

PRESS RELEASE

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Congregants, Elected Officials, Community & Preservation Organizations & Historians Call for Halt to Destruction of Historic Synagogue Adas Yisroel Anshe Meseritz (415 East 6th Street) by Developer Joshua Kushner & Call for Landmark Designation

Manhattan – Congregants gathered today with elected officials, Jewish-American community leaders, preservationists, historians and long-time area residents to call for the halt of destruction to the historic Adas Yisroel Anshe Meseritz Synagogue by developer Joshua Kushner, representing the Kushner Companies and to call for official landmark designation for this important building. Prominent synagogue members questioned the transparency of the synagogue board's agreement with Joshua Kushner & the Kushner Companies to destroy the historic synagogue.

The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and East Village Community Coalition have called upon the City to landmark the building, which would prevent its demolition. A copy of the Request for Evaluation is included here. To view photographs of Meseritz Synagogue, and for an online version of the letter to Landmarks Preservation Commission, see:

<http://gvshp.org/documents/CongregationMezritchDoc.pdf>.

Meseritz Synagogue is the Lower East Side's last operating neoclassical "tenement synagogue", named for the fact that it elegantly fits into a narrow mid-block lot. The style and history of Meseritz Synagogue strongly resemble that of the recently-landmarked Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Anshe Ungarn Synagogue at 242 East 7th Street, which LPC deemed an increasingly-rare symbol of the Jewish immigrant experience on the Lower East Side. The sophisticated, ornate facades of the synagogue reflect the character of a congregation of simple means with dignified aspirations.

Prominent synagogue members question the transparency of negotiations with Joshua Kushner & the Kushner Companies, asking the Attorney General to investigate. Freda Fried, a synagogue member, has said: "My father, of blessed memory, grew up on this block and was part of this synagogue for 50 years. He would lead an effort to prevent a sale of the synagogue in the 1960s and help its revitalization before it fell upon harder times in the 70s and 80s. My mom also served as a member and board member until she passed away.

"As my children and nephews who occasionally pray here tell me there is always a minyan and the people who come are dedicated to the shul and want to join but have been told they are not welcome. Who ever heard of a synagogue not wanting people to join? My children and nephews have been turned down too. They were lifelong

members through their families and the synagogue turns them down now. Aside from keeping out the people who pray here and others who are interested in becoming members, the Board held a meeting on the Monday morning after July 4th weekend at 10 am; not exactly a time to encourage attendance. It provided little information about the sale in its mailing so members could do any due diligence or even consider it important to give a proxy to anyone else. If there was a real process and search for a development partner, little or no information was provided about any other choices."

Dr. Gerard Wolfe, the retired NYU art historian credited with "rediscovery" of the now-landmarked Eldridge Street Synagogue, recently said that the Mezeritz Synagogue is "a jewel. It is an unusual example a neoclassic style synagogue with an interesting façade of beautiful details, and an unusual interior with a two-story high Victorian gothic style arc. That it has managed to survive is a testament to the energy of its rabbi and the devotion of its congregation. It is an irreplaceable asset to its congregation, New York and the world. Its demolition would be an irretrievable, unforgivable loss."

Andrew Berman, Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, said "Synagogues like this once dotted the entire Lower East Side, serving what was once perhaps the most vibrant and important Jewish community in the world. This tenement synagogue embodies the aspirations of a generation of poor immigrants who came to New York and the Lower East Side to begin a new life in a new world, and went on to transform our city and our country. To lose this piece of our city's history would be a terrible shame," said

Mezeritz Synagogue Members, Elected Officials, Preservation & Community Groups and Historians Opposing Destruction of Meseritz Synagogue:

Willie Rapfogel - Congregant

Frieda Fried – Congregant

Jonah Lichter - Congregant

City Councilmember Rosie Mendez, Manhattan District 2

Lower East Side Conservancy - Laurie Tobias Cohen, Executive Director

United Jewish Council of the East Side - Joel Kaplan, Executive Director

Justin Ferate, architectural historian, founder Tours of NY

Elissa Sampson - community historian

Joyce Meldelsohn – historian

Dr. Samuel Gruber - International Survey of Jewish Monuments

Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation - Andrew Berman, Executive Director

Historic Districts Council – Simeon Bankoff, Executive Director

CityLore - Marci Reaven, Managing Director

East Village Community Coalition - Kate Spaulding, Managing Director