



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

November 6, 2013 / Calendar No. 16

N140103HKM

IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated September 20, 2013, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the Steinway & Sons Reception Room and Hallway, First Floor Interior, 109-113 West 57th Street (Block 1010, Lot 25), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on September 10, 2013 (Designation List No. 467/LP-2551), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 5.

Pursuant to Section 3020.8(b) of the City Charter, the City Planning Commission shall submit to the City Council a report with respect to the relation of any designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, whether of a historic district or a landmark, to the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements, and any plans for the development, growth, improvement or renewal of the area involved.

On September 10, 2013, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Steinway & Sons Reception Hall and Hallway, First Floor Interior (Block 1010, Lot 25), as a city landmark. The landmark designation consists of fixtures and interior components of this space, including but not limited to the southeast section of the first floor interior, the domed rotunda and second floor balcony, the east foyer and stairs leading to the balcony; the hallway of the public corridor, up to the north glass doors, that adjoin the reception room; and the fixtures and components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, arches, pilasters, stairs, landings, ceiling murals, painted medallions, metal railings, metal grilles, chandeliers and lighting fixtures, door enframements, doors and windows, and attached furnishings and decorative elements.

Early in the history of the firm Steinway & Sons, Steinway pianos were recognized for their superior craftsmanship and design. In 1864 Steinway & Sons opened a showroom, piano depository and offices at 71-73 East 14th Street, within New York's classical music center. Most of the leading piano makers followed Steinway's lead and had showrooms in the area. By 1875 Steinway was one of the world's leading piano makers. Its pianos were also popular in Europe and the firm gained renown as the purveyor of the pianos of choice for the greatest concert pianists. Since its construction, Steinway Hall has been the sole sales location for Steinway pianos. Professional pianists may sample and purchase concert grand pianos at Steinway Hall.

Steinway Hall is a designated landmark.

After the opening of Carnegie Hall in 1891 at West 57th Street and Seventh Avenue, and its ascension as the city's premier classical music venue, New York's classical music center, including the piano companies, gradually moved uptown. The Steinway building at 14th Street was sold in 1923 and closed in 1925. In 1924 Steinway & Sons acquired eight adjacent lots in the immediate vicinity of Carnegie Hall; three lots on 57th Street and five lots on West 58th Street. The Steinway Hall building was developed by Steinway & Sons, and completed in 1925.

The building was designed by the architectural firm Warren & Wetmore. Whitney Warren attended Columbia College for a time, and continued his studies at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris from 1885 to 1894. Whitney Warren was a founder of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects and the Beaux-Arts School of Design. Charles Whetmore studied architecture before joining a law firm. Warren successfully persuaded Whetmore to leave law and established the firm Warren & Wetmore in 1898. Warren & Wetmore became a highly successful and prolific largely commercial architectural firm. The firm's work was concentrated in New York City during the first three decades of the 20th century. The designs were mainly variations of the neo-Classical idiom, including essays in the Beaux-Arts and neo-Renaissance styles.

Walter Hopkins worked for Warren & Wetmore for more than 20 years. In 1923 Hopkins published an essay in the "Architectural Forum" magazine which focused on the importance of "public rooms" and the "limitless possibilities offered in the domain of painted decoration and ornament". Hopkins planned the building and interiors, working with the decorative painters Paul Arndt and Cooper & Gentiluomo. The primary space is a double height octagonal rotunda where visitors, musicians and potential customers meet store representatives before entering various piano showrooms. The lavishly-decorated room has a shallow domed ceiling with allegorical murals and a crystal chandelier. Each side of the rotunda features a white marble arch that rest on fluted Ionic columns, flanked by green marble pilasters. The decorators Cooper & Gentiluomo probably painted the surrounding images, inspired by imperial Roman and Italian Renaissance wall decorations; imagery of this type often appears in late 18th century English interiors.

In 1925, Hopkins published an illustrated essay on the Steinway Building in “The Architectural Record” magazine. He described how the “home like appearance” of the office and showroom areas expressed the “dignity and distinction befitting the traditions of its owners”.

Situated in a C5-3 (max FAR 15.0) zoning district, the Building’s zoning lot contains 16,300 square feet of lot area. Since the lot is located in the Special Midtown District, however, transferable development rights generated on the site are calculated as if the FAR was 16.0, therefore approximately 60,848 square feet of development rights are generated by the zoning lot.

Pursuant to Section 74-79 of the Zoning Resolution, a landmark building may transfer its unused development rights to a lot contiguous to the zoning lot occupied by the landmark or one which is across the street and opposite to the lot occupied by the landmark building, or in the case of a corner lot, one which fronts on the same street intersection as the lot occupied by the landmark building. There are seven receiving sites for the transfer of the landmark’s unused floor area.

All landmark buildings or buildings within Historic Districts are eligible to apply for use and bulk waivers pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution.

The subject landmark does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution. In addition, the Commission is not aware of any conflicts between the subject landmark designation and projected public improvements or any plans for development, growth, improvement, or renewal in the vicinity of the landmark building.

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