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Kate Wood, executive director, LANDMARK WEST!

Name, age, occupation, where do you live and where are you from.

Kate Wood, 32, executive director of [LANDMARK WEST!](#) I live in Hudson Heights,

otherwise known as Fort Washington or Washington Heights. I spent the first ten years of my life in Texas, where most of my family is from, but I grew up in New Jersey.

You work with Landmark West!, a committee that tries to "preserve the Upper West Side." What is Landmark West! working on now?

LW! is a professional, non-profit, community-based organization founded in 1985 to defend the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side. To do this, we've often had to look beyond our geographical boundaries (59th to 110th Street between Central Park and Riverside Park). Our efforts to convince the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to hold a public hearing to consider designating 2 Columbus Circle (Edward Durell Stone, 1964) as an official Landmark is a case in point. The failure of the LPC to give 2 Columbus Circle due process indicates that something is deeply wrong with New York's system for preserving its history. And because so much of New York is made up of historic neighborhoods, the LPC's negligence is causing the character of our communities, including the Upper West Side to erode. LW! is actively working with the New York City Council and many neighborhood and civic groups across the city to pass legislation (Intro. 705, the "Landmarks Hearing" bill, introduced by Harlem Council Member Bill Perkins) that would make it possible for the Council, by a majority vote, to require the LPC to hold a public hearing on a building, district or other site that qualifies for protection. It is a simple, but potentially powerful enhancement of the Landmarks Law that would give communities in all five boroughs another tool for protecting the places that matter most to them. Even if 2 Columbus Circle is destroyed, our goal is to ensure that something positive emerges from its rubble, as the demolition of Pennsylvania Station fueled the creation of the 1965 Landmarks Law.

If 2 Columbus Circle can't get a hearing, how many other, lesser known buildings will the LPC overlook? For over a decade, LW! has had a running "wish list" of buildings on the Upper West Side that deserve landmark designation, but remain unprotected. Especially above 96th Street, the number of landmarks really peters out, a fact that doesn't reflect the architectural or historical value of this area, which is equal to many neighborhoods south of 96th Street. Development pressures have mounted, and so has the need for a rational strategy for protecting buildings that deserve landmark designation and for zoning that promotes appropriate, sensitive growth.

Landmark and zoning protection don't mean that we can go on "automatic pilot". Maintaining the character of the Upper West Side requires constant vigilance, creativity and responsiveness. With the help of our Certificate of Appropriateness Committee (named after the permit that the LPC issues for work on landmarks), LW! consistently represents the West Side community and other preservation constituents at public hearings regarding proposed changes to landmarks and historic districts. A current example is an application to build a 10-story building on the brownstone midblock of West 70th Street, within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District and adjacent to the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue, an Individual Landmark. Not all changes are inappropriate; this one clearly is. Sometimes institutions make an effort to consult with the community when considering renovations. For example, LW! has been meeting with the leadership of Lincoln Center for many months to discuss planned changes to their campus, which LW! was able to get determined officially "eligible" for the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Also, since 1997 we've worked with businesses and property owners on West 72nd Street to improve its appearance and retail appeal. This project has become a model for other community

groups throughout the city seeking to enhance commercial areas while preserving historic architecture and neighborhood businesses. Recently, West 72nd Street became the first New York City street ever to be selected as a semi-finalist for a Great American Main Street Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The list of projects goes on. But one really vital part of our mission is public education, particularly when it comes to the kids who will inherit our city. Whether those kids grow up to be architects, dentists, developers, teachers or anything else, we hope they will also be preservationists - that is, people who take care of the built environment and make an effort to preserve its lessons for the generations that will follow them. Through our youth education program, Keeping the Past for the Future, which uses as its centerpiece an activity book called "My Preservation Journal," we reach over 1,000 students, teachers, parents and principals, providing them with the basics of architecture, urban design, neighborhood history and active civic participation. Even with limited funding, 1 part-time coordinator and 1 part-time intern, the program has been a huge success and demand is high. The long-range goal is a city where people are engaged in their communities and make informed decisions about how they develop.

What's so special about 2 Columbus Circle?

Whether you love 2 Columbus Circle or hate it, it's hard to deny that it has captured more attention than any other preservation issue of its generation. Among the many voices that have spoken out in favor of a public hearing for 2 Columbus Circle are Robert A.M. Stern, Tom Wolfe, Chuck Close, Richard Meier, Peter Eisenman, the World Monuments Fund, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Preservation League of New York State...you get the picture. It's special, first of all, because of where it is, right at the crux of one of New York's most potentially wonderful public spaces, Columbus Circle. Recent changes to the circle (the Time Warner Center, the re-landscaping of the pedestrian areas) focus even greater attention on Edward Durell Stone's deliberately eye-catching 1960s design. The curved, white-marble façade and diminutive scale of the building are welcome foils to all of the towering steel and glass surrounding the rest of the circle. Stone's design also represents a pivotal moment in his career when he was questioning orthodox modernism (as in the Seagram Building, Lever House and even his own design for the original Museum of Modern Art on West 53rd Street) and experimenting with decorative elements that recalled historical styles that preceded "international-style" modernism. One might as well ask what's so special about the Jefferson Market Courthouse in Greenwich Village. It was designated a landmark primarily because of its High Victorian Gothic-style architecture, which is all the more prominent because of its location at the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Christopher Street. But a generation ago, many people disparaged this style as "old-fashioned" and obsolete. We're just on the cusp of being able to recognize the significance of 2 Columbus Circle and other buildings of its time. It would be a shame to lose this building to politics and greedy short-sightedness when one would hope we had learned that lesson before (i.e., Penn Station, etc.).

Besides 2 Columbus Circle, what building in New York deserves to be landmarked than hasn't been?

Lincoln Center is an example of a place that is a landmark in every sense - historically, architecturally and culturally. In 2000, when the complex was less than 50 years old, it was determined eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places, which by law only includes older sites except in cases of extraordinary significance. It is our understanding that the LPC has played an informal role in advising Lincoln Center on current redevelopment plans. If the LPC is going to devote resources to trying to preserve this place, why not just landmark it so that the public can participate in a truly open discussion about its future?

Your organization is behind the "Landmarks Hearing" bill that would Force the Landmarks Preservation Commission to have a public hearing on any building that is has been determined eligible for listing on the state register of historic places. Do you think that the bill would open the floodgates and frustrate the operation of the LPC?

The "Landmarks Hearing" bill would go a long way towards opening up the LPC's now rather obscure process for deciding which buildings do and do not get public hearings. Whereas the LPC now has complete discretion, the purpose of the bill is to provide an external mechanism for requiring hearings when a building, district, interior or scenic place demonstrates a certain level of significance and public support. A key way the bill proposes to meet this goal is by giving the City Council the authority, by majority vote, to direct the LPC to hold a hearing for potentially worthy buildings. There is almost universal support in the preservation community for this mechanism. The State Register trigger is more complex since the LPC has not been as active in identifying potentially worthy resources as the state has been and, yes, there is a sizable backlog of buildings to consider. This more ambitious element of the bill may need to be tabled until next year since time is running out to get anything passed this year. Even without this provision, the bill would succeed in getting more public hearings than we currently have. Still, we believe that the LPC can and should be working more closely with the State Historic Preservation Office to make sure significant buildings don't fall through the cracks. If the LPC were committed to protecting these buildings, it could devise a system for calendaring them (which would prevent them from being recklessly demolished) and pacing out hearings over time. At the end of the day, holding public hearings is, by law, one of the primary functions of the LPC. The LPC holds far fewer hearings today than it did in past eras, in part because it now only holds hearings when it has done all of its research and intends to actually designate. Hearings by themselves don't require nearly as much time and could be treated as starting points for research if the evidence of public testimony suggests a closer look by the LPC. The net result could be a time savings for the agency and a lot less frustration within communities that now feel as though they've been shut out of the process.

What is your favorite building in New York that currently has landmark status?

My favorite landmark is actually an interior - the Four Seasons Restaurant.

In the 20 years that Landmark West! has been an organization, what is Its biggest achievement?

The numbers say a lot: When LW! was founded in 1985, there were only 337 designated buildings on the Upper West Side, as compared to over 1000 on the Upper East Side. Today, there are 2,606 landmarks in our neighborhood, largely due to our efforts. Our first major, successful push was the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District, designated in 1990 with over 2,000 buildings. We could have declared victory then and there. But we felt that the West Side would continue to need a strong advocacy voice for preservation. Since the beginning, we've conscientiously maintained our independence and ability to focus on the details as well as the bigger picture, Intro. 705 and our youth education program being cases in point.

What advice, if any, would you give to Mayor Bloomberg?

New York's buildings, neighborhoods, public interiors and parks are its most abundant and accessible art forms. As the "Arts Mayor" Bloomberg should devote the next 4 years to strengthening the LPC. A great place to start is to give the LPC the budget and staff it needs to fulfill its mission. Right now, the LPC only has just over \$3,000,000, a staff of just around 50 to monitor over 23,000 designated landmarks throughout the five boroughs, and no survey department for identifying potential new landmarks (as has existed in the past). Giving the LPC adequate resources would send a strong signal that preservation is a priority for New York City.

When you just need to get away from it all, where is your favorite place in NYC to be alone?

I think if I were really about to lose it, I would escape to the main reading room at the New York Public Library. Very little in this world makes me as happy as a long library table, a creaky wooden chair, and a stack of books. The truth of the matter is that I haven't been to the library at 42nd Street in probably over a year. So, more practically, my kitchen serves as a good getaway. It's amazing how some heavy chopping can cleanse the spirit.