



Report of Manhattan Borough President, Scott M. Stringer & WEPS Meeting “To Preserve and Protect West End Avenue”
May 14, 2009 6:30-8:30pm

By the time that the WEPS crew arrived, a little before 6pm, the MBP’s staff was already there; tables were set up and 150 chairs were set out. Scott’s banner hung proudly at the front of the room, and the set-up for Andrew’s power point was under way.

People started to arrive; there was a blur of meeting and greeting; our ‘Save West End!’ buttons started flying out of the basket, those who had not signed the petition signed, postcards to send to LPC were filled out, and in a blink of an eye, it seemed, the meeting had begun.

Richard Emery, President of WEPS, called us all to order and spoke a bit about WEPS, our history and mission, and then introduced “someone who’s been with WEPS from the beginning, someone we can rightly call one of our ‘founding members,’” **Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer**.

Scott’s speech began with remembering the hard struggle to landmark the Riverside West End Historic District, the one that takes in a few blocks of West End Avenue. His enthusiasm undimmed by the years, he spoke forcefully in favor of a West End Avenue Historic. His remarks were bracing in the extreme, and as he left he took my hand and said, “We’re going to do it.”

By then, **Linda Rosenthal, State Assemblymember**, had arrived, and Richard called on her to come up front, noting as he did that Linda had been at our first meeting and was another “founding member,” that her support and guidance had been invaluable. Greeted warmly by the crowd, Linda took the floor to speak of the formation of WEPS and its strong focus and worthy goal, which she pledged to continue to support in every way she could.

Next, there was **Eric Schneiderman, State Senator**, with a Save West End! button in the lapel of his beautifully tailored suit, waiting to take the stage. Richard called him up, and Eric spoke about West End Avenue from a resident’s point of view. He spoke of the pleasure of returning from Albany and turning down West End Avenue, of that reassuring feeling of coming home. He noted that WEPS would have its second birthday in July, and said “You know what that means: a fundraiser! And I’ll be right there,” he promised, as he and Richard shook hands.

Andrew Dolkart’s talk was next: the lights were lowered and the strong, sturdy soldiers of West End Avenue, interspersed with the lighter spirited, smaller houses in between, marched across the wall of the ballroom. Taking us from end to end of the Avenue, the presentation was in Andrew’s usual style: easy, relaxed, knowledgeable and engaging. Questions followed and Andrew fielded as many as he could before he had to go.

While this was going on, I kept passing notes to Richard as one after another neighborhood activist arrived; he wanted to be sure to mention them all. (list of attendees separately attached.)

Richard then introduced **Peg Breen, President of The New York Landmarks Conservancy**. Peg said that it was true that districts were lining up hoping to get protection, but the difference between them and us was that “*You* have done the work. You are not asking LPC to do the survey; you’ve done it. This should be something that LPC can look at and take care of and have off their plate.” On costs in a HD, she asked, “Does it cost more -- in the short run -- to repair that cornice rather than rip it down? Yes. But does repairing it increase the value of your property in the long run? Yes, absolutely yes.”

Frampton Tolbert, Deputy Director of Historic Districts Council, followed up with lucid comments supporting the contention that living in a Historic District brings many benefits, only one of which is the bottom line. Frampton came armed

with two of HDC's well-written publications, *Financial Incentives for Historic Buildings* and *Frequently Asked Questions about the Landmarks Process*, both valuable assets to any landmarks process.

Cristiana Pena, the Director of Community Relations at Landmark West! was next to take the podium. With her usual poise, she spoke eloquently about the importance of neighborhoods and a life that is enriched by living among buildings that have a human relationship to their surroundings. Her comments were greeted enthusiastically; she touched the very heart of the matter.

It was just about then that **Council Member Gale Brewer** arrived, and Richard called her forward to sustained applause. Gale, in her soft and low voice, said that WEPS was a group with focus and drive. "You call Richard, you call Erika, and things get done." Gale spoke with sadness of the demolition permit that was, only last week, issued for 732 West End Avenue. Those in the audience who had not had the WEPS email warning of this possibility were unprepared, and there were gasps of dismay.

Can we still save this lovely little townhouse, and 734, right next door, that have been emptied and already stripped of much of their detail inside? WEPS hasn't given up hope, but of course, having been granted a demolition permit makes it tremendously difficult. Unless we are calendared very soon, we may see these lovely buildings fall. It is on a hopeful note, therefore, that I report that **Jenny Fernandez, the Director of Intergovernmental Affairs for LPC**, attended the event. She listened to the information presented and will bring it back to the Commission.

Tom Holmes, WEPS stalwart and creative fund raiser, rose to speak briefly. He encouraged anyone there to contact WEPS if they knew of people ready to buy or sell apartments – as one of New York's top real estate salesmen, he has arranged for WEPS to benefit from sales that come through information given by WEPS members. But the part of his speech that touched the heart (I've already gotten emails about it) was his evocation of the importance of these buildings themselves, that they were "built to last," that they come from a time that will not be seen again, and that the importance of preserving these buildings and the neighborhood they create for our children is paramount.

To wrap it all up and give a rallying call for action, **Cynthia Doty of Westsiders for Responsible Development** gave us the story of their fight for down-zoning from 96th Street to 108th. It was inspiring and instructional: 800 people at a meeting greeted officials in an election year ... and down zoning won. She reminded us that NOW is the time to act!

AN ELECTION YEAR ... this was drummed into our heads by Peg Breen and others, and Cynthia just nailed it down. NOW is the time to act. NOW is when we can put pressure on Mayor Bloomberg to pay attention.

We ended the meeting with a buzz of energy and commitment in the air. Issues before WEPS are immediate and pressing:

Getting the LPC to calendar us so we can make a presentation and have a hearing
 Creating a letter campaign to Mayor Bloomberg
 Fundraising
 Can we save 732 -734? Trying to save them if at all possible –

All this means money and time from committed volunteers.

Send donations to
 West End Preservation Society
 514 West End Ave
 Suite 15B
 New York, NY 10024

Volunteers, contact WEPS to find out what you can do. There is a job for everyone.

In community,
 Erika

West End Preservation Society