



**IN THE MATTER OF** a communication dated August 10, 2018, from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of the AT&T Corporate Headquarters Building (Block 1291, Lot 10), by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on July 31, 2018 (Designation List No. 509/LP-2600), Borough of Manhattan, Community District 5.

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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 June 19, 2018, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designated the AT&T Corporate Headquarters Building as a historical landmark. The landmark designation consists of Block 1291, Lot 10. The landmark site at 550 Madison Avenue fronts on the west side of Madison Avenue between East 56th Street and East 55th Street in the Midtown East neighborhood, Manhattan Community District Five.

The AT&T Corporate Headquarters Building (later Sony Plaza, now 550 Madison Avenue) is an icon of the Manhattan skyline and of postmodern architecture. The top of the office tower is crowned by a colossal broken pediment, a feature that sets the building dramatically apart from earlier glass skyscrapers in midtown. Built for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company between 1978 and 1984, the headquarters was designed by architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee, in association with Simmons Architects.

Philip Johnson was a pivotal figure in 20th century American architecture, active as an architect, curator, and art patron. At the Museum of Modern Art he helped introduce European modernism to a wider American audience in the early 1930s, and with partner John Burgee ushered in the era of postmodernism.

Postmodern architecture originated in the mid-1960s, with the publication of Robert Venturi's "gentle manifesto" *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, which critiqued "orthodox modern architecture" and encouraged the use of ornament and historical forms. Venturi's influence was felt in such pioneering works as Charles Moore's Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans, Michael Graves' Portland Building in Oregon, and the AT&T Building – the movement's first skyscraper.

Thirty-seven stories tall, the office tower is clad with rough-finished, pinkish-gray Stony Creek granite, a material associated with important Beaux-Arts-style buildings in New York City. Johnson and Burgee's handsome yet playful design references various classical sources, such as the 15th century Pazzi Chapel in Florence and 18th century Chippendale-style clocks and cabinets. Visible from east and west, the large circular opening in the pediment aligns with the entrance arch facing Madison Avenue. Located in the center bay, the monumental entrance is flanked by groups of flat arches that originally opened to twin arcades beneath the tower, as well as a covered pedestrian space behind the building, linking East 55th and 56th streets.

These privately-owned public spaces (POPS) generated floor area bonuses, allowing a tower of significantly greater height without setbacks, a major feature of the building's design. Approved by the City Planning Commission (CPC) in 1978 ([C 780301 ZSM](#)), these bonuses and waivers had a significant impact on the office tower's configuration and massing. The layout, design, and maintenance of these amenities were reviewed and approved by the City Planning Commission, and because of these bonuses, these spaces remain under its jurisdiction. With its approval, these spaces have undergone alterations, such as the substantial modification to the original unenclosed POPS in 1992-94, during which time the arcades flanking the Madison Avenue entrance were mostly converted to shops and the covered pedestrian space at the rear of the tower was enclosed at both ends. AT&T sold the building to Sony USA in 2002, and since 2016 it has been owned by the Olayan Group.

The landmark site is situated partially within a C5-2.5 zoning district, which allows a maximum base floor area ratio (FAR) of 12.0, and partially within a C5-3 district, which allows a maximum base FAR of 15.0. The subject building contains 685,125 square feet of floor area on a 36,803-square-foot zoning lot (18.6 FAR). As the portion of the site situated in the C5-2.5 district was rezoned after the building was completed, the building was constructed pursuant to C5-3 regulations. In addition to construction of the building, development of the zoning lot included two arcades totaling 3,542 square feet and a 10,164-square-foot covered pedestrian space. These POPS generated a total floor area bonus of 122,430 square feet: 10,626 square feet from the arcades and 111,804 square feet from the covered pedestrian space.

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 (an “adjacent lot”). Since the existing floor area exceeds that permitted by current zoning, there are no unused development rights available for transfer.

The subject landmark does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution. Furthermore, the Department of City Planning is not aware of any conflicts between the subject landmark designation with the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements or any plans for development growth, improvement or renewal in the vicinity of the landmark.

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