

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
JULY 14, 2009
Council Member Gale A. Brewer, 6th District, West Side of Manhattan**

RE: IRT Powerhouse

I thank Chairman Tierney and the Landmarks Preservation Commission members for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Gale A. Brewer and I represent the residents of the West Side of Manhattan, from West 54 Street to West 96 Street, in the City Council.

The IRT powerhouse is a monumental structure occupying a full block on the West Side of Manhattan from 58th to 59th street between 11th and 12th Avenues. Completed in 1904, it was built by the Interborough Rapid Transit Company to provide power for New York City's first subway system. The powerhouse provided electricity for the IRT system, and later the New York City Subway, until 1959 when it was sold to Consolidated Edison for use as a power station. The city has since reassumed ownership of the powerhouse, but Con Edison still occupies the building as a lessee and continues to use it to provide steam for private customers in the area.

It goes without saying that the powerhouse is of considerable historical significance as it was an important part of New York's first subway system, an unprecedented feat of planning and engineering. However, the powerhouse's connection to our city's history is not the only reason why it is deserving of landmark status. The mammoth structure is also an architectural masterpiece. A relic of the "City Beautiful" era, the building was designed by the legendary architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White in the form of an Italian palazzo. Its design is unlike those of other powerhouses, and more akin to *Beaux Arts* treasures like the New York Public Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The area surrounding the powerhouse is rapidly shifting from industrial to residential. The building is in close proximity to the Riverside South development, Lincoln center, and the significant expansions of Fordham University and John Jay College. One cannot help but imagine that once the powerhouse has outlived its usefulness to Con Edison, the structure might be converted into a world-class art museum or event space for the residents of these neighborhoods, and all New Yorkers to enjoy. The Hudson River Powerhouse Group has also suggested that the building's north hall could potentially accommodate New York's largest indoor market.

The IRT powerhouse is one of the last of a dying breed. In recent years, many of New York's architecturally and historically significant powerhouses have either been razed or redeveloped as condos. I urge the Landmarks Preservation Commission to take action to preserve the beauty and history of our city. Please designate the IRT powerhouse as a landmark and ensure that this great monument will remain a fixture in New York for generations to come.

I would like to thank Arlene Simon and Landmark West!, Paul Elston and the Riverside South Planning Corporation, as well as the Hudson River Powerhouse Group, Friends of IRT Powerhouse, and everyone else whose efforts have made this hearing possible.