

## **Community Board Five – March 2013**

### **Request for Evaluation for Proposed Interior Designation Rose Reading Room - New York Public Library**

Whereas, New York Public Library, (NYPL) Central Building, 476 Fifth Avenue, between West 40th and West 42nd Streets, is an iconic individual New York City Landmark, famous throughout the world, designed in 1897 in a competition won by the architectural firm Carrere & Hastings and completed in 1911; and

Whereas, The Exterior of the majestic Beaux-Arts building was Designated a New York City Landmark January 11, 1967 and the Main Lobby, North and South Staircases, 1st to 3rd Floor, and Central Hall on the 3rd Floor were Designated Interior Landmarks November 12, 1974; and

Whereas, The Rose Reading Room, on the third floor of the Library (Room 315), is one of the great library spaces in the world, comparable to other distinguished spaces such as Bibliotheque St. Genevieve in Paris, Wren's Trinity Library in Cambridge, England and the Austrian National Library in Vienna, renowned internationally for its grandeur and elegance; and

Whereas, The Room is a majestic public space, roughly the length of two city blocks, almost equal in size to a football field, weaving together Old World architectural elegance with modern technology; and

Whereas, Its dimensions are 78' wide x 297' long x 51'2" high, making it one of the largest rooms in the nation without a dome, interior columns or steel-reinforced walls to support the ceiling; and

Whereas, This classical masterpiece was designed by John Mervyn Carrere and Thomas Hastings, architects of the Library, following the concepts of its original librarian, John Shaw Billings who insisted that the patrons ascend to the third floor in order to get natural light from two directions; and

Whereas, The Room has nine bays of arched windows, each measuring 14' 9" by 17' 7", dividing the walls on the east and west sides of the Room, with a high cornice running continuously around the Room, containing other features including book shelves, accessed via a long balcony, and murals on the ceiling; and

Whereas, The Room's upper walls are masonry (Caen stone - plaster, designed to resemble stone block) giving an appearance similar to the exterior of the building, but the Room is given warmth and comfort from the extensive use of wood; and

Whereas, The central delivery desk, surmounted by clocks, has intricately carved Doric pediments and details like carved dolphins that enliven the materials, with wood stained a golden, dark brown that harmonizes with the warm limestone-tinted plaster on the walls above, punctuated by many gilded rosettes, coffers and moldings in the ceiling above; and

Whereas, The ceiling is a tour de force of classical design, decoratively painted plaster using gold and copper leaf, echoing the design of Renaissance and Baroque ceilings with panels and coffers subdivided by cartouches and other classical medallions, including rinceaux, swags, egg and dart moldings, consoles and rosettes; and

Whereas, The restored ceiling contains recessed murals painted on canvas (inspired by the original paintings on plaster which had badly deteriorated at the time of the restoration in 1968), giving the impression of looking through the ceiling up to the vibrant blue sky with billowing clouds; and

Whereas, the murals, based on the original ceiling paintings, were executed by EverGreene Architectural Arts, under the supervision of Davis, Brody, Bond, the restoration architects and are deemed appropriate to the original ceiling design; and

Whereas, The floors are covered in red Welsh quarry tile surrounded by Hauteville marble from France; and

Whereas, Each desk in the room stands on a pedestals bearing the library's seal; there are special lecterns for holding large reference materials and a carved and gilded throne-like bench, atop a marble base, for patrons waiting for materials to use, facing the delivery desk; and

Whereas, The Room takes on a golden glow when lit from two ranks of chandeliers when natural light dims in the evening; and

Whereas, Each light fixture has four rows of bulbs decorated with acanthus leaf rings and flowers, with faces of satyrs behind the leaves, peering down on the patrons below; and

Whereas, These decorative flourishes throughout the Room make for one of the City's richest and most elegant interiors, at the same time, the Room is inviting, warm and democratic, a symbol of aspiration, not elitism, encouraging advancement, urging every citizen to become better educated and more informed about the world; and

Whereas, The seating consists of 42 American white oak tables on marble bases with 22' x 4', tops weigh over 600 lbs. each, seating up to 16 readers (total of 624 reader seats; before renovation, only 490 reader seats); and

Whereas, Library patrons can read or study at these long tables lit by elegant bronze lamps; and

Whereas, Since the the Room's opening day on May 23, 1911, vast numbers of people have utilized the main reading room, including literary figures such as Norman Mailer, Barbara Tuchman, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Elizabeth Bishop, E. L. Doctorow, and Alfred Kazin, all of whom have cited the division containing this Room as a major resource for their work; and

Whereas, The Room was officially named "The Deborah, Jonathan F. P., Samuel Priest, and Adam R. Rose Main Reading Room of the NY Public Library", as a result of a \$15 million gift for the restoration of the Room, completed in 1968, from Library trustee Sandra Priest Rose and Frederick Phineas Rose, who had the Library rename the Room in honor of their children; therefore, be it

Resolved, Community Board Five submits a Request for Evaluation to the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission for the Designation of the Rose Reading Room, 476 Fifth Avenue, between West 40th and West 42nd Streets, as an Interior Landmark.

Vote; 11-0-1 (In Favor - Mendes, Klimerman, Clark, Curtis, Golab, Hagelmann, Matz, Pedrazzi, Levy, Harris, Taylor; Present , but not entitled to Vote - Connelly)