



Queens Civic Congress

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June 23, 2009

Hon. Robert Tierney, Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
The Municipal Building, 9th Floor
One Centre Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Tierney,

The Queens Civic Congress, a not-for-profit organization representing over 110 civic and homeowner associations in the borough of Queens, is in full support of landmark designation of the Ahles house and are excited that the Landmarks Preservation Commission is considering designation at this juncture.

The Second Empire-style Ahles farmhouse, otherwise known as the last remaining Bell family residence in Bayside, Queens, is important for its connection to local history; the development of the former village of Bayside and specifically the Bellcourt neighborhood, developed on the Bell family farm immediately to the north and west by the Rickert-Finlay Realty Company, also developers of the landmarked Douglas Manor and National Register-designated Broadway-Flushing neighborhoods; and its relatively intact, mid-nineteenth century high-style architecture, an increasingly rare occurrence throughout New York City.

While the owner's legal land use representative, Sheldon Lobel, has attempted to challenge the integrity of this building by creating the impression that the Ahles house is not worthy of designation for a host of factors, including its movement forty feet in the 1920s to avoid demolition due to the opening of 213th Street; its subsequent loss of part of its wraparound porch and a bay window; and its stucco-coating – not concrete – which covers the original clapboard, possibly to obscure the alterations made previously.

Still, considering these changes, the house retains a remarkable amount of its architectural character and integrity. Additionally, buildings change over time; many of these are alterations were made more than 80 years ago and can be considered historically appropriate.

Also, the comparative resources that are provided by Mr. Lobel are misleading at best. While the Pell house on City Island and the Bedell house in Tottenville are both good examples of Second Empire-style buildings, not all buildings of that type have extensive wraparound porches.

Also, the Bedell house is a curious example for Mr. Lobel to use as a comparison at all, as it was heavily vandalized by its owner during the designation process who was vehemently opposed to landmark designation as it would have gotten in the way of his plans to demolish the house and redevelop the site with condominiums. And, in fact, once the Bedell property was landmarked, part of the agreement to redevelop the property was to actually move the house towards the street in order to accommodate four new townhouses behind it.

Frankly, it is remarkable that the Ahles house has survived at all, given the former R4 multi-family zoning that existed on 213th Street until the early 1990s. Even the current R4A zoning, which is an improvement over the previous zoning, would allow this house to be demolished and replaced by two two-family houses. Losing this important connection to our past would be devastating to not only Bayside but also the borough of Queens, not to mention the rich history of New York City.

Please designate this building as soon as is humanly possible and make it the third official New York City individual landmark in Bayside, Queens that doesn't happen to be located on Fort Totten.

Sincerely,

Paul Graziano
Chair, Historical Preservation
& Landmarking

Patricia Dolan
Executive Vice President
Planning & Land Use Chair

Corey B. Bearak, Esq.
President

[Note: Queens Civic Congress [Membership](#) follows below]

Find Queens Civic Congress [Members](#) on the web at: <http://queensciviccongress.org/organization/members.php>.

Queens Civic Congress Members

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