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Statement of Council Member Daniel R. Garodnick
Public Hearing on numbers 10 and 30 West 56th Street
Landmarks Preservation Commission
March 13, 2007

Chairman Tierney and members of the Landmarks Preservation Commission: thank you for allowing me to make a brief statement concerning the designation of 10 and 30 West 56th Street.

I represent the portion of the West Fifties which includes those buildings, known as the Frederick C. & Birdsall Otis Edey and Henry Seligman residences, respectively. Constructed at the start of the 20th Century in a middle-class quarter full of four-story brownstone and brick-faced rowhouses, these buildings represent significant additions to our city's landscape for both architectural and historical reasons. I urge you to landmark these buildings, which are part of a neighborhood steadily losing its unique residential character.

Completed in 1901, 10 West 56th Street was designed by the architectural firm of Warren & Wetmore – a prominent partnership also responsible for the now landmarked New York Yacht Club and Grand Central Station. It is a slender, Beaux-Arts style 5-story limestone townhouse, an elegant relic of its era and one of the very few remaining Warren & Wetmore residences in New York City. Other than its altered storefront, its exterior remains in its original state.

10 West 56th Street's architectural significance is only exceeded by its original owners' contributions to the financial and political spheres of New York City. Frederick C. Edey was a well-known and successful banker; Birdsall Otis Edey was a pioneering advocate for women's rights, a poet, playwright, and National President of the Girl Scouts from 1930-1935.

A striking contrast to number 10 and its other narrow neighbors, number 30 West 56th Street is an ornate, imposing structure filling two lots. It was designed by C.P.H. Gilbert, the architect behind many standout mansions, including the landmarked Felix

and Frieda Warburg residence on Fifth Avenue (now the Jewish Museum). Also a Beaux-Arts style 5-story limestone townhouse, its façade remains intact outside of slight alterations on the ground floor.

Like number 10, 30 West 56th Street's owner was a prominent financier. Henry Seligman was one of the heirs to the investment banking firm started by his father and uncles, J. & W. Seligman & Co. Important patrons of the arts in New York City, Henry Seligman and his wife Adelaide lived in this house until their deaths in the mid-1930s.

Though I thank you for your consideration of these buildings amidst what I know is a tremendously long list of candidates for landmark status, I also want to note my concern about preservation of the rest of this neighborhood. Since last fall, the West Fifties has lost four notable townhouses – all similar to the grand limestone structures being discussed today – at 31, 33, 35, and 37 West 56th Street. As you may know, the City established a Special Midtown Preservation Subdistrict in 1982 “to preserve the midblock area north of the Museum of Modern Art (from 54th to 57th Streets) for its special contribution to the historic continuity, function and ambience of Midtown.” Today's booming real estate market, however, has created an environment in which luxury residential and commercial development increasingly trumps the protections of the Special Midtown Preservation Subdistrict. Though the City's zoning regulations fall outside of your formal responsibilities, I do ask that you take this particular situation into account as you prioritize landmark hearings in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of my views.