



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

November 6, 2013/Calendar No. 17

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IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated October 4, 2013, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the Holland Plaza Building, (Block 226, Lot 1), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on September 24, 2013 (Designation List No. 466 / LP-2537), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 2.

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 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 24, 2013, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Holland Plaza Building, as a City landmark. The landmark site at 75 Varick Street (aka 73-93 Varick Street) fully occupies an irregularly-shaped lot, bounded by Canal, Varick, Watts and Hudson Streets.

The Holland Plaza Building faces the entrance to the Holland Tunnel, which was completed in 1927. The building location was chosen to take advantage of the new transportation hub then developing at the entrance to the newly-constructed tunnel linking New York and New Jersey. The area is primarily characterized by full lot coverage, low to mid-rise industrial buildings, many of which were constructed by in the years immediately following the opening of the tunnel.

By the late 19th century, the surrounding area had become the site of numerous small warehouses and storage facilities, factories and small shops, as well as scattered older residential buildings remaining from its earlier residential development.

In the years before and after the tunnel opening, the immediate area underwent a huge transformation. Between 1925 and 1929, millions of square feet of industrial and office space were added in this area. Developers saw tremendous potential in this convenient location for a greatly enhanced movement of both finished and raw goods. Further, Trinity Church, which owned large tracts of land in this section, began to make some of its property available for development. By 1929, there were 14 new industrial buildings in the vicinity, each providing between 100,000 and 350,000 square feet.

The Holland Plaza Building, constructed on an almost triangular lot, was designed by architect Ely Jacques Kahn. In 1918, Ely Jacques Kahn assumed partnership in the architecture firm of Buchman and Fox, which later became Buchman and Kahn. His abstract, geometric style reflected his classical training at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Many of his earlier buildings were tall loft structures built in areas of office towers and the goal was to make the buildings fit in with those surroundings. Ely Jacques Kahn felt that business owners could be innovative and were more likely to be open to new design ideas. His style evolved into a distinctive language of abstract, geometric designs that emphasized the surface of the building and its massing. His manipulation of brick and terra cotta gave a strong sense of texture to his facades.

The Holland Plaza Building, is an excellent example of the way Ely Jacques Kahn met the needs of the developer and the specific building project, using a combination of modern design elements on a classically-organized façade. The Holland Plaza building is clearly an industrial building, with interior floors able to carry large loads and provide large expanses for manufacturing. The Watts street elevation is punctuated with numerous freight loading bays to supply those industrial tenants. Central pedestrian entrances are located on Canal and Varick Streets. The building shows 15 stories on the street, with only a few setbacks on the Varick and Watts Street elevations and this gives a sturdy effect to the structure.

The landmark site is located in a M1-6 zoning district. With an allowable floor area ratio (FAR) of 10.0, the zoning lot could be developed with approximately 625,000 square feet of floor area. The Holland Plaza building contains approximately 993,903 square feet of floor area. Therefore, the site is overbuilt and there are no unused development rights.

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 building or one which is across the street and opposite to the zoning 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. Since the maximum FAR is 10 and the landmark site is developed to an FAR of 15.9, there are no unused development rights to transfer.

Pursuant to Section 74-11 of the Zoning Resolution, landmark buildings or buildings within Historic Districts are eligible to apply for use and bulk waivers upon application to the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The subject landmark does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution. Furthermore, 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.

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