



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

My Testimony to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission Regarding the Landmarking of Public Interior Spaces at the Waldorf Astoria New York

BRAD HOYLMAN-SIGAL January 24, 2017



Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) today regarding the consideration of landmark designation for public interior spaces within the Waldorf Astoria New York, located at 301 Park Avenue in Manhattan and in my State Senate district.

I wrote a letter to the LPC in September 2016 to bring attention to the glorious and historic interiors of the Waldorf Astoria and request the immediate calendaring and designation of these spaces. I am grateful that the LPC has responded expeditiously to my request – backed by the advocacy efforts of the Historic District Council and the Landmarks Conservancy – and moved to calendar and consider the Waldorf interiors for New York City landmarking. I urge the commission to take action today to protect these spaces for decades to come.

Foremost, I would like to thank the Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, the Art Deco Society of New York, and Manhattan Community Board 5 for their research and advocacy on behalf of the landmarking of the Waldorf Astoria's interior spaces.

The Waldorf Astoria is one of the most important repositories of art deco architecture in the nation, both inside and out. The exterior of the building was recognized as worthy of preservation protections by the LPC in 1993, but the interiors also merit designation.

According to Peg Breen of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Waldorf Astoria's interiors "possess not only aesthetic significance as the very finest surviving examples of Classical Modernist design, but also immense cultural importance." These public spaces have hosted countless New Yorkers and visitors alike, including United States Presidents, world leaders and prominent figures in business, the arts and civic life.

As such, I strongly support designation for the following interior spaces within the Waldorf Astoria New York: Park Avenue vestibules and foyer, Lexington Ave vestibules and foyer, Park Avenue lobby and colonnade, West Lounge (formerly Peacock Alley), West Elevator Lobby, Main Lobby, Main Lobby Hall, East Arcade, Lexington Avenue stairs and landings, second floor Lexington Ave stairs and landings, third floor Lexington Avenue stairs and landings, Grand Ballroom and Balconies, Ballroom Entrance Hall (Silver Gallery), Ballroom Foyer, Basildon Room, Jade Room, Astor Gallery, and the foyer connecting Jade Room and Astor Gallery.

While I am grateful for the LPC's consideration of these sites, I would also like to urge the LPC to calendar the following locations for interior landmarking: the Starlight Roof and Palm Room, the Presidential Suite, and the belowground subway entrance used by various United States Presidents.

Protecting the hotel's historically significant interior spaces should be a priority. In light of the purchase of the Waldorf Astoria property by the Anbang Insurance Group and its decision to convert the hotel into residential units, many New Yorkers are justifiably concerned that renovations may cause irreversible harm to this quintessential piece of New York City history. While I am grateful that Anbang has expressed a commitment to preserve and protect the hotel's historic spaces, we must act now to guarantee the preservation of interior spaces under current and future ownership. Without the firm protections of an interior landmark designation, the City leaves the fate of this extraordinary space to chance. Absent an interior landmark designation, owners are legally permitted to gut the iconic rooms of the hotel. I am sure New Yorkers would be aghast to learn that under current law even the famous World's Fair clock in the Waldorf's main lobby could be dismantled and sold for scrap by future owners if they so choose!

Over eight decades after opening its Park Avenue location, the Waldorf Astoria's interiors continue to inform and enchant all who enter through its revolving doors. The public spaces inside the Waldorf Astoria hold significant cultural, architectural and historical importance. Our city has a responsibility to celebrate the Waldorf's interior spaces and safeguard them for future generations, and I urge the LPC to expeditiously designate the hotel's interiors before it is too late.

Thank you for your attention to my testimony and for LPC's commitment to preserving our city's historical spaces.