



Greenwich
Village
Society for
Historic
Preservation

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October 2, 2013

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Urgent Request for Evaluation of Town and
Village Synagogue/Congregation Tifereth Israel, 334
East 14th Street, Manhattan**

Dear Chair Tierney:

We write to urgently request that the Landmarks Preservation Commission expeditiously consider 334 East 14th Street, the Tifereth Israel synagogue, for landmark designation. The property has recently been advertised for sale and possible redevelopment. Despite being calendared in 1966, shortly after the Commission's founding, it has never been voted upon. Now that this historic building is on the market, and conceivably could be demolished, we ask that a decision be rendered on this long-overdue designation.

The stately stone building is not only a commanding presence on the block, but it encapsulates the immigrant experience of the Lower East Side. Called a "pure Gingerbread Romanesque fantasy" by architectural writer David Dunlap, the structure was designed in 1866 by Julius Boeckell as the First German Baptist Church, at the edge of *Kleindeutschland*, the third-largest urban German community in the world after Berlin and Vienna. It was stylistically German, an important assertion of the immigrant group's identity. The structure contained two symmetrical spires, a large cross sitting on building's highest point, and many stained glass windows. The congregation first met in 1846 at Stanton and Essex Streets, before relocating to Avenue A near Second Street in 1850. As the Civil War closed and many of Little Germany's residents migrated further uptown, the church moved too – eventually either merging with other congregations or simply ceasing to exist sometime after 1920.

In 1926, it became the Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church of St. Volodymyr, which removed the central cross and replaced the spires with onion domes, a common feature in Eastern European architecture. Similar to the northward movement of the German Baptists before it, this congregation also moved uptown in 1962, making way that year for the Town and Village Synagogue, Congregation Tifereth Israel (Glory of Israel). A Conservative congregation, it was founded in 1949 and first worshipped at the Labor Temple at 242 East 14th Street. The Christian-themed stained glass was removed, though the onion domes remained and serve as a reminder of congregations past. Large panels

of Jewish-themed stained glass presently adorn the sanctuary. The mid-century flourishing of nearby Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village, as well as the neighborhood generally, has been a major source of support to the congregation until today.

Sales documents tout the possibility that the building be razed with new construction replacing it. Should that happen, the East Village will lose both a tangible reminder of its rich history, as well as a grand and civilizing presence on East 14th Street.

Given that this architecturally and culturally unique German Baptist-Ukrainian Orthodox-American Jewish edifice has been waiting for 47 years to be considered as a landmark, and its future is now in jeopardy, we ask that the Landmarks Preservation Commission act quickly to consider its merits and move ahead with landmark designation.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director
Greenwich Village Society
for Historic Preservation



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Executive Director
Historic Districts Council



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cc: NYC Councilmember Rosie Mendez
State Senator Brad Hoylman
State Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh