

GOTHAM



CENTER  
FOR NEW YORK CITY HISTORY

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April 29, 2013

Hon. Amanda Burden, Chair  
Department of City Planning  
22 Reade Street  
New York, NY 10007-1216

Dear Amanda:

I was very gratified a few weeks ago when the Bowery was at long last designated an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Bowery is something of a star performer in *Gotham*, from its days as a Lenape foot trail and Dutch farm road. Washington's troops marched down it on retaking the city, as did herds of cattle heading for Astor's abattoir, and the nation's first street car line ran along it as well. Lincoln raised his presidential profile at Cooper Union, and as the city's working class entertainment district it helped launch tap dance, minstrelsy, Yiddish theater, and vaudeville. It nurtured Foster and Berlin, was adored by Crane and Whitman, and as a linguistic seedbed it enriched the American vernacular. The street will have pride of place in *Gotham II*, too, both for hosting the city's down and out, and for phoenixing into a thriving cultural incubator for Beats, Abstract Expressionists, and punk rockers.

I know you're well aware of our town's considerable ability to obliterate its past. *Harper's Monthly* complained back in 1856 that "New York is notoriously the largest and least loved of any of our great cities. Why should it be loved as a city? It is never the same city for a dozen years together." It would be a pity if the Bowery got bulldozed out of existence. The National Register designation suggests the country agrees, shouldn't the city do the same?

I hope you will approve the East Bowery Preservation Plan which would extend the contextual zoning, which has helped preserve and protect the Bowery's west side, over to its vulnerable east side. In recent years it's lost some of its oldest and most significant structures, including Federal-era houses at 35 Cooper Square and 135 Bowery, and the first Germania Bank Building at 185 Bowery, the latter a reminder of yet another historical facet of the Bowery's, its days as commercial hub of *Kleindeutschland*. Perhaps it would be worth considering the city's designating its own Bowery Historic District? I urge you to do whatever can be done to preserve the Bowery as the municipal, state, and national treasure that it is.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Mike Wallace". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Mike Wallace  
Distinguished Professor of History, John Jay College  
Founder, Gotham Center for New York City History