

RANKING MINORITY MEMBER
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
INVESTIGATIONS &
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
COMMITTEES
AGING
CULTURAL AFFAIRS, TOURISM, PARKS
& RECREATION
HEALTH
JUDICIARY
LOCAL GOVERNMENT



**SENATOR
BRAD HOYLMAN
27TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
STATE OF NEW YORK**

DISTRICT OFFICE:
322 EIGHTH AVENUE, SUITE 1700
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10001
PHONE: (212) 633-8052
FAX: (212) 633-8096

ALBANY OFFICE:
ROOM 413
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
PHONE: (518) 455-2451
FAX: (518) 426-6846

e-mail:
hoylman@nysenate.gov

website:
hoylman.nysenate.gov

Testimony of State Senator Brad Hoylman Before the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission Regarding the IRT Powerhouse at 820 12th Avenue

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Landmarks Preservation Commission ("LPC") regarding your consideration of individual landmark designation for the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) Powerhouse at 820 12th Avenue (the "Powerhouse") in Hell's Kitchen, located in New York State's 27th Senate District. Before I address the reasons why I believe this particular site warrants designation, I first want to commend the Landmarks Preservation Commission for undertaking the ambitious Backlog Initiative, which will give due consideration to the 95 inactive properties under its purview.

This is LPC's fourth consideration of the Powerhouse; it failed to landmark the building in 1979, 1990 and 2009. LPC must not miss another opportunity to protect this monument to our city's industrial heritage from alteration or demolition. Over the years, Con Edison, which has owned the Powerhouse and operated it as a steam plant for over fifty years, has removed the original smokestacks and the cornice. Meanwhile, development pressure continues unabated on all sides of the waterfront. LPC must act now.

As you well know, the IRT Powerhouse was built in 1904 under the direction of architect Stanford White of McKim, Mead & White in an extraordinary Beaux Arts style emblematic of the period. Many of White's projects, such as mansions and private clubs, were properties frequented by New York's elite, but the Powerhouse, along with the original Penn Station, was his architectural contribution to the city's working people, a majestic building with a utilitarian purpose. Powering the signal and lighting systems of the transportation system, the Powerhouse helped usher in a new era in electric urban transportation. Today it is a monument to New York City's industrial past, the architects and engineers who designed and built the original subway system, and the "City Beautiful Movement," a philosophy that held that grand public improvements could help beautify industrial American cities and inspire civic virtue.

Con Edison says that granting landmark status to the site would hinder the plant's ability to operate and prevent it from making emergency modifications. I find this argument unpersuasive. Landmark status would prevent the aesthetics of the building from being further diminished and disrupted; it would not prevent necessary repairs to the mechanical infrastructure within. Rather, Con Edison would be required to demonstrate preservation care and consideration in the execution of any

emergency repairs, steps that are wholly appropriate for a building of such architectural and historic renown.

The industrial history of the Far West Side has nearly been lost to the frantic pace of demolition and development. The IRT building is a monument to this history in its finest form, and is an integral part of the history of its neighborhood that must not be lost as the aesthetics of New York City continue to evolve. As William Murtagh once wrote: "Preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future."

I have a concern for the future of the IRT Powerhouse, which I share with the Municipal Art Society, Community Boards 4 and 7, the AIA - NY Chapter, Landmark West!, Historic Districts Council, among others. No more false starts by the LPC. I urge in the strongest terms that this majestic building once and for all be preserved as a New York City landmark. I appreciate the Commission's time and consideration, and thank you again for the opportunity to comment.