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October 8, 2008

Honorable Robert Tierney, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
The Municipal Building
One Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Tierney,

I am writing to encourage the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to consider the Interborough Rapid Transit Powerhouse (IRT Powerhouse), located at 600 West 59th Street in Manhattan, for designation as a New York City landmark.

The IRT Powerhouse is both historically and architecturally significant. Constructed in 1904 by Stanford White, the IRT Powerhouse was the largest steam-driven powerhouse ever built and provided energy to run and maintain the city's first subway system. The powerhouse's energy contribution was a crucial element in the development and industrial evolution of the modern city of New York. Although the powerhouse has not produced electricity for the subway system since 1959, it has been consistently utilized in different ways to serve the residents of New York City.

The IRT Powerhouse is also notable for its magnitude and architectural style. Not only does it occupy an entire city block adjacent and rise more than 100 feet high, but its roof and walls are contoured to appear perfectly symmetrical. The most notable architectural achievement, however, is not the sheer size but rather the application of Beaux-Arts style to a utilitarian building. The façade is ornamented with arched windows and enriched by an intricate cornice. The detailing is infused with delicate patterns which provide a sharp contrast to the initial purpose. Architecturally, the building is a visible paradox that juxtaposes ornamentation and functionality.

In the past few years, three architecturally and historically significant powerhouses have been demolished or altered. It would be unfortunate to leave one of the last such powerhouses in New York City vulnerable to new development. Thus I strongly recommend that the IRT Powerhouse be favorably considered for the landmark designation at this time and I urge LPC to act swiftly to ensure its preservation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The letters are cursive and slanted to the right.

Thomas K. Duane
New York State Senate
29th District