

Kelly Carroll for NYPAP

Inspired by Grassroots Stories: Community Architectural Advocacy

Phoebe Blake, Julia Charles, Hazel Deane – 300 East 25th Street Block Association/East 25th Street
Historic District Initiative

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Brad Vogel: Okay, welcome to the second installment of our NYPAP series, Inspired by Grassroots Stories: Community Architectural Advocacy. Now, that's a lot of words, a long title, but there's...it's all in there. It's what we're after tonight. A series about, how do neighborhoods, how do communities go about their work of trying to enact historic preservation to preserve the things that matter to them, to preserve parts of their community that they don't want to lose.

My name is Brad Vogel and I am the Executive Director of the New York Preservation Archive Project and I'm really excited to be here tonight because this is the second time we'll get a chance to sit in, sort of, sit in the audience right around the edge as Kelly Carroll, who is our moderator and host this evening will take us on a journey with an organization that has been working at the grassroots level to get things done out in East Flatbush. So, I'm really excited to hear from this group and it's so great to see Julia Charles who I know from the HDC conference in the past and her friends. We're going to learn some more tonight.

But I did want to stop for just one moment and say thank you to the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and also to Pat Reisinger for helping to provide the support to make the series possible. And I did also want to mention that, you know, the group that you're going to hear from tonight and Kelly will tell you more, of course, but the group that you're hearing from tonight was also part of Historic Districts Council's Six to Celebrate, which is a whole process that helps neighborhoods engage in historic preservation efforts so that effort also is funded by NYSCA in part, and so just I had to make sure that everybody was aware of that, before we get on with our show. I am now going to introduce to you a woman that many of you already know. Her name is Kelly Carroll, and Kelly is a historic preservation consultant and an educator. She's an instructor at NYU in the historic preservation realm and she's going to take it away tonight Kelly, without further ado, please proceed.

Kelly Carroll: Thank you very much Brad and thank you, NYPAP and Pat Reisinger who has joined us again tonight, as well as NYSCA and the East 25th Street Block Association 300 block.

Before we get started with our discussion this evening, I wanted to introduce the block and the residents that we're going to hear from tonight. So, this block has been called the winningest block in Brooklyn and rightfully so. So, just quickly: this block has won first place in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's Greenest Block in Brooklyn's four times. In 2004, 2006, 2011 and in 2016. It also won first place for the Best Children's Garden in 2014. In 2018 it won an inaugural Garden Mentor Award. In August 2019, it won National Grid's Leadership and Sustainable Practices Award and after all that, in November of 2020 it became the first historic district in Community district 15...15 right? And in East Flatbush and was the first landmark designation in that area since the first ever landmark was designated in 1965, which was the Wyckoff House. So, since the beginning of our Landmarks Law was created, there had not

been another historic district designation until this block decided that this was something they were going to tackle.

So, in terms of guests, tonight we have Hazel Deane. Mrs. Deane is a 47-year resident of the block, a founding member of the 300 East 25th Street Block Association and an active member and leader in the community. We have Phoebe Blake, a resident for over 24 years. Ms. Blake has been the secretary, vice president, and president of the 300 East 25th Street Block Association and continues to be an active member of the block. And last but not least, we have Julia Charles. Julia is an eight-year resident, founder of the East 25th Street Historic District Initiative, former president and vice president of the 300 East 25th street Block Association and she is also a member and leader and community gardening initiatives, and serves on the board of directors and advisors for the Historic Districts Council.

So, we have a decorated guest list tonight and an even more decorated block. So, I like to do things chronologically, as this is a history-oriented field so, my first question is going to be for Mrs. Deane, who moved to the block in the early 1970s. And I would like to hear Mrs. Deane. When you came here in the early 70s, where were you coming from and why here, why did you pick this block?

Hazel Deane: I came from Bedford Stuy. And I picked this block, because I am originally from Barbados, I spent time in London, and my sister had a limestone and I fell in love with those limestones. But funny, I thought I had a limestone and when I move in I realized, it was a brownstone. And coming from Bedford-Stuy, my son, young son and we wanted to change the environment. And that so became the Flatbush.

Kelly Carroll: What was the neighborhood like in the 1970s, how was it, how was it different than today?

Hazel Deane: When I came to the neighborhood there was a different community. There was the Europeans, Asian, English, Irish...the block was kind of there. And then it changed. That community left, and then we got the diverse community of African American and the Caribbean community.

Kelly Carroll: I understand that you are a co-founder of the 300 East 25th Street Block Association. When did that happen, and what...was there an event, or what were some of the ideas behind that you all got together? I know your husband was also a co-founder that you decided to create this block association?

Hazel Deane: It was that we wanted to serve and have like a community and like for neighbors to know each other and for the upkeep of the block.

Kelly Carroll: And when was that around approximately?

Hazel Deane: That was around in the 1980s. In the 1980s.

Kelly Carroll: Excellent, and you still have a very active block association today which has focused around, a lot of your work has been around these community gardens. Would you say that this culture of community gardening and...in the both in the back and front yards on this block, would you say that that was specific to the African American and the Caribbean immigrants who were moving to this neighborhood during that time?

Hazel Deane: Yes, I would say that, because when we came the were just trees and shrubbery. The block association, along with the Brooklyn Botanical Garden started to plant flowers and that gave a lot of our camaraderie and friendship and community. It brought the neighbors together.

Kelly Carroll: Absolutely. And Phoebe and Julia, feel free to jump in. When you moved in later—Phoebe in the 90s, and then Julia in the two-thous...in the, I guess after Hurricane Sandy—what attracted you to that to move to this block, specifically East 25th Street, and what was it like when you moved in terms of the culture, this gardening culture?

Phoebe Blake: Should I go first or? I came here from Trinidad actually when I was 10 years old, and we lived on Pacific Street between Bond and Nevins in a brownstone. So, it was kind of like our lives are kind of like out of a Paule Marshall novel: *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. So, when I got married, I've always had it in the back of my mind to return to a brownstone. So, we lived in an apartment on Avenue H, and we had a really terrible, terrible two-year-old so we were kicked out of our apartment, because our two-year-old was a menace.

So, my husband found this block actually and he was like, "You won't believe this beautiful block that I saw in Flatbush." And he brought me to see it, and then, this was the first house that we saw and he was, I was like...I fell in love with it because I really liked parties and I like to entertain. So, I just saw that the whole setup was just like party central. But he was like "No, we can't...have can't have you get the first house you see, there's no parking here, we can't do it." So, my daughter was two and a half, my daughter's now 27, she'll be 28. And we moved in. I convinced him that we needed the house because I needed to have like garden parties here and it's been wonderful. This block has the most fabulous people. We actually immediately felt at home, and this is where we belong, this was our community. This was our place. We could go to Trinidad for Carnival for two weeks and come back and our gate would be closed, our garbage would be picked up, our snow would be removed and we wouldn't have a care in the world. So, this is our place. I don't see that we would ever move. The people are just wonderful and that's why we're here.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, I wish we could landmark people.

Julia Charles: I echo that. Sorry, go ahead Phoebe.

Phoebe Blake: I said the people the people as a draw here. I mean, it's just, you know, the people were just wonderful.

Julia Charles: Definitely. I would definitely echo that I was...my family and I, we were displaced after Hurricane Sandy and, you know, my whole family lived in Rockaway. And my husband's whole family lived in Rockaway. Everyone was walking distance and, you know, we had to, you know, get our foundation, get our footing and allow our kids to go back to school. And we moved to Prospect Lefferts Gardens and immediately fell so much in love with Brooklyn and, like the Caribbean culture. It was just...it just spoke to us. You know it's electric here when you, you know, you can walk all times at night, and you hear the music, and you smell the food and we immediately fell in love.

When we when we saw a house on the block for sale, and I said, "Okay, let's take a walk!" and on the corner of Clarendon Road and East 25th Street we said, "Wow, like do you see that? Like, did you feel that?" Like, we were walking looking for a place to kind of, you know, cement our roots and fell in love with the block. And when we reached to the corner of Avenue D, "So, you felt that?", like, past tense. Like, it's something special here, you know, opposed to all the blocks that we walked on really canvassing for a property.

And this one here—her husband—when a property was for sale and right next door. Beforehand, you know, my husband approached and said, “Hey, I mean, you know, is any house on the block for sale?” and you know, lo and behold, it would be that conversation that would actually help catapult us actually landing where we are, you know, total strangers. It just kind of really speaks to the synergy and the people on the block when you connect and really like look out for each other, and you know we're here we're so happy to be here.

Kelly Carroll: Absolutely, and that that feeling that you talked about that sense of place and community is palpable when you're on the block and the LPC—even when it released its press release about the designation of East 25th Street—it said that it's not just the Renaissance Revival row houses, but it's the...it's how intact they are that directly reflects the dedication of the community found there. So, the houses are about a little over 100 years old and as, as Mrs. Deane said, before the block turn Caribbean there was...there really weren't...there were shrubs and trees, but not gardens. So, for Phoebe and Julia did you either you know how to garden prior to moving to this block?

Phoebe's iPhone: Well, I've always loved it. It was just perfect for me and people were very helpful in terms of showing you different plants and we share plants. My, one of my best, best friends Pauline Green, you know, she's actually addicted to this stuff. She is! You know, she kind of like takes over my garden sometimes. You know, it kind of fostered the whole essence of community. The gardening, and the sharing of plants and you know, if I bought too many plants that would give some plants to my neighbors while we're planting my neighbors gardens, so I think that kind of fostered the fellowship that was that makes the block what it is.

Julia Charles: Yeah, I would definitely say I wanted to garden.

Phoebe's iPhone: You got really good at it!

Julia Charles: Thank you, thank you, thank you! I really wanted to garden, but you know wasn't a property owner, so I...you know, was pretty limited. And in my home in Rockaway I had planted green ivy just because I just wanted something to not die and always see something green. But when I moved to East 25th street, I was quickly indoctrinated into gardening. So, you're carefully, you know, softly told: “You need to garden, you need to update your yard, and you know, plant window boxes.” And it was really, really, really beautiful because they involve the children and the children gardening and sharing plants. Even my window box now, it's like a couple of clippings off of the street, you know? And so was really it was...really great to have that. That was basically a catalyst for building relationships, building real, sustainable relationships. So, I'm even when I'm, you know, away and visiting family, you know, I had my neighbors come, you know and wet my garden, for me, you know? I mean I'm almost terrified. I know Phoebe would share that too, when you go away...

Phoebe's iPhone: I don't like to do that!

Julia Charles: You know, worried if your garden's gonna die, but your neighbors have your back. You know, so it's a real catalyst of building community and sustainable and loving relationships.

Kelly Carroll: Absolutely, and I think that that speaks to the strength of your block association and these gardens being the glue on this block because gardens, plants, flowers...I know that many of people on the block grow food and share food. So it's not only something that you're sharing visually when you walk down the block and you could admire each other's front yards, but you can also directly benefit

from eating from each other's gardens. And you know, unlike an art collection which stays inside someone's house and you may never see, these gardens are really for everyone, and I think that's absolutely helped tie your block together, which is why I think your block was also so successful in harnessing landmark designation. So, my next topic is...there was, and I know Phoebe when she testified at the Landmarks Commission—not to spoil the ending for anyone—talked about how preservation is important to protecting this block in particular from development. So, I would like to hear from you all about how Development has been negatively impacting your community and why, what exactly was going on in the neighborhood that made you feel that your very special block was under threat?

Hazel Deane: I would say that a lot of construction, even in in the back there on Bedford. They were two family houses and three family houses and they made an extension with another floor. With that floor, it takes the light from our gardens. So, I would think that the you know, the development of the neighborhood is not good for our wellbeing.

Phoebe Blake: Yeah, I think the development is without care. It's just, you know, these stacks of Lego blocks and disgusting attachments without any concern about the integrity of the structures that were here or the families that were here. Our neighborhood, I don't believe we have the resources to handle all of these new people and cars and electricity and water and sanitation. So, we're really under a lot...we're basically under siege from what's happening with the...you know, it's just absolutely no cap on these developments. This is just wanton, just craziness and I just think that it's gonna negatively impact not only us, but all of the blocks that are surrounding us, the surrounding communities.

Julia Charles: Well, absolutely I would definitely say that it looks disrespectful to the community.

Phoebe Blake: Yes.

Julia Charles: You know, that it's, you know, the quote unquote the middle finger, the finger buildings, it looks like a middle finger in the middle of the block. You have that. And then also it also speaks to you know, unfortunately, I mean sure people need somewhere to live but it's not people who are well invested into the communities. So, you're not going to see things like gardening efforts, you know? People who are really not just, you know, takers but givers. You don't see that, with all of the rapid development.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, there was a real estate critique piece about your block when you all were fighting to secure landmark status that said, it was painted in a negative light that, like, "How dare they try to stop development?" and I personally disagree with the fact that it's not up to communities to self-determine their own futures.

Phoebe Blake: Correct.

Kelly Carroll: And I think that because of the strong nature of home ownership on your block you have people—not LLCs—in your homes. That you've been able to survive and thrive for this long. I know that there was a tear down on your sister block East 26th Street. Does anyone want to talk about the impacts that that has had on the quality of life for residents that are just next door to you all?

Julia Charles: Well, I mean I can say, one of the residents there...her and I, we talk, you know, pretty often. And originally, before we fully sought out landmarks designation, we wanted to partner for designation. Unfortunately, you know, it didn't work out for them. But I know part of the spirit of why

they were trying to do that wasn't....it wasn't just about the aesthetics of the block, but it was to maintain that homely community feel.

So right now—and it's been like this for over a year—it's like a gaping hole on the block. It's a blight on the block, you know, and it feels pretty damaging for the residents that are there that they kind of feel powerless that someone can just, you know, developers can just come in here and tear down and there's no deadline for them to, you know, continue their development. The...at the current zoning laws that R6 so it would allow them to go up in height and also in girth—so all the way to the back—and that would completely shadow the gardens. And the east side of our block, their backyards. So, it's like it's an ongoing thing where it's either going up really quickly or they're just demolishing with no care whatsoever to the current residents there. So it's...it negatively impacts them, you know, it's pretty sad because they're a community, like us, you know, they're our sister block and they care, they care as well.

Hazel Deane: Might I go back and say something about the block association? I think the block association is very necessary because we needed to keep the block association going. We always did not have a quorum, but two or three or four people still came to the meeting and we kept it going, and kept it going, and I think that's an important aspect.

Kelly Carroll: I would absolutely agree with that assessment, because in my experience when I worked...all the years I worked at Historic Districts Council, the blocks that had block associations were always more successful in terms of organizing, having relationships with one another, having relationships with the outside blocks surrounding them, and relationships with the community board, just in terms of involvement. I think having a block association put you all in a great spot for all of your accomplishments and your just your eyes on the street and keeping the neighborhood intact. And so, my next...so on that note about landmarking. So, if I didn't know anything about landmarking I'm not sure I would know that that was the thing that a person can do, like as an option like, this magical thing that could keep our neighborhood intact could...would involve community involvement. So, how did How did the notion or thought of landmarking come about, for the 300 these 25th Street Block Association.

Julia Charles: Well, Kelly, what I can say is during the time—2019—I served as the block association's president and, obviously, because there was so much legacy already established between green initiatives and cultural events like stoop night events, and tea parties and such but, again, we would discuss, you know, our issues and plans, and many of the neighbors would talk about how development is just taking over our community. And so that really served as like a launchpad for the East 25th Street Historic District Initiative, where it was like, okay, you know what? This is, this is something we haven't tackled, you know, even before I even lived on the block, apparently there was a conversation about you know, maybe you know, the block should get landmark status and so forth.

But at that point, it just seemed like you know what, this this needs to actually kind of really happen. And quickly just doing the research to say okay well who, who is what? And what's the governing parties? So the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, that's the governing party that issues out with designation, and the Historic Districts Council was the organization to help facilitate getting to that point. And so this is where I got to meet you Kelly, and you know really hit it off and learn a lot about landmarking, landmarking law, the really interesting thing about you know, the first ever landmark in New York City law was an East Flatbush, you know, the Wyckoff House.

And so, it just really led to a situation where, yes, the community is under siege, and we are definitely worthy. Like this there's been a legacy established here of a community coming together, of obviously having strong stewards in the community, with their greening efforts, and we're worthy! And we need to just, you know, go forward and seek out whatever resources we can so that we can preserve our block. Preserve the beauty, the architecture, and the culture.

Kelly Carroll: Would Phoebe or Mrs. Deane like to add anything to that?

Phoebe Blake: I would like to say that when I first came here 24 years ago, there was a discussion about having the block landmarked, but we really didn't go...we weren't able to go very far with it. So, I think it's really important to give Julia the credit that she deserves, because without her determination, organization and dedication, we really weren't, you know I actually didn't think it was possible. I was kind of like it's very nice, but it's not gonna work.

Phoebe Blake: Okay, so um so when we were...

Julia Charles: They are recording this, by the way!

Phoebe Blake: Where we were...when it came to pass, I was really, really, happy because I think this is a legacy that will impact her children, my grandchildren, or her grandchildren, you know? So, I mean, it's been a community effort, because everyone, but she spearheaded this so it's very important that we kind of note that without her kind of like really taking the lead on this and really seeing it to the very end we wouldn't be in a position where, that we are in today. So, I am extremely grateful and I'm really proud of her that this was actually able to come to pass. I tell her that all the time, don't I Julia?

Julia Charles: Yeah. Yes you do, thank you.

Kelly Carroll: And you're exactly right and Julia would never say that herself so I'm so glad you filled in that part of the narrative for us, Phoebe. And you actually took one of my questions which was, did you all ever think that landmarking was even a possibility?

Phoebe Blake: I didn't. I thought it was nice, but ludicrous. But it actually came to pass.

Hazel Deane: I didn't because when the other president started, my home was...the mailing and the...I still get the mail to this day, just the brochures. Nothing else from the landmark preservation. So thank you, Julia.

Phoebe Blake: Yeah, she's a rock star around here.

Hazel Deane: Yes, yes, yes.

Kelly Carroll: Yes, she is.

Hazel Deane: Julia the person who started it was a fighter too, but Julia really brought it home.

Julia Charles: Aww.

Kelly Carroll: Julia, did you think after, did you think after we had our first Landmarks 101 in the Flatbush YMCA that was via the Historic Districts Council, did you walk out of that meeting thinking like, "Yeah, it's gonna happen!" Or, were you like Phoebe and Mrs. Deane?

Julia Charles: I'll be honest with you, I might've been overconfident because I had no doubt it was going to happen. I really, I really just felt like it's going to happen. It was...it felt so correct, it felt right. Like, again, it's...I couldn't even imagine the Landmarks Preservation Commission really looking at a block that has been intact, every you know, original cornice, so well maintained with gardens, even when people with you know, over the years, whatever economical challenges you know, have maintained their block so well and so lovingly. I couldn't imagine how could they say...how could they really say no?

I mean it's just, it's 56 you know, limestone and brownstone facades. It's...the gardens are beautiful, the neighbors are beautiful, they obviously care. Because it's well documented, between the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens and throughout the city and so, I actually really had no doubt. I just felt like whatever needed to...whatever connections need to be made whatever work needs to be done to make that happen, and you know, obviously, the work of my neighbors. How they maintained their homes, it spoke for itself and any extra connection that needed to be made, I was more than happy to do it.

Kelly Carroll: Right, and I remember when you started working on this initiative and you were putting together the Request for Evaluation—which is the form that you have to send into the Landmarks Preservation Commission when you're asking for a historic district or a landmark or scenic landmark or even an interior landmark—we had just...we were on the coattails of Bay Ridge Parkway being designated and I said, “Hmm this looks so similar to something they just were comfortable doing down in Brooklyn, so we're going to follow up with them if they dare say no to this block.”

Julia Charles: Yeah.

Kelly Carroll: There was good, there was a good precedent that had just happened in Bay Ridge. And so, you did an amazing job of putting together the RFE and the branding for the East 25th Street Historic District Initiative. You came up with a logo, you created social media, you really...you were able to attract tremendous press to this issue and, like you said it was hot anyway, because your block already had a rep in the borough for the Greenest Block.

So, as you're on this upward trajectory, Covid happened and we, in New York City entered lockdown. And I'm sure most people in this meeting remember that probably not fondly. So, how did you, Julia keep morale and outreach alive during lockdown to not let this landmark designation pursuit die?

Julia Charles: Well, I'd have to say it was it was really, it was really scary in a sense, obviously just the issue at hand—the virus—and people being inflicted with it. As a matter of fact, I served as a panelist for HDC's preservation conference, and then the very next day, you know, John Jay was shut down—all of CUNY colleges—were shut down, and so it was it was really scary to say like, is preservation at the forefront of anything?

To be honest with you, it just really didn't seem like it would be considered a priority. But I, you know, continued to create newsletters and send emails and what really I feel like reinvigorated the whole campaign was the PPE and Preservation. So, although it was very small obviously, very small, there's a few of us it was great just to be able to put out a table, give out face masks, you know, some of the info graphic cards. One side, it had the 10 commandments which the gardening committee created of gardening, and on the other side really discussed a lot about, you know, just quick bullet points of you know, our preservation campaign. And our social media to keep people engaged to get people really

invigorated for the upcoming hearing, because I was serious the hearing was going to happen, come hell or high water.

And I'm glad, I'm glad that happened. I'm glad that event happened because it did just that: it was another touch point, another way to say that, you know, this campaign is still alive and you know, landmark designation is still something we're working on, you know, amongst you know, Covid-19. It's...it's still something that's happening. And you know luckily, the New York City, you know, Landmarks Preservation Commission still continued to come out and do their research, you know? So that was really great too because you know, we all could be excited but if the presiding agency is not doing their job, we can just get shelved, like every other initiative. So, that was really great to see that you know what? They're invested, you know, organizations like HDC were invested. I know...Kelly, you and I, we you know, we chat via text and social media and email and everything you know, everyone was so well invested to see this through 'til the end and we're really happy for that.

Kelly Carroll: It was, it was the best news during that time That when we found out that the Landmarks Commission was gonna move ahead with your block, it was like, "Oh, my God, this is, this is, this is the best news ever!" during this terrible time. Phoebe, how did you feel when you heard the good news?

Phoebe Blake: Well, the block was...I had Covid. And many other residents on the block had had Covid. We lost a pair of beloved gardeners. The gardeners that worked on this block for about 25 years, perhaps. Both of them—they were brothers—they died from Covid in April. So, the celebration was really grand when we actually got this designation, because there was you know, there was a degree of darkness, to some extent on the block during that period of Covid because so many people were affected by it, so many neighbors were sickened by it. And there was you know, people that we cared about died from it, so it was you know, news that was really...much needed.

Kelly Carroll: Absolutely. Yeah, during...New York City that time was just quiet with a lot of sirens, so...

Phoebe Blake: Yeah.

Kelly Carroll: Mrs. Deane, do you want to add anything to when you found out that, as a long-term resident that the block was going to get landmark status?

Hazel Deane: Yes, I, yes, I was. I live here almost half a century, and I was so happy to know that when I go, it will still be taken care of and loved and enjoyed like I do, or like I did.

Phoebe Blake: Absolutely.

Kelly Carroll: Yeah, so that's—with landmarking—I'm so glad you said that because the block has a lot of immigrants, the block has a lot of daughters and sons of immigrants. And they may leave or they you know, they might go to New Jersey, or they may go back to the islands and then come back to New York. And what's great about that is throughout the generations, they can always come back to East 25th now and it will it will always be there.

Hazel Deane: Yeah. Mmhm.

Kelly Carroll: And my next question in that vein is do the children on the block, I know there's a lot of children that live there, I saw them running around on Saturday and dancing. Do the children of the

block know that, do they have an awareness that they are now in a historic district, or is it like not on their radar?

Julia Charles: Oh, I don't think it's really on their radar. It's on their parents' radar. That I'll tell you. I don't think it's on their radar yet, but I would definitely say when they're adults and if they're well invested, the way we all are, I think they'll have a real appreciation to know that the block that they grew up on is you know, the first historic district in East Flatbush. That's really saying, that's really saying something. You know nothing, nothing against the rest of the community, obviously, you know we live in a beautiful, beautiful community. But I think that it speaks it speaks volumes to say that you know, you're like the first you know? And it's you know there are children and it's not something they'll connect with now, but I would definitely think that preservation is becoming more in the forefront so it's something that they'll probably revisit as they get older, you know?

Phoebe Blake: Absolutely.

Hazel Deane: My grandson Shaquan said he would never sell the house. He might get another house but he will never sell the house.

Kelly Carroll: That's really good, that's good to know and that's...in a lot of cases it's in Bed-Stuy too, where you came from, the only reason Bed-Stuy stayed looking as gorgeous as it has even before it got landmarked is because people didn't sell and they took care of those homes generationally. From when people started arriving there in the late 1920s early 30s. So, holding on its definitely...it's a very long preservation strategy, a long term to just hold on.

Phoebe Blake: Yeah.

Kelly Carroll: But it's one that absolutely works. What was remarkable to me about your preservation initiative is that you had unilateral political and community board support. Do you think that you have created an awareness politically in your community by being the first block that's landmarked?

Julia Charles: Yeah, definitely. I would definitely say that. I'm not going to name the politician—I will say it's a male—but they you know, one of the real opposition, but they said “Oh, you know what's that conversation about landmarking a block?” and so on, so on. And so it wasn't really a real consideration for some. And for others, maybe it was it was a thought, but not something that they really kind of put their mind to. So I think it speaks it speaks to them, the fact that again, the block is so worthy, so beautiful, has had a long standing block association and willing to do the work. It's obvious. You don't you don't have to see it on paper to walk on the block and see that it's set with residents that are willing to do work and so, politically that's very attractive, you know?

Especially if you're you know, a new council member and you're saying, “Well, my first term, this is something that I can say happened on my watch.” You know, so politically that's very, that's very attractive and inspiring too. I think for other blocks and other communities we're not the only beautiful block in East Flatbush. That's an inspiration and also an opportunity for others, if you're not organized to get organized, and to partner with political figures that can help move the needle forward.

Kelly Carroll: Right, and then that was going to lead me to my last question and then I do have one question from Susan Hopper which I will address.

Your block is absolutely a model for other blocks who may want to pursue this. Your RFE was like, you can't teach this in school how wonderful your Request for Evaluation was. I know that, right now, the Flatbush Savings Bank is being demolished just around the corner, despite the Landmarks Commission actually saying, "You know what, this is a great building, but because there are demo permits there's nothing we can do about it." And I know that many people on your block, Julia, did sign the petition to try to save that building because they're already activated in this preservation mindset. So, the last question being, do you do you think that this landmark designation will catapult you all to think about more preservation initiatives in your community beyond your doorsteps?

Julia Charles: Absolutely. Absolutely. You want to speak to that?.

Hazel Deane: I would say yes does, I know, I know of someone who is thinking about it, for her block.

Kelly Carroll: Good.

Julia Charles: I would, I would definitely say yes. I love that there's more attention to this side of you know, this side of the tracks, this side of Flatbush. I love that there's more attention here, I think it was Respect Brooklyn that was really leading the campaign with the Flatbush Savings Bank and it's unfortunate because it's a beautiful structure and, unfortunately, somebody actually perished. One of the construction workers perished there. Yeah, so you have that, you know, and that work we'll continue to watch and observe and see what happens.

There's also the PS 90 site over on the corner of Bedford and Church Avenue. So, that was formerly like a public school, PS 90, but historically, it was the African burial ground. So actually, the community now, they have their own task force...is really set to challenge to say: what goes there? How is it going to be built? What's going to...are we going to you know save some of the stories of the people who you know, enslaved and you know, Africans that were there? Like, you know, there's more conversation about that. And obviously the big headline, which is the 960 Franklin Avenue Fight for Sunlight with the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens. So that is a real community effort when it's not just organizations stepping up and saying we need to preserve communities, it's everyday people like you know, myself and Phoebe and Mrs. Deane saying that you know, we need to be respectful of the existing community. We need to put real thought into the language that is said about the history, and real thought into how we're going to move forward in the future. And you know, everything is said within the guise of affordable housing, but not affordable to the existing community at large. So, I definitely would say this block gaining landmark designation started to—not that these initiatives weren't there—but I think it just, it's a matter of power numbers.

Phoebe Blake: I want to speak on an interesting thing that Julia just said about the block being on the other side of the tracks.

Julia Charles: Uh huh.

Phoebe Blake: It's really interesting because on the one side of the track is Ditmas Park, and so on our side of the tracks, we really don't get the services that we need. We don't get the sanitation services, we don't get a lot of general services that we need because we're not given the respect that we deserve. So, I'm hoping with this landmark status that other blocks would feel empowered to pursue those initiatives as well, because I think if we kind of work together as a group, we will be able to get some of the

resources that are absolutely lacking here, and some of the you know, we really need some respect put on the sides of the track for sure.

Kelly Carroll: Absolutely, and I think landmark designation is like...has the potential to totally uplift an entire community. Like, your block is a stellar block, but maybe it'll inspire some other neighbors to be like, "You know, what we need to be more like them." And like you said, there is...in preservation, just like everything else, there are a lot of serious issues of parity and who gets what, and landmarked where? And you're absolutely right that in Ditmas Park, there have been historic districts there for quite some time now and it favors a totally different wave of development which was suburban, which was built for an upper middle class population, detached housing.

Whereas your community was built as a row house block and I'm so glad that the landmark designation has started to trickle into East Flatbush. I think that's wonderful and I hope that it continues. And I'm sure your block will be involved in anything that does continue. So, for my last my last question is a question from Susan Hopper who is on the HDC board—fellow board member of Julia's—and she asked this question, I guess, for Julia, as Julia led the historic district initiative. And the question is: Julia, how did you how did you find out about Historic Districts Council?

Julia Charles: Hi, Susan! Just research, Google research. Again, it was...the main thing was identifying the difference between the organization that helps you, that advocates, helps you on your behalf, and the Six to Celebrate. Obviously, at the time Kelly came out to Flatbush and conducted a whole you know, info session with my neighbors and also our sister block and we really got to learn some of like the ins and outs about the Landmark Law and the process of, to create the Request for Evaluation. And some of the tidbits, some of the gems that Kelly shared with us.

Saying that, you know, she met with the LPC and they said, "Look we like glamour shots." Well guess what? My block has glamour shots. We have plenty of those you know? We had so many great articles, with the *New York Times*, *Daily News*, News 12, NY1, Channel 5, you know it goes on, you know? So we had so we had all of that, and then the designation map just simply saying exactly identifying, you know, where the designation would be and the end part. So, that was really instrumental just learning who's the agency and who is the resource that's going to help you, and that was just a basic Google search and then and then obviously the outreach.

Kelly Carroll: Excellent. And the rest is history! We met at the Y and didn't have a projector and so used 8 and a half by 11 sheets of paper.

Julia Charles: That's right. Old school!

Kelly Carroll: All right, well all, thank you so much we're going to we're going to wrap up for the evening I'm going to I'm going to stop recording.