



Testimony of the Municipal Art Society
Before the City Council's Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses
By Melissa Baldock, Kress/RFR Fellow for Historic Preservation and Public Policy
Designation of the Prospect Heights Historic District
September 9, 2009

I am Melissa Baldock, Kress Fellow for Historic Preservation and Public Policy, speaking in support of the Prospect Heights Historic District on behalf of the Municipal Art Society. The Municipal Art Society is a private, non-profit membership organization that fights for intelligent urban planning, design, and preservation through education, dialogue and advocacy.

MAS enthusiastically supports the designation of the Prospect Heights Historic District, and we would like to thank Council Member Letitia James for her support and leadership, which have helped us get to this point today. Prospect Heights is of great importance to MAS. In the wake of the proposed Atlantic Yards development, the future of Prospect Heights' historic resources came into question. In response, MAS worked closely with the Prospect Heights Neighborhood Development Council to conduct a survey of the neighborhood. The neighborhood's involvement and dedication were remarkable. Over twenty members of the Prospect Heights Community were involved in the surveying and the preparation of a comprehensive proposal submitted to the LPC. In part due to that enthusiastic engagement, today there is widespread support in the community for this designation.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission voted to designate Prospect Heights in June because of its rich historic architecture. The neighborhood includes some of Brooklyn's finest historic residential architecture. It includes beautiful blocks of rowhouses articulated in the Neo-Grec, Romanesque Revival, Renaissance Revival, and Second-Empire styles. These rowhouses are interspersed with churches and small commercial and apartment buildings, adding to the richness of the neighborhood's architecture. Located just north Prospect Park, the neighborhood has seen few changes since it was first developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth, and is one of brownstone Brooklyn's most intact neighborhoods. Containing over 850 buildings, Prospect Heights is the largest district designated by the LPC in decades. It is important to note that the agency's ability to undertake larger districts like Prospect Heights in recent years has been due, in large part, to the increased funding it received from the Council.

When there are large-scale development plans and rezonings that affect New York City's historic resources, it is critical that the LPC step in to ensure that these resources are protected. MAS applauds the LPC for doing just that in this instance, and urges the City Council to join Council Member James in supporting this district.