

Statement to the Landmarks Preservation Commission Regarding 181 and 185 Montague Street

Good morning, Chair Srinivasan and LPC Commissioners. I am Peter Bray, the Executive Director of the Brooklyn Heights Association.

I am pleased to speak in favor of the designation of the Peoples' Trust Company and the National Title Guarantee Company buildings. Their designation would complement the landmarked Brooklyn Trust Company building next door at 177 Montague Street and fill a notable void on the north side of Montague Street left when the Borough Hall Skyscraper District was designated.

Others testifying today can speak much more authoritatively and eloquently about their significance, both in terms of their architecture and their context within the larger work of their architects.

Rather, I can attest to their significance for the neighborhood, what these two buildings signify for the residents of Brooklyn Heights. Whenever the two buildings have come up in speaking with my neighbors, the nearly universal response is: "I thought they were already landmarked." That they have yet to be landmarked evokes a look of disbelief and a reply, "Why haven't they?" For those more knowledgeable about their status, their reaction to hearing that the LPC calendared them, is simply: "Bravo."

Without question, their presence on Montague Street is greatly valued by the neighborhood. Even for those not well versed in architectural styles, the dialogue between them and the adjacent Brooklyn Trust Company building engenders a rich visual appreciation and conveys an unsurpassed sense of place to the experience of that block.

And yet, when so much of the city we take for granted is in play today for redevelopment, their loss or desecration is possible, however inconceivable it would be to the community. Two other building lots on this block are slated to be redeveloped. Moreover, the development rights of the two Montague properties could potentially create a truly out-of-scale building on that block. In a blink of an eye, their scale and their presence would be lost.

Fifty years ago, on the eve of the designation of the Brooklyn Heights Historic District, Frank Freeman's magnificent Brooklyn Savings Bank building, situated one block away, was torn down. Its loss has left a gaping absence in the neighborhood.

I want to thank the LPC for its consideration of these two buildings as individual landmarks. On behalf of the BHA's 900 members, I ask the Commission to designate them as expediently as possible so that the dialogue between the three individual landmarks on this block, and between them and the residents of the neighborhood, will continue to enrich our lives far into the future.