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What you can do to help Tribeca's historic districts now.

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The blue line indicates our new proposed boundaries for Tribeca's historic districts. It is simple: **make Tribeca whole again.**

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Phone of Chair:
917-363-5620



Dear Neighbor,

1. Tribeca Trust submitted a extensively researched request to the Landmarks Preservation Commission for **expansion of the boundaries** of Tribeca's historic districts on July 31st. It contained a five-page letter to the Chair of LPC outlining why expansion is essential to protect Tribeca in the future. That letter is copied here in this newsletter at the end of these news items. The map of the new boundaries is also with this newsletter. You can also see the map at www.tribecatruster.org

2. Tragedies like the glass tower under construction at 56 Leonard (the "Jenga" building) happen because Tribeca's four historic districts were too small to begin with as well as heavily gerrymandered. The community originally requested a larger, contiguous area. Over time, inappropriate development (eg: 88 Leonard, 1 York, the

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frames building, etc) has eroded Tribeca's sense of place at every one of our historic district boundaries. The best solution is expansion of those boundaries. A second-best solution is a new kind of zoning at our borders. We are pursuing both options.

3. **Now is the time for all of us to stand up for our historic districts.** If we don't get Landmarks to expand these districts, it will be too late in the future: we risk being surrounded by glass curtain-wall architecture and over-scaled structures that destroy our distinctive Tribeca character, our light, and our air.

4. Do your part: write the Landmarks Preservation Commission to support our request for Tribeca's historic district expansion. Tell them who you are, where you live, why you love Tribeca, and why you think expansion of our boundaries is essential. Copy your letter to us. Write to Chair Robert Tierney, Landmarks Preservation Commission, Municipal Building, 1 Centre Street, 9th Floor, NYC 10013. You can email them at this link: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/html/contact/email.shtml>

5. Do your part: if LPC pays attention and we are "calendared," – that is, scheduled for a hearing – we will let you know the date, time and location. Bring your pitchfork and your voice and your neighbors. If we are not calendared in this administration, we will push again in the next one.

6. Do your part: contact us at volunteer@tribecatruster.org to give some time to our letter-of-support-campaign that we will wage this fall.

7. Do your part: give us a tax-deductible contribution at www.tribecatruster.org using the Paypal link there. We need about \$20,000 this year to re-print the book *Texture of Tribeca* and to hire a zoning expert and a preservation research specialist.

8. Other news: Our application (joint with New York Law School and New York Academy of Art) to participate in the Department of Transportation's plaza enhancement program was submitted at the end of July. Our application is for the area around Finn Square. If they approve the application, we will begin a process with DOT to come up with a design plan. Alessandra Galletti is leading this project. Contact her at galletti@tribecatruster.org with questions or offers of support.

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That's all for now. The next newsletter will announce our next meeting to work on these various projects. I will also pass on the information circulating about the Real Estate Board of New York's recent attacks on historic districts.

Sincerley,

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TEXT OF LETTER SENT TO LPC JULY 31

Robert Tierney
Chair, Landmarks Preservation Commission
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chair Tierney,

Attached is a request for evaluation for an extension of Tribeca's historic districts, to follow the boundaries on the attached map.

Tribeca Trust asks to calendar this historic district extension to Tribeca now. These areas are without doubt part of Tribeca. They were part of the community's original request in 1988, prepared with the counsel of the architectural historian Andrew Dolkart. Accordingly, most of the research on the individual buildings has already been done, so the LPC can act quickly.

The proposed extension would go south of Chambers to end along the north side of

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Park Place, west to Washington Street, and north to Canal Street. Below Chambers it would go east to Broadway. In Tribeca North it would include the blocks at Centre Street and Lafayette Streets where there are many distinguished palazzi.

Every leading preservation group in the city came out in favor of an expansive designation for Tribeca back in 1988 and again in 1993 when the issue arose a second time. Yet the result was that four much smaller, gerrymandered historic districts were granted. After much struggle, a tiny extension in Tribeca south was further granted in 2002, but it literally cuts the affected blocks in half.

The consequences of this kind of gerrymandering are now clear, and they are terrible. They threaten the sense of place even in the designated historic districts. This is because undesignated lots reach deep into the geographic heart of Tribeca's historic districts. A case in point is the 80-story glass tower rising up at 56 Leonard Street. It is on the site of small parking lot between Tribeca East and Tribeca West historic districts. It goes up on what had been the former site of the original Mother AME Zion Baptist Church. While this site may have seemed inconsequential in 1988, it now is a call for action: the zigzagging boundaries of Tribeca's four historic districts obviously present an imminent threat and a grave problem to one of New York's greatest cultural and historic assets. This is a problem the LPC can easily and quickly fix.

The request is simple. Make Tribeca whole.

The facts are:

- Only the Landmarks Preservation Commission can provide the protection Tribeca needs. The administrative code of the City of New York that lays out the Landmarks law declares that it is a matter of public policy to protect and perpetuate areas of historical or aesthetic interest and that moreover, it "is a public necessity and is required in the interest of the health, prosperity, safety, and welfare of the people."[\[1\]](#)

- There has been widespread support for designation of this area for three decades. The Tribeca community in all its organizational forms has supported it, as well every city council member from our district. The latter group includes our present Councilmember. As a community board member she submitted moving

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testimony in favor of expansive designation. This collected testimony and that of dozens of historians, architects, residents, and preservation groups is archived and in your files. If you would like copies we would be happy to provide them.

- The noted architect and historian Robert Stern wrote in favor of expansive designation in Tribeca to the LPC in 1988 with these words: “Is **broadly defined area** designation preferable to scattered individual designation? In the case of Tribeca, I think the answer is clearly yes; as in other great New York neighborhoods, the total is far more than the sum of its parts. Even the most masterful urban buildings are not isolated icons, but part and parcel of the larger matrix....if the **entire** area’s architecture and urbanism are not legally protected, we risk losing not only individual, aesthetically significant buildings but a vivid record...of an important phase in the city’s rise as a world economic power.”^[2] Those risks are now coming to pass and must be dealt with.

- The designation boundaries of the four smaller Tribeca historic districts represented unequivocal gerrymandering. They were obvious bones thrown to the real estate industry. Back in the early 1980s they advocated a vision of “Wall Street North,” since discredited and even reversed, as parts of the financial district become residential. The Wall Street North idea would demolish buildings south of Chambers in favor of skyscrapers, and West Street would be transformed into a wall of high rises blocking Tribeca from its historic connection to the river. Moreover, at what must have been a last-minute policy move, anything that looked like a parking lot was left out of the newly designated districts. These were ill-conceived ideas and bad discretionary policies that have had tragic consequences. The borders they created have meant too little protection for Tribeca’s architectural and historic fabric. In boom economic times, they have resulted in opening our neighborhood to violent architectural assault by real estate developers: in the past decade grossly inappropriate buildings have sprung up at 1 York Street; 281 Broadway; 88 Leonard Street, 5 Franklin Street; 34 Desbrosses; and 475 Greenwich Street.

- One former Landmarks Commissioner looked at the map of the current districts and commented that it had “too many edges” to provide Tribeca with the kind of long-run protection of its sense of place that historic districts are meant to ensure. He was right. I have personally witnessed Tribecans testifying in despair before your Commission on this issue, in particular the damage that the new high-rise at 56

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Leonard Street is doing to their own sense of place at 63 and 71 Worth Street, buildings who bravely anchor Tribeca on that stretch of Worth Street.

- The consequences to future residents of New York of this type of policy failure and regulatory weakness are now known: such gerrymandering endangers the sense of place, the light, the air, the views, the history, the walkability, and the economic value built up in the rest of the currently designated areas. It is critical to act now to protect Tribeca from further damage.
- Residents within the four small Tribeca historic districts have invested many millions of dollars in restoring their historic structures. Millions of people in our country and from abroad come to New York to see our historic districts. Moreover, residents within Tribeca's current historic district boundaries contribute \$68 million in taxes per year to the city, far more than Trinity Real Estate's \$25 million per year. This total is much more than the tax value of any single lot that might get bulldozed and rebuilt in the areas we are requesting. Why endanger the value that has been created?
- There is no question that the structures we are requesting belong to Tribeca. Including them will make Tribeca whole again. Professor Dolkart's work in ***Texture of Tribeca***, that of his students at Columbia University, and that of Oliver Allen in his books on Tribeca, provide the basic historical understanding of the development of Tribeca. Moreover, the work of many prior LPC staffers on buildings that were heard but not designated for individual landmark status has contributed to that body of knowledge. All of this research is surely already well known to the Commission and need not be repeated here. We have nevertheless conducted new research on a broad sampling of buildings in the areas we are requesting for inclusion. We include that research with this request.
- Much of the unknown social and economic history of Tribeca's unprotected buildings may be lost if LPC fails to act. Already we have unearthed important findings on a sampling of these unprotected sites: the building where the largest pharmaceutical company in the world – Merck - made its start and built up its brand; the site where Walt Whitman hit upon his strategic inspiration as a young artist; the building where the calculating machine was invented and made; the building that housed the engineering firm responsible for the industrial revolution in our country;

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and the building that housed the bank built by the small-scale entrepreneurs of the old Washington Market. All of these and many more parts of our history risk being lost if you do not act.

- The sense of place in these unprotected stretches of Tribeca is still there and still capable of inspiring. We see it every day. We live it. We invite you and your staff to walk with us and discover the history of these unprotected areas. Let us share with you what we have found. One artist has already put up a website to showcase his many images of the endangered areas at www.robertripps.com.
- Washington Street presents a special case to the LPC. It is the last remaining part of the old Washington Market warehouse area that once stretched from below the World Trade Center site all the way to Greenwich Village. Bit by bit, this street has been eaten alive through misguided policy. A vast swath from Dey Street to Hubert Street was utterly destroyed. All that is left is the segment in North Tribeca, having, in Robert Stern's words, "heroically withstood successive waves of development". And it is still a magical place. Alas, new state legislation allows air rights to be transferred from the piers on the river to West Street buildings. This creates yet another threat to Washington Street. It risks being buried under glass curtain wall. If this last part of Washington Street is inappropriately developed an entire streetscape of immense significance will be gone forever. It will be a great wrong to the city.
- While some buildings in these undesignated areas have suffered from architectural abuse, architects assure us the damage is reversible. In the words of Anthony Tung, a former landmarks commissioner and author of the book *Preserving the World's Great Cities*: "regulation, over time, can heal wounds to the streetscape." Therein lies a compelling fact. These areas require the oversight and protection of the LPC to achieve this goal of healing.

We urge you and your commissioners to calendar these Tribeca extensions. Stand firm against the erroneous and self-interested arguments being put forth in this election year by the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY). You have the regulatory power under the Landmarks law to solve this problem.

There is a vision of New York's future among residents that is stronger and more

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...durable than that of REBNY's. It includes honoring our history and the beauty of our built environment, the stories it tells, the success it makes of urbanism, and sharing it with the world. People who live in the city know more than REBNY does about what makes for a liveable city, one that we can transmit to our children. That legacy of a distinctive city must include Tribeca's expanded historic districts.

Attached is the map of the proposed boundaries and five pdf files on a flash drive.

Each file covers a part of Tribeca: Tribeca North, Tribeca South, Tribeca East, and Tribeca West. A fifth presents our argument in visual form about the damage done to Tribeca through the current gerrymandered boundaries. We also include with it a digital folder containing a sampling of new research that we have done on individual buildings throughout the unprotected areas.

We will be happy to provide you with a complete listing of block and lot numbers should you need it and do not already have it in your files.

Sincerely,

Lynn Ellsworth

On behalf of Tribeca Trust

cc: Councilmember Chin, CB #1 Chair, CB#1 Landmarks Committee, CB#1 Tribeca Committee, Landmarks Conservancy, Downtown Resident's Coalition, Downtown Independent Democrats, Lower Manhattan Independent Democrats, Historic Districts Council, Borough President Stringer, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, Tribeca Citizen, Tribeca Trib, Downtown Express

[1] NY City Code Section 25-301.

[2] Robert Stern, letter to the LPC dated March 5, 1993, emphasis is mine.

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