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NEW YORK STATE SENATE
SENATOR JESSE HAMILTON

RANKING COMMITTEES

BANKS
MENTAL HEALTH

COMMITTEES

AGRICULTURE
CODES
COMMERCE
EDUCATION
ENERGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

August 12, 2016

Re: Our Lady Of Loreto Church

Dear Chair Srinivasan,

I am acutely aware of the need for affordable housing in Brownsville. Every day, my office sees a stream of people losing their homes or looking for an affordable way to stay in Brooklyn. Housing is the number one priority of my office, and I will work to be the most outspoken advocate for creating affordable housing in New York State.

With that in mind, I am writing to support the landmark designation of Our Lady Of Loreto Church located at 126 Sackman Street in Brooklyn (Block 1436, Lot 32), regardless of the proposal to demolish it in the name of affordable housing. I find the arguments made by the Brownsville Heritage House (BHH) for preserving this century-old Italian-American cultural piece very compelling. As an elected representative of Brownsville, I consider it my responsibility to take a stance on this issue.

Currently Brownsville only has one public landmark, the Betsy Head Play Center. Yet it is dominated with eighteen public housing developments. The East Brooklyn Congregation is currently working with the Community Preservation Corporation to develop and rehabilitate rental units in Brownsville as well as improving the living conditions of Brownsville Public Housing. Brownsville had made huge strides in affordable housing, however it is detrimentally lacking in public landmarks.

In addition to the statements of BHH, I want to address point by point why the LPC should follow its mandate, based on history of the LPC and the current landmark law (see nyc.gov/html/lpc/html/about/history.shtml):

Stabilizing and improving property values/Fostering civic pride: Our office is dedicated to changing the current narrative about Brownsville. All too often, when the neighborhood is in the news, it is usually because of a shooting or some horrible statistic. As a proud representative of the neighborhood, we know the neighborhood can improve by fostering the successes there. This church is a Brownsville success story. Its existence shows the perseverance of beauty in the face of decay, and the height of artistry in the face of mediocre new developments.

There are many new housing projects in Brownsville, but would anyone ever come to the neighborhood to admire them? Are there any architectural books about the exciting

architecture going up? While some of these projects are quite successful and well-designed, there are few buildings that can foster civic pride like Our Lady Of Loreto. I challenge you to find one building that would increase property values as much as this building.

Yes, Brooklyn in general and Brownsville in particular desperately need affordable housing. But the people in Brownsville are tired of getting crumbs. They are tired of housing healthcare workshops as if there is only sickness in their community. They are tired of only forums on gun violence, as if there are no good deeds in Brownsville. The neighborhood needs something outstanding—Our Lady Of Loreto is just that. To turn it into just another development site would not only destroy the unique beauty of the building, but would denigrate the entire neighborhood.

Protecting and enhancing the City's attractions to tourists/Strengthening the economy of the City: Brownsville is not known as a tourist destination, but Our Lady Of Loreto can change that. It is conveniently located by train from Downtown Brooklyn and Prospect Heights. It offers a chance to create a new artistic hub at a time when even successful artistic institutions in Brooklyn are facing the challenges of rising rents.

Promote the use of historic districts, landmarks, interior landmarks, and scenic landmarks for the education, pleasure and welfare of the people of the City: Our Lady Of Loreto is the only living artifact that gives residents a glimpse into the history of this culturally rich neighborhood. Most people, even neighborhood residents, fail to realize that Brownsville was not always an African-American neighborhood. Some might know that comedians like Larry and Curly of the Three Stooges were from Brownsville, fewer still know about the areas Italian heritage. Even fewer would know that one of the finest examples of Italian-American architecture can be found here. Landmark protection of this property would celebrate this history, and fulfill this part of the mission of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Furthermore, the church offers a wide range of possibilities for community engagement, and can act as a safe haven for residents of all walks of life. The intended purpose of the church will be a community center serving to educate the neighbors and provide an outlet for theater and other ennobling activities.

My office hosts public events around Brooklyn. We see the impact of beautiful public spaces, and we see how Brownsville needs Our Lady Of Loreto, not only because of its innate beauty, but because it has such potential as an important cultural center for the neighborhood. I urge you to protect this property.

Yours in Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jesse Hamilton". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jesse Hamilton
New York State Senator, 20th District