

Historic Morningside Heights

Issue No. 5

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What does it take to protect a community?

In recent years, we have endured an increasingly severe erosion of our neighborhood's culture and history. The loss of Morningside Heights' architectural integrity has been painful to watch, as several all-luxury residential towers and out-of-context institutional buildings have appeared, along with chain stores with no connection to our unique character and quality of life. Some community members are resigned to this corporatized fate. Others, however, link arms, hold their ground, and say "enough."

We stand with these committed neighbors and want you to join us.

Inside: Historic Districting 101 — how you can make a difference.

Updates



The Morningside Heights Historic District Committee is ready to take next steps in protecting our home. We were successful in securing Historic District designation for a portion of our community in 2017. That was just a start. So much more needs to occur if we are going to prevent further encroachment in the form of real estate overdevelopment, the loss of local businesses, and overtaxed infrastructure.

We are calling for additional protections in Morningside Heights through the districting of five additional areas of our neighborhood, a challenging process defined by political will, local leadership, and community organizing. It's got to happen.

Welcome to MHHDC's Phase II Campaign.

Before we get into the mechanics of Historic Districts, here's what we see happening during the rest of 2021.

Phase II Campaign Plan: *This is How We Make it Happen*

1. Canvassing: March — August

We engage with community members in the five additional proposed Historic Districts, to describe our effort and why it's important.

2. Survey and Petition: March — August

Our online petition is now active [here](#). We need as many community members as possible to sign. It's up to us to motivate those who haven't yet participated. Our survey will be active soon.

3. Phase II Webinar: March 24, 5:30pm

We educate as many people as possible on the Historic District process, as taught by local experts.

4. Community Rally: September

We hold a positive and passionate, socially distanced event to raise awareness and encourage local support. We invite the media.

The impacts we make during each of these steps will shape how we proceed during and beyond this campaign.

Along the way, we'll produce newsletters and [videos](#), post on [Social Media](#), and hold [online events](#). Our community urgently needs to advance additional protections now. New buildings are being planned and constructed [today](#).

We will share details as events approach. Now let's take a step back. How does Historic Districting work?



Morningside Heights Historic District Committee, Inc.

Officers:	Laura Friedman, <i>President</i>	Robert Stern, <i>Vice President</i>	Allyn Shepard, <i>Secretary</i>	Harry Schwartz, <i>Treasurer</i>
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Consultant:	Gregory Dietrich			
Editor:	Dan McSweeney			



mhhistoricdistrict@gmail.com



www.historicmorningsideheights.nyc



MHHDC

Historic Districts 101



The process of designating an historic district starts when the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) begins to consider an area worthy of special protection. However, rarely does the designation of a neighborhood happen without substantial community involvement.

MHHDC is clear that more of our neighborhood needs to be protected. The current Morningside Heights Historic District covers less than half of our community. We have submitted a [Request for Evaluation](#) to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission and are following up with their leaders and with local elected officials to advance the process. As many community members as possible should join this effort to demonstrate our commitment to local protections.

Here are the steps involved:

- After submission, the LPC reviews the RFE, makes site visits, does further research, and decides if a district is worthy of further consideration. The community can also make known to the LPC that there is strong support for this designation in the form of letters, phone calls or e-mails to the Commission. It is also recommended that community members meet with the LPC chair and staff to tour the neighborhood. *(This is what our petition and community organizing can stimulate.)*
- Once the LPC decides that an area is worthy of further consideration, “calendar” is the first official step in the designation process. Calendar is the action of establishing that an item will be scheduled for a Public Hearing. This is also when boundaries of the potential district are proposed by the LPC. *(We have developed proposed boundaries based on sound historical and architectural significance for five areas of our neighborhood.)*
- The Public Hearing is the opportunity for members of the community, elected officials and interested parties to give testimony for or against the designation of the proposed district. Sometime after the Public Hearing (in most cases), the LPC will take a vote on the district. If the vote is favorable, a Designation Report is issued and the new historic district is now protected. *(Our Phase II Campaign will prepare us well for this.)*

Historic Districts 101

Five Additional Historic Districts have been proposed to the LPC.

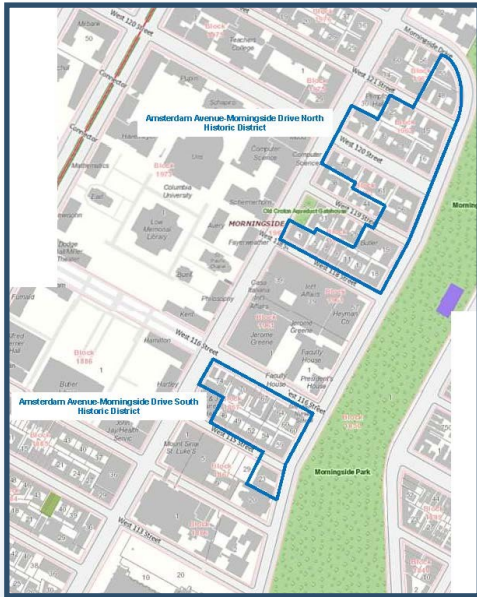
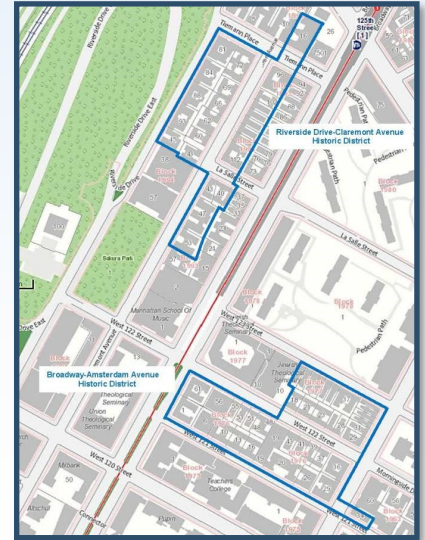
Here are the areas, from north to south.

1. Riverside Drive - Claremont Avenue Historic District:

122nd - 125th Streets, between Riverside Drive and Claremont Avenue

2. Broadway - Amsterdam Avenue Historic District:

121st - 123rd Streets, between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue



3. Amsterdam Avenue - Morningside Drive North Historic District:

118th - 122nd Streets, between Amsterdam Avenue and Morningside Drive

4. Amsterdam Avenue - Morningside Drive South Historic District:

115th - 116th Streets, between Amsterdam Avenue and Morningside Drive

5. Morningside Heights Historic District Extension:

112th - 114th Streets, between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue



Historic Districts 101

Clearly, this is an ambitious agenda.

It is what must occur, however, if we're going to have a fighting chance to protect the home we know and love.



By committing and working together, the MHHDC family has already accomplished so much. Our shared efforts have benefited the Morningside Heights residents, workers, students, and visitors of today. More profoundly, though, we are ensuring that our community remains vibrant, diverse, and culturally rich for those who will live, work, and study in our neighborhood many decades from now.

Now is the time to act. This is our legacy. Please join us.

- Sign — and ask your friends and neighbors to sign — our [Phase II Petition](#).
- [Volunteer](#) to canvas in our five proposed Historic Districts.
- Engage with us on [Social Media](#).
- [Join](#) our Action Team to prepare for the engagements before us.
- [Donate](#) to help us cover our ongoing administrative costs.

We all know “it takes a village.” Let’s show those who would threaten our community how unified, committed, and indefatigable a village we can be.

Present & Past

CATCHING UP WITH: Jim Mackin

Jim is a “walking legend” in our community. An amateur local historian with an encyclopedic knowledge of the neighborhood, Jim has been conducting his neighborhood [walking tours](#) for almost a decade, though they have been paused due to COVID. His recent book, *Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan’s Upper West Side: Bloomingdale — Morningside Heights* (Fordham University Press), is already a neighborhood hit and is a treasure trove of biographical information on locals as far back as the Dutch Era.



What distinguishes Morningside Heights and informs its Historic District designation?

This is one of the most interesting neighborhoods in the city. So many influential people from wildly diverse walks of life have connections to Morningside Heights. This, combined with its architectural consistency and beauty make it a natural Historic District and the fact this only happened for a portion of the neighborhood four years ago speaks to the challenges involved in the process.

Do you have any favorite sites in the neighborhood and why are they special to you?

It's hard to select one site, though anyone who knows me understands I'm a huge fan of Amsterdam Avenue, between 110th and 111th Streets because the Hungarian Pastry Shop is located there. That is one of my key local hangouts and I've done countless hours of reading and writing at those small tables, surrounded by other book-minded folks.

How did you initially become interested in history, architecture, and preservation?

My background is in finance but I've always had a passion for understanding what places looked like before, who lived in them, and what these people's backgrounds and motivations were. It's endlessly fascinating and we are truly fortunate to live in a place in which so many different kinds of New Yorkers with so many far-reaching impacts have spent time. It's truly astounding and inspirational, from artists of all types to academics, activists, and government leaders. A small plug: Read my book. I think even local history buffs will learn some interesting new facts about Bloomingdale and Morningside Heights.

Editor's Note: We are pleased to announce we'll be featuring a notable Morningsider from Jim's book in each new issue of our newsletter. Thank you, Jim! Buy *Notable New Yorkers* locally at [Book Culture](#).

