 2009

Hon. Robert B. Tierney, Chairman  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
One Center Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor North  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chairman Tierney,

I am writing to request that you hold a hearing on designating the 59<sup>th</sup> Street IRT Powerhouse as a NYC landmark. I understand that the Commission has on two separate occasions considered conferring individual landmark status to the building, and that the building is a good candidate for designation.

Built in 1904 to power New York City's first subway, the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) Powerhouse occupies an entire city block from West 59<sup>th</sup> to 60<sup>th</sup> Street between Tenth Avenue and the West Side Highway. McKim Mead & White designed this massive public building. It is part of the uplifting, civic-minded architecture of the City Beautiful movement on a par with other New York City Beaux-Arts designated landmarks such as the New York Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Farley Post Office. Consolidated Edison took over the facility in 1960 and continues to use it to generate energy, but only occupies approximately 12% of the interior space today.

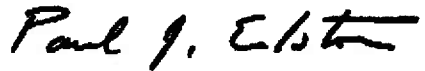
When the Landmarks Preservation Commission first considered the Powerhouse for designation in 1979, it described the building's significance as "the most monumental building associated with the subway system in New York City" and "This mammoth structure was the largest powerhouse in the world upon its completion in 1904, and it represented the highest level of technical sophistication in the production of electrical power at that time." In 1989, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation determined the Powerhouse "eligible" for the State and national Registers of Historic Preservation.

During the past fifteen years the area surrounding the Powerhouse has been transformed with the creation of the Hudson River Park and Riverside Park South, expansion of John Jay College immediately east of the Powerhouse, and a very significant increase in residential properties nearby. Most immediately the City Planning Department is considering development proposals for the blocks immediately to the north and south of the Powerhouse. We are concerned that the decisions of City Planning should fully reflect the landmarking qualities of the Powerhouse, and will only do this if the Landmarks Preservation Commissions fully documents those qualities through the designation process.

Because Consolidated Edison utilizes only a small portion of the interior space in the Powerhouse, we are also interested in the adaptive re-use of the Powerhouse as a public space, a community and/or cultural center. We have requested the NYCEDC to evaluate replacing the power produced by the Powerhouse with power produced by new energy efficient cogeneration – to define the fuel savings and energy efficiency, the economics and the space requirements of a cogeneration plant. We have also requested that City Planning require the appropriate developer to study the possibility of locating the cogeneration below grade between 59<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Streets (the Extell property) or, alternatively, between 57<sup>th</sup> and 58<sup>th</sup> Streets (the Durst property). However, we do not think the designation of the exterior of the Powerhouse as a landmark should be dependent on the outcome of efforts to change the use of the interior of the Powerhouse.

We urge you to re-activate the consideration of designating the 59<sup>th</sup> Street IRT Powerhouse as a NYC landmark as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul J. Elston". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Paul J. Elston, President

CC: Kevin Burke, President Con Edison