LEADING THE COMMISSION: INTERVIEWS WITH THE FORMER CHAIRS OF NYC'S LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

The Reminiscences of

Jennifer Raab

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Jennifer Raab conducted by Interviewer Liz McEnaney in 2011. This interview is part of the *Leading the Commission: Interviews with the Former Chairs of NYC's Landmarks Preservation Commission* oral history project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The views expressed in this oral history interview do not necessarily reflect the views of the New York Preservation Archive Project.

Jennifer Raab was the Chairwoman of the Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) from 1994-2001 under Mayor Rudolph Guiliani. During her time on the LPC, she worked to streamline the appeal process and placed a high value in working with developers to preserve historic buildings. To that end, she advocated for a tax break for owners of landmarked buildings to encourage them to maintain them, and raised awareness of the financial benefits to landowners who own historic buildings. Some of her notable preservation accomplishments were landmarking Governor's Island, the renovation of the Brooklyn Museum, and the addition to Hearst Tower.

Jennifer Raab was chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission from 1994 to 2001 under Mayor Rudy Giuliani. Arriving from spheres of public administration and private litigation, Raab entered the world of historic preservation as an outsider. Prior to the LPC, Raab worked as special projects manager for the South Bronx Development Organization, and as director of public affairs for the New York City Planning Commission. As chair of the LPC, Raab shaped the commission into an ally of economic development, rather than an adversary of real estate. Within the agency, Raab created the position of director of enforcement, a sign of Raab's commitment to regulating and penalizing the destruction of landmarked architectural features. Under Giuliani, Raab guided the LPC through a decade marked by extreme municipal budget cuts.

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Interviewee: Jennifer Raab | Location: Unknown

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Q: Okay so I've been starting with everyone just talking about when they were appointed to the chair position. I'm wondering if you could talk about your appointment, who approached you and how that whole process came into being.

Raab: I was appointed officially in September 1994. That's when I had my appointment hearing at the New York City Council. I was asked by a deputy mayor in May 1994 if I would consider this position, that the mayor had asked and would I consider becoming Landmarks [New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission] commissioner.

Q: What were your perceptions or interactions with the Commission prior to your appointment?

Raab: Although I was practicing law at the time. I actually had a long involvement in public policy, urban policy and urban planning. I have a master's degree in urban policy from the Woodrow Wilson School [of Public and International Affair] at Princeton [University] and when I graduated from graduate school I worked in urban planning, first up in the South Bronx and then I worked for the New York City Planning Commission which of course had almost daily interaction with the Landmarks Commission so I was very familiar with the Commission. I was

very familiar with the Commission, with their mandate and also with their interaction with greater urban planning.

[INTERRUPTION]

Videographer: Repeat that last part.

Raab: When I graduated from graduate school I went into urban planning, first up in the South Bronx and then working for the New York City Planning Commission, which had almost daily interaction with the Landmarks Commission. So I was very familiar with urban planning issues and city regulation and of course the mandate of the Landmarks Commission.

Videographer: Wow, that was excellent.

Q: *[Laughs]* And when you received your appointment can you talk about some of your goals of you wanted to achieve when you became chair of LPC [New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission]. You were very interested in looking at the area of Lower Manhattan but also in making the process a lot easier, LPC more user friendly in a way. I'm wondering if you could talk about what your objectives were when you signed on for the position.

Raab: One of my main goals after talking to the different constituencies involved in the landmark process was to try to make it a more friendly process in order to make it a more popular process. One of the things I noticed was that despite its obvious importance to making New York City

what it is—we all think about the great landmarks of New York when we think about New York, whether it's the brownstones of Greenwich Village or the waterfront or the Empire State Building. That's what's the Landmarks Commission does, it preserves the great historic fabric. But notwithstanding the fact that everybody viscerally appreciates the work of the Landmarks Commission on a person-by-person basis or an industry-by-industry basis, there was not that general acceptance. In fact, there'd grown up as sort of us against them mentality that somehow if you were a preservationist you were a good person and if you were not a preservationist, you were someone out to destroy the fabric of the city.

It became very clear to me that property owners often love their properties and they love—whether it was an individual who wanted to fix their stoop on a brownstone or it was Donald Trump acquiring phenomenal building on Wall Street. He bought that building for a reason, so there was affection and appreciation and it was our job to work with him or with the brownstone owner, to help improve the property in a way that everybody felt that they were partners. And that was really my goal. The more I talked to people and felt that people weren't coming to the Landmarks Commission and in fact, many city agencies were actually required to come to the Landmarks Commission, would find a way to skirt around the Commission and that can't be positive.

That began this interest of mine of mine in trying to improve the process. We did that in a number of ways. One of the first was just trying to make the process more efficient, and more rational, and sort of more acceptable. One little example of that, had actually a long term impact and I think is still followed, is rather than having a hearing that started at nine in the morning and

lasted as long as the agenda required, which was often midnight, we decided to have two nine to five days. That meant the commissioners were fresher and it meant that you would not be summoned down to a government agency at ten o'clock at night to ask if you could change your windows. That doesn't create good government. It doesn't leave people feeling good about the Landmarks Commission. So part of my lawyer background, particularly as a litigator, my job was to advocate and I became the ultimate cheerleader and advocate for the Landmarks Commission, and part of doing that had to be giving people a good experience that not only would we be efficient and sensitive to their needs but we would give them an expeditious way.

The other thing we started to make people aware of the staff's value added in any project. The people who work for the Landmarks commissioners are, in a way, the unsung heroes of New York. They're incredible, competent, smart, talented and visionary. They have degrees in architecture, they have degrees in preservation, and they know more about restoring your brick wall or fixing your granite than almost anyone you will encounter. And they are here to give you free advice. So, yes you had to come in, you had to file for a permit and you might've had to wait two weeks before you started to repair your stoop, but you are going to use the best material for that stoop that was available. We really started to both promote the Commission's value added and we started to try to make it, as I said, a more efficient, a more effective process.

Q: That's a great answer.

Raab: One of the other initiatives that I brought into the Landmarks Commission and again, I think this had to do with being the first lawyer to run the Landmarks Commission was to create

sets of rules. What we did was each homeowner in a historic district would come in with a different problem but many of the different problems were a variation. So you had an issue of your windows in historic district in Douglaston, and your neighbor had similar windows, and then three other people on the block had similar windows. We came up with sets of rules that would tell you, if you have this type of historic window, this is how you can replace them. This is how you can repair them. We started to take each architectural element—the doors, and the roofs, and the backyards—and we had clear policies. They were discussed in public, they were public hearings, the neighborhoods weighed in on whether they seemed appropriate and consistent with the historic fabric and at the end of the day the Commission would pass a regulatory plan for the Douglaston Historic District or any other historic district. That would save months, no longer would you be required to come to a public hearing.

Again, how can we make it easier for you, the homeowner or the commercial building owner to take care of your beautiful landmark? That was something that motivated us. We wanted you to be our partner in this process and that didn't mean we weren't going to be tough. If somebody didn't follow the rule or if somebody didn't do the right thing, we were there to tell them, but there's a way to make the process feel comfortable for that property owner, which I believe helped enhance the status of the Landmarks Commission in the general public's view. And over the years we had, even in tough times in city government, consistent funding, we weren't a target, we were popular within the City Council, within the neighborhoods, and people saw the value. Even people didn't get what they wanted and got a no, felt they were being treated fairly and they got an expeditious answer. That wound up being the important thing.

Q: You mentioned, I think, that transformed how the Commission operated in some ways, and you touched upon that you were still tough. That your regulations were important to you and you added the position of *[crosstalk]*—

Raab: Director of Enforcement.

Q: Do you mind talking about that and some of the staff changes you made to that were able to implement some of your visions and goals as commissioner?

Raab: One of the things that I found frustrating when I started the Landmarks Commission was that we had a public process. We had rules. We would make a finding and if somebody ignored our finding or someone didn't come to get the required permit, our hands were tied. We had no enforcement ability. I actually found that shocking. Again, as a lawyer it would just seem rational to me that there's a rule, there's a law, and there's a consequence. When I asked the community that had worked so hard on preservation, why haven't they advocated for enforcement ability, it became—the answer as clear. We didn't want to rock the boat. If we start to really have penalties, landmarks will be less popular, we'll lose our funding, the [New York City Landmarks Preservation] Law will disappear, they'll dilute the law.

That didn't sit well with me. As somebody trained as a Wall Street litigator, it's just not my style to back down. I went to the City Council and we got historic legislation passed to enforce the Law. There were civil penalties. If you changed your windows without getting permission from the Landmarks Commission, you could be brought up on a violation. You had a hearing. The

right windows were determined. You could have a rational amount of time to change your windows. We were not out to punish people, but if you didn't comply ultimately, you would be fined and that fine can be collected through a civil proceeding of the city just like any other violation of any other city law. Buildings Department [New York City Department of Buildings], zoning, et cetera—we were going to be like other government agencies. There was a lot of anxiety, surprisingly to me, within the preservation community—let's not rock that boat. I just felt we really had to become an agency that stood by our regulation. If we believe this is the right thing, we had to require compliance. It was not necessarily easy legislation to get passed, but we did get it passed. We hired a director of enforcement, created that new position, we had more inspectors and we began to serve fines and violations on people. I believe it actually protected us against more abuses and created more compliance.

Q: You mentioned how the agency then kind of became more part of the administration in some way. They became more part of adhering to the same standards of Department Buildings or Planning. I'm wondering if you could talk about, in some ways it seems that there was a shift that Landmarks was longer this outlier agency when you were chair, that you brought it in to the larger administration and the larger city agenda. I'm wondering if you would agree with that and that's something that you'd want to touch upon, about making these connections to the other agencies and have it be part of a larger citywide plan, as opposed to doing its own thing somewhere.

Raab: I was absolutely adamant that Landmark be respected as an important player in the city government and an important player in shaping the physical landscape of the city. I think the fact

that I had had a long relationship with the mayor, and he knew I was going to be somebody who was going to be very forceful in my views, and he knew that when he appointed me, left him with no surprise when I said Landmarks wants to be at the table for many initiatives. A few examples include first Governors Island.

Governors Island, we were told at the city level, was going to be decommissioned by the feds and the city was going to take ownership and we were all put together in a task force to decide what to do, I insisted that Landmarks be part of that incredibly important historic property. We landmarked the historic part of the island, and then we wrote the rules I talked about so that when a developer or the city or the state or any other agency came in to start the redevelopment, which we're still waiting to see completely realized, they would have the flexibility and the certainty and the speed with which to develop. But Landmarks was going to be at that table with City Planning, with Economic Development [New York City Economic Development Corporation], with Parks [New York City Department of Parks and Recreation], with maritime agencies, and we were a full player.

Another wonderful initiative was the Lower Manhattan renewal. Very soon after I was appointed, the city began to focus on Lower Manhattan, and it's ironic and a little sad now to remember why the Lower Manhattan had such problems, and that was because of the World Trade Center's development. When the World Trade Center was built so many of the tenants of the older commercial buildings in the Wall Street area moved into the Trade Center. It created huge vacancies in these beautiful buildings built in the turn of the century, the 1920s and a real sort of mini-depression in the Lower Manhattan real estate market. The Lower Manhattan market

is the third largest commercial real estate area in the country. This couldn't be left without some government attention. I said Landmarks needs to be at the table and we need to designate these historic buildings and treat them with the importance that they deserve.

Well there had been for years some sort of quiet policy that we would not designate the wonderful skyscrapers, the original skyscrapers of lower Manhattan. That someone had sort of said that and everybody as going to quietly follow it, and I just announced we weren't following it anymore. We landmarked about twenty buildings down in Lower Manhattan, but we did it in a way, thinking ahead how can we create partnerships with the people that own them, so we can get them redeveloped. Because one of the challenges of Landmarks is you can designate a property but you can't require anybody to fix it.

So how do you get some incentives? We worked with [New York City Department of] Finance who was also on that task force and said they had tax exemptions and a whole tax policy to incentivize development, and I asked them let's add a year of tax advantages for all buildings that are landmarks. First time in the city's history we gave tax advantage for being a landmark. Now if you're going to do a conversion from one of those office buildings to apartments and it be designated as a landmark, you could get an extra year of tax benefits. All of a sudden Landmarks is a partner, we're providing technical expertise. They can now start marketing their buildings and everybody did, you look at those ads—historic property, landmark property. We're adding value, and you get an extra year of tax benefits.

Perhaps one of the most wonderful examples of Economic Development and Landmarks working together in Lower Manhattan was what happened on Stone Street. Stone Street we believe is the first paved street in New York City and had this wonderful kind of eclectic architecture in two little alleys right in front of what was then the Goldman Sachs major skyscraper. It was sort of this protected area in between these large buildings, but obviously no landmark protection, and at any time could be torn down. We approached the Lower Manhattan Business Improvement District. They were there to improve the district, to deal with the property owners and to try to bring the area back.

Together, we decided that we would revitalize Stone Street. As a Landmarks Commission we designated the area. As a Landmarks Commission, we created special rules that would help expedite renovation of the properties. The Lower Manhattan Development Organization paid for various studies to see what kind of industries would fit in these buildings. They helped us design the most appropriate renovation so we had extra design help. Then together we went to the federal government and asked for money to help restore the public areas—which were the streets and the street beds and the street lighting—and together as this business group and this preservation agency we transformed Stone Street. Of course, we needed the property owners and they came in with the private funding to restore their storefronts and their stores and to this day, you can now go downtown to Stone Street on a wonderful summer evening. The streets are filled. There's bars, there's pubs, there's stores, and it's this wonderful historic alleyway, little secret in New York that people love to be in and part of the reason they go there is the historic ambiance.

There's a perfect example of business working with Landmarks. And we didn't give up anything. Every one of those storefronts was restored according to its historic design. We just worked in partnership with the owners so they felt that the regulator and the owner had the same goal which was restore the properties, put it back online, get people back and enjoying the historic properties.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: I think that's such a great story because in some people's minds there's preservation and then there's development, and god forbid you use the two in the same sentence. I think for example this is transforming its preservation as a tool towards development or towards the growth of Manhattan. I'm wondering if that's something that you perceived and just kind of how the story of preservation is part of economic development, how working with owners or whether owners were against consent for designation, whether they were consenting to designation, not consenting to designation, and kind of what the carrots were that you had to work with some of these people.

Raab: Well I think part of it was the advocacy and turning the vision around that there wasn't development and then preservation on the other side. We did do some research and we looked at tourism. Where do people want to visit? They want to visit historic parts of cities. Often where do people want to live? They want to live in the renovated lofts of SoHo. Where do they want to shop? Ladies' Mile, lower 6th Avenue brought in the big box stores, the Gap, Old Navy, and Barnes and Nobles. People love the idea of going to the efficiency of going to a super store, but

in a beautiful old 1920s storefront. You could see how people and business are drawn to historic areas. We just needed to put that message out. One of the ways we did it was by creating a system of awards where we really recognized private industry's commitment to preservation, and even though it was an award without any sort of financial backing, people really resonated to the appreciation to the work they had done. There was another thing I asked the mayor in a few tough places, I said if we can get people to do the right thing and they really invest their money in important historic properties, I'm asking you to personally present the award and he would do it.

We had some wonderful moments with owners, who when they first were faced with coming to Landmarks, were not necessarily happy participants. But again, they could see the value added and then they saw good press. They saw people wanted to rent apartments and shop in their buildings, and then this whole ceremony at City Hall where the government was giving them the appreciation they deserve for their private investment. That was very much a message we carried on was, on the one hand we're going to be tough, we're going to enforce, you're going to follow the rules. On the other hand we're going to try to make it faster for you to get this preservation work done, by rules, by efficient hearings, by consistency. Then we're going to show our appreciation through the media, through awards, through just sort of the bully pulpit to say we appreciate it.

Then we had this one, one of my favorite public hearings was when we were actually landmarking the building, 40 Wall Street, that Donald Trump had bought. He was at the hearing and we were landmarking it and one of the just stalwart preservationists, a person—Margot

Gayle, who had saved the cast-iron district of SoHo, and I don't think anyone ever expected her to say a good word about Donald Trump, who before had been known to preservation circles as the person who had destroyed Bonwit Teller [& Co.] building. But here he was and he was going to agree to this designation and my argument was he's here, he's agreeing to this designation, he's going to invest in this landmark, so he's a preservationist. But when Margot Gayle got up and said we need to give Donald Trump a round of applause it really was a historical moment.

Q: That's a great image. We've got to find photos of that, what a wonderful story.

Raab: Another project that we talk about Economic Development and Preservation trying to break through these factions is the success of Bridge Market, that is what was the open air market under the Queensboro Bridge and it was built in the early 1900s and then a decade later they put the doors on the arches so it became an enclosed market. Incredible space Guastavino tiles, and the arches under a bridge, abandoned. Abandoned for decades and every time a developer came in to try to do something with this market, the neighborhood fought them. It really was a question were they fighting to preserve this space that nobody could see because it was just abandoned and enclosed, or did they really just not want development that was going to bring more people from outside the neighborhood into the neighborhood. That question really had to be asked. Why could we not develop this beautiful piece of property in Midtown Manhattan?

When they came back to me I made it a bit of a cause to see if we could move this project ahead. We had Terance Conran, himself, send his people over. They built a store. We had a

supermarket. It's probably the most beautiful supermarket in the world with Guastavino tile ceilings, but we had a Food emporium next to a Conran's and again, the neighbors had fought it for decades. We all had a good laugh, when we had a ribbon cutting, there was the neighborhood. And again, you took a while to just sometimes not let the fact that people didn't want something to happen, stop the government agency from deciding whether it was the right thing. That was a brilliant preservation project. All that Guastavino tile was restored and cleaned and people who had never—nobody ever saw it, and now everybody could enjoy it. So it was a very clear perseveration project done according to all standards and what was stopping that was just this sort of neighborhood opposition. Sometimes it just took a little bit of perseverance to move ahead, and that was just one of those wonderful examples of how Preservation, Economic Development were just one in one, in a project.

Q: Preservation and development, it seems though, that you were also you knew when to put your foot down when things weren't appropriate, whether buildings were out of scale at Carnegie Hill or other projects. I wonder if you could talk about that aspect too, that there is this balance and that there are just times where things are inappropriate and things that are coming before the Commission. What's some examples of those?

Raab: Well I think, there's absolutely times where you have to say no. Sometimes you just say outright no as we did in the Carnegie Hill Citibank project. The project was just wildly out of scale and as much as we tried to work with the developer we were not getting the result that would've been appropriate in the neighborhood, so we had to say no. There were other times that you could watch a project and just give a very clear review. That was my preference, rather than

say no and go back to the drawing board, was to ask my commissioners, be very clear. Give signals. What would we find appropriate? What is wrong with the materials being proposed and what would be appropriate materials? What's wrong with the scale and what would be an appropriate scale, again, so we could move to yes. That didn't mean there was always a yes, but let's be sensible regulators. Let's tell the applicant, you want to build this building here are some of the bottom line. Our standard was appropriateness and we're going to give you a sense of what those parameters are so the architect could go back to the drawing board and do a design.

One of their reasons we were able to do that effectively is that I began to add to number of architects on the Commission. That was something that was I think very important to me because at the end of the day, this is really architectural regulation, and to have a core of architects—we're required by law to have three—I often had five. I had wonderfully talented architects with different skills. when we were able to recruit Yann Kaporni *[phonetic],* one of the world's top preservationist and the world lost just a brilliant aesthetic visionary died a few years ago, to the Commission. That was just an incredible coup, because nobody could say there's not a man who understood the challenges of preservation what was correct in an aesthetic way, and yet he was listening and opining on a project and he had such credibility.

Then we had Richard Olcott, a very modern architect with [James] Polshek—were partners, and always had a view, always had a vision, and a very keen eye for the small detail that would make a difference. To this wonderful compliment of architects, fascinating woman Joan Gerner. We were able to bring her on. Trained as an architect but one of the real construction experts in the world. One of the paths that I took the Commission down on was to look at more modern

architecture, and that's always a little tricky. A landmark, as you know, is a building that's over thirty years old. When we would go and meet with our European counterparts or have groups in, they would find this absolutely hilarious that in New York City a landmark was thirty years old. In Italy if it's in the 1600s maybe it's old. Right? In New York, 1960, that's old. But clearly there was important modern architecture that needed to be preserved but without some space it's hard for anyone to understand the actual importance of a style of architecture.

One of the things I learned at the Commission was just how little Art Deco architecture was appreciated in the period after it was built. I always felt one of the sort of things the Commission lost a little bit was some of the great, just purity of the Art Deco architecture of the Grand Concourse. It took too many years because people who grew up in the 1930s and 1950s lived in those buildings didn't see them as anything great. To them, beautiful architecture to be preserved was Beaux Art architecture in Grand Central Station [Grand Central Terminal], etc. It takes a while to appreciate what style, so it's almost ironic we designated Lever House. Now if Lever House had not been built, the brownstones and the townhouses on that spot on Park Avenue would have been designated, right?

But we were now designating the thing that replaced them. But there's a little bit of irony always in preservation so we began to take steps down the path to add modern architecture—the CBS Building, even the Unisphere at the World's Fair—just some wonderful 1960s architecture. And then be able to bring on Joan Gerner whose specialty was glass wall architecture, and to understand that because that's a whole new avenue of preservation. When we did the Lever House building, they came in to replace the glass. The type of glass, the width, the thickness, the

quality that you use in a replacement is critical. You make the wrong decision; you're not going to get the same Lever House after a renovation. So she knew that.

Another fascinating project, the Guggenheim [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum] came in to repair their walls and we went through a number of different projects with them to make sure that the Guggenheim still looked like the Guggenheim when it was finished. To have someone with specialty in modern architecture and modern construction techniques was really important. I felt I tried to get the real topnotch professionals on the Commission and I still marvel at the talent we were able to recruit during that period. It was just extraordinary. These people, as you know, work without pay. I had gone through the system now. We weren't going to go until midnight so they had to work not one, but two Tuesdays a month and then they had committee work. And yet, they came back for the love of their contribution to the city.

Q: Could you talk a bit more about the workings of the commissioners? This is something we've been asking all of the chairs. It's just to get a sense of the dynamics between the Commission members and whether you encourage discussion or how decisions were made, and what was happening in the committees as well.

Raab: I really asked each commissioner to be a full participant but we also developed a system where we had respect for different peoples expertise. I think that was really important and what made us, I think, a harmonious group. So if a piece of modern architecture was being reviewed, we would listen more carefully to Joan Gerner with significant construction experience in architecture. One of the challenges we faced often was that a commercial concern was coming in

to take over a building formerly used for residential or other use, and it needed a conversion for commercial process. Often we would find that people were doing a conversion—

[INTERRUPTION]

Raab: Often we would find people who were interested in converting a historic building into commercial use. And that type of conversion needed someone regulating the plans who understood the needs of the commercial concern but also the needs of preservation. Sherida Paulson had a practice where she was always engaged with commercial concerns. So for example, in the Bridge Market process, there was one point were one of the stores that was presented for occupancy needed a certain kind of shelving space that was going to conflict with the historic windows. Because she understood the commercial concern and she understood the dictates of preservation, she could find and suggest a solution where everybody could be happy. That was the kind of thing where if you have enough varied perspectives, you can get to a good solution. Not let preservation slide but be creative to think about what are the needs of both sides, and that's what I charged the Commission to do. So rather than just as I said the answer is no, you can take that position, but there'd be another way of well could we find a way to make this building work for a commercial concern, but also preserve it in a fashion that absolutely met all preservation standards.

Often the answer was yes and if you didn't just stop at that initial place where the answer has to be no, we have to preserve it, you could get to a yes that did preservation but also allowed economic development to occur. Because remember, Landmarks Commission can designate but

we were not funded to restore buildings. If you want to see great preservation work happen, you need to have the funding and often that funding was coming from private sources. Sometimes those private sources were through cultural institutions so it wasn't necessarily a commercial concern.

For example, one of the projects that I'm very, very proud of and it was a little bit controversial was putting back the new front to the Brooklyn Museum. Now, that was a place where the stairs had been totally cut off, in a Beaux Art building, and it look like somebody cut someone's nose off. One way to restore it would've been just to put back the stairs in the classic way. But instead, Jim Polshek had a bigger vision, involving glass enclosures, modern, yet respectful and we found it appropriate. It was an exciting way to help the Brooklyn Museum really come back as an institution in Brooklyn. So it was a great way to get to yes. Another very exciting project for me was the Hearst Building [Hearst Tower] and one of the great things about the Hearst [Corporation] Company was they took charge to them very seriously.

One of the ways I found that we could get success with the Commission is when the owner, whether it be public or private, really invested in the project by finding a great architect because complex projects need talented designers and I was very bold about suggesting, cajoling, incentivizing owners to think about hiring true artists architects, and that's what we did with the Hearst Company. When they came to me and they said we have this building, its eight stories tall and we want to add a tower, the answer is well, in Landmarks that usually doesn't happen because we don't let people put towers on top of a base but it turns out after I suggested that they look into some research to see if a tower was ever planned, turns out a tower was planned. I felt

that they could come back and have a conversation with the Commission about what would be appropriate since we knew the original architect had envisioned a tower. I believe they took a whole year and traveled around the world and interviewed architects in Japan and in other parts of Asia and in Europe and then brought them back the different panels with the and ultimately decided on the incredibly talented Norman Foster to design that tower. And what a great thing for a company to do. They paid of all of that. They hired one of the best and paid his fee and I don't know anyone that doesn't see the Hearst Tower as this incredible contribution to the skyscape of New York City. It was a great success and again, because it was a company that felt we were willing to work with them and we were willing to work with the city by making that investment.

Q: It's a new landmark for the city *[laughs]*. I'm wondering, I know that you knew Mayor [Rudolph] Giuliani before becoming chair and coming on without a background in preservation from the advocacy camp, and having the relationship with Giuliani, do you feel that was an advantage in some way and allowed you to get done more than you might have otherwise? Of having the mayor's ear, of having perhaps access to more money or not having to worry about the funding cuts that are happening. Was that connection somehow an asset to your time as chair?

Raab: I think it was very important. When I started there was a fair amount of controversy about bringing in somebody who hadn't been in the business. Again, I think if you look back, that says a little bit about where the Commission was, that the commissioners were taken from people who'd been in preservation or been on the Commission before, or were known for their

preservation track records. It was a risk to bring in somebody but it also meant somebody was going to take a fresh look. That's how Mayor Giuliani began to take his tenure in city government, he was going to take a fresh look at how things were done. So it wasn't necessarily the easiest time to come into an agency where most people came from particular world and it was a little ironic for me because I'd had these years working with City Planning and Urban Planning and I did actually know many of the people that worked in preservation, but I was cast as this outsider.

I was not going to be deterred. I thought this was incredibly important position, I think because of how important preservation is to New York City and I knew that having the respect of the mayor and that's what it really was about. We had worked together and he had selected me to do this job and he was ready to invest in my being a successful Landmarks Commission. So of course I always had to argue for my funding and argue for my positions but I had an audience that was willing to listen because of the respect that he had in appointing me. So I knew that it would be a plus and I also knew that when you have a background in general planning, you can learn what you need to learn to really appreciate the value and the input and the talent of this incredible staff.

So I learned from the staff but I knew when I should be deferring what they knew about materials and again, as I said, I really focused on building a very talented commission. So we had this interesting balance of career professionals in the business, and then people in the business who are willing again, to give up, often, commissions. I mean, you become an architect in Landmarks Commission, you can't take work in a historic district. So they're making financial

sacrifices to look at windowpanes for much of the day. This is really an amazing thing how much people give, that they are willing to give because they saw it was important. So trusting the staff but also building this group of commissioners who had such practical experience in Landmarks, in construction, in land use. Pablo Vengoechea, someone who had been the City Planning Commission, somebody who is an architect and a planner—what a wonderful combination—and together we're this wonderful balance within the Commission and the staff I think to make a difference. But it certainly helped when sitting at the table, I certainly had the mayor's ear, I knew many of the other commissioners from time in the city and I've never been accused of being a shy person, so it was pretty clear that my voice—whether I would win or not, my voice would be heard.

We also had some interesting projects with the state government. One of them was the 42nd Street project because while that was under state purview, the Landmarks Commission has a quasi-regulatory role. We were asked for out oversight and say in some of the theaters that weren't officially landmarked and one of my favorite examples of ways to find creative solutions, were not necessarily preservation by the book as it had been known, was what happened with the Empire Theatre.

Forty-Second Street Redevelopment Corporation was working with a hotel that was interested in moving it to 42nd street and was willing to preserve the Empire Theatre, but the theater was right in the middle of where they needed to build the hotel. It it was a one hundred yards east, a hundred yards west it would be fine. It just happened to be in the worst place for their plans it could be. I looked at them one day and said would you save this theater if it was one hundred

yards west and they came back and said, you asked that question and actually, yes. We would save the theater. And I went back to the theater owners and to 42nd Development and asked, can you actually move a theater? And it's amazing of what can you do. So there's some wonderful film of the theater being moved west on 42nd Street and that's an amazing thing. Now again, some very by the book preservations would say you don't move things from the site on which they were built and I respect that position. But when I pass 42nd Street and see the saved Empire Theatre, which was saved because of the money that came from the hotel development, I can live with the moving one hundred yards west.

Q: Another great image to get *[laughter]*.

Raab: It's a great image you can see them. I don't know if I made this up but I think they put an Abbott and Costello look alikes pulling it down 42nd Street. I don't know. I may have made this up, but there's all this film of this. You can find it. There's film of this. It's amazing to *[crosstalk]—*

Videographer: To make that happen—

Raab: —Make that happen.

One other project that I'm particularly proud of and again, I think it was a bit out of the box but when we look as New Yorkers at the results, I believe most people find it really wonderful was the new planetarium. A lot of the affection we found for the former Hayden Planetarium was not

about its architecture, it was actually about the memories. You know, "How much did you weigh on Mars?" That was one of the big corners of the old museum and everybody in that era remembered getting weighed to see how much you weighed on Mars. So we began to investigate what was the architecture we were saving and what was it about memories. We were able as a commission, to come to a consensus that it would be appropriate to replace it with the phenomenal Polshek structure of the glass box with the glowing sphere inside, which is really again, became another iconic landmark. That again was a challenge. It was not something that necessarily would've fit into a classic view of preservation, but I have no doubt now looking back a decade or two that, that it really was the right response.

Videographer: Here, here.

Q: He's an Upper West Sider.

Raab: It was like my second week *[laughter]*.

Q: How did you deal with the—neighborhood preservation groups and advocates play such a big role in preservations agenda. They're so loud in so many ways. I'm wondering what your dealings were with the neighborhood preservation groups and what your experience or response was to them?

Raab: Probably because I'm a lawyer, I have a great attachment to process, and I have a lot of respect for it, and I encourage the groups to come testify. I encourage them to be clear about their

points of view and to make it be known. So I was known for running very balanced hearings, to let everybody speak, to make sure that they were heard. We asked questions. But then the decision was left to the Commission and I really established those rules but I completely agree that I think, for the Commission, the groups are invaluable because they are the ones often looking at the smallest detail, they're the ones out in the community seeing the property. They may actually know that when we ask people to build mockups—and that was another thing I asked people to do and it could be costly for a developer—but if they wanted to put an addition and their argument was that you would not be able to see it, and there was some controversy over it, we would ask them to mock it up. To do plywood four by fours to just see what it really looked like and where you could see it.

Well then it was great to have the community come in. I walked down to the other corner and you could still see it. I walked over there and they would test for us, and they really were valuable, so we absolutely listened to them, but we also knew it wasn't going to be possible to keep everybody happy. At the end of the day you're a regulatory body and you're trying to make the best decision according to the standards that the law gives you and people are going to have different opinions. But it was very important to have those public hearings even if they went on and you had to continue them and there'd be the whole auditorium filled with people are going to speak. We heard them and we heard them all.

Q: Coming from your background in law, you have this sense of process and obviously, before your arrival, the [New York City Landmarks Preservation] Law had basically withstood the Grand Central case and whatnot and when you came in you made a change at the Commission of

—*[unclear]* Dorothy Miner and getting a new lawyer on board, one who could deal with more the regulation and whatnot. I'm wondering if you could talk about that because that seems to be a question that comes up on a lot of people's minds—that switch.

Raab: I did make a change in council. I believe everybody was very nervous about what it would mean but if one looks back on the twenty years since then, I believe people will see that we very much maintained the standards of the Landmarks Commission. I don't believe there's anyone could say there was actually any doubt. But we also found ways to evolve as a regulatory body.

One example is a very important example and that's the issue of cost. Prior to my tenure, the Landmarks Commission was told they were not allow to consider cost as a regulatory basis. Well, the law doesn't say that, and perhaps it took me as the lawyer reading it, but the law doesn't say that. Now, the standards appropriateness, it's not cost, but we could vote for a less costly, appropriate solution. So if there are two appropriate solutions and one costs less because it's a less costly stone, but it still meets the preservation mandate, we could have that conversation, and that was a very big change in how we regulated. So it didn't mean somebody could come in and say I'm not putting my stoop back because it's too costly. Right? We can't require someone to put back their stoop. But if they say I'm not using that material but I would use this material, and the commissioners felt the second material was appropriate, we could vote for that. So it changed the conversation in a way that was absolutely consistent with the law but it did take a fresh legal perspective to make that change.

The other area we spoke about before was the issue of enforcement. There was this concern that if we tried to enforce the law, we would bring a spotlight on it, and everybody would say this is a bad law, we have to repeal it. That clearly wasn't going to be the case. I just was absolutely confident that people would understand—with good advocacy—people would understand the value of preservation to this magnificent city, which is what's so wonderful about it. You could walk down a block that's all nineteenth century and walk down a block that's twenty-first century, and you turn the corner and you're in the late 1800s again. That's what's amazing, but without the Landmarks Commission, you might not have that and people at the end of the day know that. And if enforcement was done intelligently and fairly, we were going to be able to enforce the law for civil penalties and that again has withstood the test of time. It took another perspective and I am the first person to say that the first few decades of the Landmarks Commission are some of the most really heroic work of public servants I've ever seen in my life. Fighting the Grand Central case and fighting against people who didn't want to see regulation of private property, took incredible courage by the people involved and I have unbelievable admiration for what they were able to preserve. Ironically, I was the commissioner who worked on the restoration of Grand Central Station.

Every day I had to thank all the people who came before me because of what they allowed me to be a part of. When we clean the ceiling of Grand Central Station to see that it was actually green with stars not black with soot, that was an amazing thing. One of my favorite things that that project is they left that little patch of soot to see what it used to look like. Well that was a great project. It took the MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority], the state government, we got the governor to come and cut that ribbon and talk about how important preservation was. But

again, there was balance. We let restaurants in where there were no restaurants. We let them fill in some arches as they needed to be, but we restored Grand Central Station in its historic form to the people by working with private develops in the MTA. But we never would've been able to have that project but for all the amazing people who fought for the law in 1965, for the Jackie Kennedys [Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis] who kept fighting for the Supreme Court. All of those people made what we did possible and I have the utmost respect for what they did. It's truly incredible.

Q: *[Unclear]*.

Videographer: I have one question, do you want to say Jackie Kennedy or Jackie Onassis? It's your choice.

Q: She was Kennedy at that time. *[Crosstalk]* I don't think it's important.

Raab: I think she may have been. I can tell you how John [F.] Kennedy [Jr.] came down to the Commission one day and I said state your name for the record. That was great *[laughter]*. The people were hanging off the—he moved into North Moore Street and he wanted to change his windows or something, so he was down there and he started speaking and I said "Sir, you need to state your name for the record." *[Laughter]*—like was I blind?

Q: President Raab, is there anything else you want to get out for the record for your time and my final wrap up question was just going to be how you think the influence that your time as chair

has had on preservation today with the Commission and citywide preservations in general. I don't know whether you wanted to adjust that or whether there was anything else you wanted to get on the record, so to speak.

Raab: In terms of my tenure, I look back as the lasting impact. First is the issue of enforcement, that the law is something that must be followed and it has teeth, very important. I'm very proud of the great architecture that we supported—modern architecture, modern infill—new ways of looking at how appropriate structures are built. One example was that I just adored was the Scholastic Building which was built in SoHo next to an iconic building known as the Little Singer Building by Ernest Flagg and then the current Scholastic [Corporate] Headquarters which was a late 1800s building, and what a challenge. New infill, they had to build something new, and working with this phenomenal architect Aldo Rossi, who we tragically lost soon after, Scholastic built this new landmark. And it's modern but it refers to the historic buildings—it was incredible success.

I'm proud that we allow this sort of creative architecture within historic architects, whether it was Hearst or the new Hayden Planet Rose Planetarium, and I think the rules and the efficiency allowed us to expand the constituency of preservation. At the end of the day, that to me was the most important mark that more and more people could see themselves as preservationist, as property owners that engaged and involved in this incredibly important venture of preservation, and being able to do it in a way that worked for them as property owners. I believe that still carries on and it was a great model to have helped create.

Videographer: First I'm going to—there you are, looking gorgeous, as always and now we're going to zoom in on that.

Raab: Aldo Rossi.

Videographer: Excellent, excellent.

Q: How has your time as Landmarks Chair impacted your earlier career choices?

Raab: One of the preservation lessons that I brought from being Landmarks commissioner when I became president of Hunter College was the absolute necessity of restoring the building that we're now sitting in, the former home of Franklin [D. Roosevelt] and Eleanor Roosevelt. Franklin and Eleanor had received this wonderful 1908 townhouse as a wedding present from Franklin's mother Sara [Delano Roosevelt], with one stipulation—she kept half of it for herself. We liked to call it the first reveal. They moved in and she moved in and they lived here together, and of course the Roosevelt's moved on to Albany and to Washington but they always came here as the home base. Then the house becomes incredibly important. Why, 1921 Roosevelt develops polio and this house was somewhat ahead of its time, built with an elevator for the servants on the top floor. So Roosevelt comes back here with Louis Howe to recover from polio. He can navigate around the house because of the elevator, built himself a small, hand operated wheel chair, and begins to put his career back together. He runs for governor from the house, goes to the Biltmore Hotel—thinks he lost—comes home to this house, wakes up in the morning and finds that he is governor. And then four years later this time when he comes home from the

Biltmore Hotel he knows he's been elected president, and his mother who of course still lives here with him, is on the steps waiting for him and says this is the happiest day of my life.

Somewhere in the 1930s, and we know this from the Hunter women who attended during that time, Eleanor created a relationship with Hunter College which was then an all-girls school. We have alums that remember Mrs. Roosevelt inviting them over as she made them grilled cheese and they were so naive they would talk about their basketball games. We have these incredible stories, and she just developed this incredible affection for Hunter College, so when they moved to the White House and Sara dies in the early 1940s, both Eleanor and Franklin decided Hunter College should buy this house. They give the first thousand dollars towards the purchase and then we make the real estate deal of the century; we buy this house for $50,000. The school moves in, they wanted it to be an inter-faith center so Hunter Hillel was here, the Newman Society. We had nonresidential house plans, which was just a way of saying sororities without people living in them, and the place flourished as the social home of the Hunter student.

A lot of Hunter students were actually married here to men who were off to the war. We used it and used it until literally it could be used no more. When I arrived in 2001 at Hunter, it had been closed for ten years and it was completely deteriorating—the water was pouring in the roof, the stairs weren't safe—It was just really dilapidated and I had this challenge. It was hard times for the City University [of New York]. We could've sold it for endowments to support scholarships, or I could've sought the money from the governor and the chancellor to restore it. And I choose to do the latter to really give the legacy of the Roosevelt's back to the next generation of Hunter

students. So we are just so proud that we've been able to restore the home to its original condition. We made one major change.

It was one of the great ironic moments of my life. I had to go to the Landmarks Commission to ask to build something out into the backyard. I was very nervous, I was a real applicant but it went very smoothly and our plans were approved so we were able to do everything completely historically accurately here except for really sort of blowing out the backyard and creating a beautiful auditorium, all with the permission of the Landmarks Commission. So that, all of the experience I gained as a Landmarks commissioner, about how important it is to restore historic property and not lose the value of the architecture and the stories, I brought to Hunter really threw into my first project, which was to get Roosevelt House renovated and reopened for the students. So it's a great source of pride and happiness for me when I see students here, really hearing that the Roosevelts thought of the New Deal here, and it's in this room, that we're sitting in, that Roosevelt convinced Frances Perkins to be the first woman cabinet secretary in United States history. So to know that we have restored these rooms and the stories and the things that happened here, has just really been a great privilege and something I'm not sure I would've been that committed to if I hadn't spent so many years with the extraordinary preservationist on the staff at the Commission of the Landmarks Commission.

Q: Great answer.

[END OF INTERVIEW]