



BOARD 8: THUMBS UP TO LEX PRESERVATION

CONCERN THAT KEAN HOUSE PROJECT WILL LEAD TO MORE AREA DEVELOPMENT

By Dan Rivoli

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Community Board 8 voted last week to expand the Lexington Avenue Historic District to include 219 buildings between Fifth and Lexington avenues. The new properties fall between East 72nd and 75th streets to the north, and East 61st and 65th streets to the south.

Forty members voted in favor of the resolution, though six members abstained from the action.

The meeting drew a crowd of more than 200, many of whom wore orange stickers with black lettering reading, "Save Lexington Avenue."

Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts have long pushed for an expansion of the existing district, which falls between Fifth and Park avenues from East 59th to 79th streets. The group says that development of luxury condominiums in the area endangers buildings along Lexington Avenue that the organization deems significant.



Seri Worden stands in front of historic former horse stables that are now residences and businesses, on East 75th Street between Lexington and Park avenues. Photo By: Andrew Schwartz

"The arch on Lexington is equal in quality and age," said Seri Worden, executive director of Friends of the Upper East Side Historical Districts. "It's a long overdue expansion."

Worden said that the properties included in the proposed expansion were not part of the original historic district because the lines were drawn somewhat arbitrarily due to political maneuvering to landmark the area.

She highlights the Kean House, a building on the southeast corner of East 65th Street and Lexington Avenue that will be demolished for a luxury condominium, as a cautionary tale for leaving the strip of the avenue unprotected.

"It's been a galvanizing force for a lot of people because if the

Landmarks Preservation Commission doesn't move forward [on approving the historical district], it could create a domino effect," Worden said.

State Sen. Liz Krueger also supports expanding the historic district.

"We're trying to hold on to the remaining residential and low-rise commercial space on Lexington Avenue and mid blocks," Krueger said. "That makes the Upper East Side a place where [people] want to live and the ability to be a small business to sell what people actually need in real life. Lexington is our Main Street."

If designated a landmark district, buildings would be protected from major renovations, and they would have to go through the Landmarks approval process for aesthetic and structural changes, thus slowing down development.

Steve Spinola, president of the Real Estate Board of New York, said that the commission should issue clear guidelines for renovations at the time the area is declared a district so property and business owners are saved from unnecessary bureaucracy.

"It would be responsible for the agency," Spinola said. "If you expand the Upper East Side district, people are not going to know what's expected of them or know what work you can do."

Spinola also said that landmark districts should be used as a preservation measure, not to deter development. The existing district already provides a glimpse of historic architecture of the Upper East Side, he argued.

"The district that has been designed reflects the appropriate kind of structures that are in the area," Spinola said. "It's not necessary to expand the district."

The proposal now moves to the Landmarks Preservation Commission for review.

Elisabeth de Bourbon, communications director for the commission, said in a statement, "The Commission is currently reviewing for potential landmark status the 219 buildings in the two proposed extensions."

With additional reporting by Michael Calabrese.