



IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated August 18, 2017, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the New York Public Library (Stephen A. Schwarzman Building) Interiors, Main Reading Room and Catalog Room (Block 1257, Lot 1), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on August 8, 2017 (Designation List No. 497 / LP-2592), 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 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 August 8, 2017, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the Main Reading Room and the Catalog Room of the New York Public Library Stephen A. Schwarzman Building as a New York City interior landmark. The landmark site, at 476 Fifth Avenue (Block 1257, Lot 1), is located on the west side of Fifth Avenue between West 40th Street and West 42nd Street in the Midtown neighborhood of Manhattan, Community District 5.

The interior landmark designation consists of the Main Reading Room and the Catalog Room (now the Rose Main Reading Room and the Bill Blass Public Catalog Room) on the third floor of the library, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, which include but are not limited to the wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, murals, decorative plasterwork, metalwork and woodwork, built-in book cases, balconies and railings, doors and frames, windows and frames, light fixtures, attached furnishings and decorative elements.

John Shaw Billings was the New York Public Library's first director, and in 1897 he conceived a vision for the building's plan and arrangement of interior spaces that included the placement of the Main Reading Room on the third floor, elevated above the City streets and atop the library stacks. This vision was used to develop a written "Terms of Competition" booklet, which was distributed to architects to submit bids of architectural designs. John Mervin Carrère and Thomas

S. Hastings were awarded the commission in 1897. Carrère & Hastings were a notable firm of the time, winning commissions for projects such as 105 Hudson Street, an office building in the Tribeca West Historic District, and Paterson City Hall in New Jersey. In the years to come, they would design fourteen branch libraries in New York City, the William Cullen Bryant Memorial, and the monumental approach to the Manhattan Bridge.

Construction of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building began in 1900 and opened to the public in 1911. The building and interiors are often considered “Beaux-Arts” in style, but at the time of construction, Carrère & Hastings and architecture critics identified the architecture and interiors as “Renaissance” in style. Beaux-Arts only became a popular term in the mid-1960s to describe the work of American architects who attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts, as Carrère & Hastings did, or to describe late-19th or early 20th century structures displaying an abundance of classical-style ornament. The building was designated as a New York City landmark in January 1967.

From opening day, the Main Reading Room and the Catalog Room have been the primary destination for library visitors. From the main entrance of the library on Fifth Avenue to the Catalog Room, a visitor journeys through a series of distinct and notable spaces, first entering through the grand entrance of Astor Hall, and then ascending up the central stairs to the wood-paneled McGraw Rotunda. These three spaces, combined, were designated as New York City’s first interior landmark in 1974.

Visitors first enter the Catalog Room from the McGraw Rotunda, and the entrance to the Main Reading Room is at its far western end. Billings’ original vision was that the Main Reading Room be “removed from dust and noise, and enjoy the best form of light.” Carrère & Hastings’ design places the Catalog and Reading Room on the third floor, the highest story of the library, and directly above the stacks so that visitors would receive quick delivery of books and reference materials. Both rooms have 52-foot-tall ceilings and round-arched windows, which fill the interiors with natural light. The Catalog Room is 81 feet long and 77 feet wide. The Main Reading Room is 297 feet long and 78 feet wide – at half an acre, it is one of the largest indoor public spaces in New York City.

The general configuration of the rooms in a “T” shape was envisioned by Billings, but it was Carrère & Hastings who fully designed the layout of the space. Design elements were chosen by Carrère & Hastings to ensure strong visual cues for wayfinding purposes, as large crowds of visitors were anticipated from the beginning. Doorways from the Main Reading Room and Catalog Room were given large round pediments, which rose above the woodwork of the walls to be easily noticeable by visitors. To encourage a particular pattern of circulation, bands of white marble were used in contrast with red quarry tile to divide the floor into a distinct axial pathway and to indicate where desks should be arranged. In addition to designing the interior, Carrère & Hastings designed all of the interior finishes and fixtures of the Main Reading Room and Catalog Room, including furniture, lighting fixtures, hardware, and the decorated ceilings. The original ceiling painting of a cloud-filled sky was created by James Wall Finn, a French-born decorative artist. Over the past century, these interiors have been carefully maintained, and a comprehensive ceiling restoration took place between 2014 and 2016.

The Stephen A. Schwarzman Building is situated in a C5-3 zoning district within the Special Midtown District, which permits a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 10.0 for residential use, 15.0 for community facility use, and 15.0 for commercial use. For the purposes of determining the amount of floor area that can be transferred from a landmark lot, the maximum FAR of a lot located in a C5-3 district within the Special Midtown District containing a landmark is 16.0. The building is situated on a zoning lot that has 219,250 square feet of lot area, resulting in an on-site maximum allowable floor area for of 3,508,000 square feet of transferable development rights. The landmark building contains 284,249 square feet of floor area. The maximum amount of unused development rights available for transfer is 3,223,751 square feet.

Pursuant to Zoning Resolution (ZR) Section 74-79, 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 (“adjacent lot”). There are eighteen potential receiving sites for the transfer of the landmark’s unused floor area.

Pursuant to Section 74-711 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.

MARISA LAGO, *Chair*

KENNETH J. KNUCKLES, *Esq.*, *Vice-Chairman*

RAYANN BESSER, ALFRED C. CERULLO, III,

MICHELLE R. DE LA UZ, JOSEPH I. DOUEK,

CHERYL COHEN EFFRON, HOPE KNIGHT, ANNA HAYES LEVIN,

ORLANDO MARIN, LARISA ORTIZ, *Commissioners*

RICHARD W. EADDY, *Commissioner, recused*