



July 23, 2021

Commissioner Sarah Carroll
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre St
New York, NY 10007

Re: Request for Evaluation of 265 Prospect Avenue aka Grand Prospect Hall

Dear Commissioner Carroll,

We are writing to request an evaluation of the Grand Prospect Hall at 265 Prospect Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11215, for designation by the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) as an individual landmark building. Grand Prospect Hall was added to the [National Register of Historic Places in 1999](#), but has not been locally landmarked by the LPC. We ask that you evaluate and designate the location as an individual landmark, including designating the magnificent and historic grand ballroom as an interior landmark.

This 118-year-old building has critical historical, cultural, and architectural significance to warrant landmark status. The National Register of Historic Places noted that “Prospect Hall has always made a monumentally large presence within its surroundings.” Following a fire that destroyed the original hall built in 1892, architect Ulrich J. Huberty—designer of Prospect Park’s Boathouse and Tennis House—redesigned the building which reopened in 1903. The banquet hall embodied the late 19th-century French Renaissance style, home of the first “French birdcage” elevator, and the first fully electrified commercial building in Brooklyn. The interior included bowling alleys, a speakeasy, meeting spaces, a German-style beer hall, a roof garden, and its iconic ballroom.

The Grand Prospect Hall has long served as a civic and cultural institution, where William Jennings Bryan spoke in 1908 and the Women’s Suffrage Party launched its national campaign in 1914. As the National Register of Historic Places describes, “In addition to its significance as an outstanding specimen of its architectural type and period, Prospect Hall is an important example of the large ethnic social/cultural/entertainment facility, a building type that existed in large urban immigrant neighborhoods nationwide at the turn of the 20th century.” The hall served as the site of entertainment and civic organizing across different languages and ethnicities, including concerts, sporting events, and celebrations. Prospect Hall served as a bridge “between the old country and the new, welcoming and easing the experience of strangers in a strange new homeland.” In a borough as diverse as Brooklyn, we

must preserve the institutions that helped combat cultural, social, and political isolation for the city's newest New Yorkers.

The ballroom, the central element of Grand Prospect Hall which rises through three stories of the building, should be considered for interior landmarking. The National Register of Historic Places report describes it as follows:

Located on the second floor, at the head of the main stair, this great rectangular space is a level-floor theatre arranged and decorated in the tradition of America's great 19th century ethnic halls. The balcony, which surrounds the space on three sides, is treated as a series of bow-fronted theatrical boxes...The gallery, above, which retains its original wooden bench seating, has a continuous plaster rail and a somewhat steeper slope. Both balcony fascias are highly ornamented with molded cartouches and fruit garlands and are studded with exposed incandescent lamps. Both upper levels are supported by polished marble columns. The ceiling is flat with a deep ornamental cove cornice and a central dome. The dome's lighting, incorporating both exposed and concealed electric lamps is original to the building and is a superb example of early electric lighting technology as applied to a theatrical interior.

For the past 30 years, Michael and Alice Halkias restored, preserved, and invested in Grand Prospect Hall. They resurfaced much of the building's lost history, including the recovery of paintings that hung in the beer hall decades prior. Their dedication ultimately earned the building its landmark status with the National Register of Historic Places. Sadly, Mr. Halkias died of Covid-19 last May, and the Halkias family has sold the property.

We implore the Landmarks Preservation Commission to evaluate and designate the Grand Prospect Hall as an individual landmark, including designating the ballroom as an interior landmark. Landmarking this beloved, historic building will help preserve a site that many in our communities have held dear for over a century.

Sincerely,



Council Member Brad Lander



Assemblymember Robert Carroll