



IN THE MATTER OF a communication dated April 30, 2018, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of Benjamin Franklin High School (Block 1713, Lot 1), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on March 27, 2018, (Designation List No. 505/LP-2596), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 11.

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 March 27, 2018 the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated Benjamin Franklin High School as a City landmark. The landmark site, at 260 Pleasant Avenue (Block 1713, Lot 1) is located in the East Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan, Community District 11.

Located on the eastern edge of Pleasant Village in East Harlem along the Harlem River, Benjamin Franklin High School represents the rich history of the social and political engagement of East Harlem in the mid-20th century. Established as East Harlem’s first high school—not a trade school or vocational school—under the leadership of the school leader, activist, urban sociologist, and East Harlem resident Leonard Covello, Benjamin Franklin High School was intended to be a citizen-centered community school that actively engaged its students and the broader community in social and political reform. Designed by Eric Kebbon, head architect of school construction for the New York City Board of Education, and completed in 1942, the grand two-block long brick and limestone Georgian Revival building is a highly visible structure symbolic of a community’s focus on, and its commitment to, the future of East Harlem.

Envisioned in the 1930s as a means to improve the opportunities of the Italian immigrant community through bilingual education and community engagement, Benjamin Franklin High School opened as the neighborhood began to experience significant demographic changes. The school not only became an important space to ease increasingly tense race relations, it also

adapted its curriculum to meet the needs of Puerto Rican migrants by providing orientation in Spanish, forming a Puerto Rican cultural club, and actively engaging the Puerto Rican community.

Throughout the brief life of Benjamin Franklin High School as a community-centered school, Covello and other progressive educators sought to improve the social and economic conditions of the neighborhood while providing for the welfare of the community. Despite the ultimate abandonment of the Benjamin Franklin High School “experiment,” the rich history of the school, from its conception to its reorganization as a standard comprehensive New York City public high school, is a revealing depiction of East Harlem during a period of significant change.

The building now houses the top-ranked Manhattan School of Science and Math (also known as “Math and Science”) and the Isaac Newton Middle School. Positioned between the Harlem River, Thomas Jefferson Park, and the dense neighborhood of Pleasant Village, it is a substantial presence in East Harlem and continues to plan an important civic role.

The landmark site is situated in an R7-2 zoning district, which allows a maximum base floor area ratio (FAR) of 6.5. The 164,626-square-foot zoning lot could be developed with 1,070,069 square feet of floor area. Benjamin Franklin High School contains 285,012 square feet of floor area (1.73 FAR). The site therefore has approximately 785,057 square feet of 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 that is across the street and opposite to the zoning lot occupied by the landmark building, or in the case of a corner lot, one that fronts on the same street intersection as the lot occupied by the landmark. Eighteen of nineteen adjacent sites are eligible to receive the landmark’s unused development rights.

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 LPC.

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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