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# Residents Seek to Save Former Camera Club Building, Stave Off Development

By Alan Neuhauser on May 20, 2013 9:47am  
 @alneuhauser

MIDTOWN — Midtown residents are seeking to save the former home of one of America's most storied photography clubs after a local church has entered into talks with a developer to sell and demolish it.

Marble Collegiate Church on West 29th Street plans to raze four buildings between Broadway and Fifth Avenue, then convert the space into a mixed-use high-rise, sources told [Dnainfo New York](#).

One of the properties, a red-and-tan brick 10-story-structure known as the **Bancroft Building**, was reportedly once the hub for **Alfred Stieglitz's Camera Club of New York**. The clubhouse, now on 37th Street, once held wood-paneled libraries, lounges and darkrooms at the turn of the 20th century, attracting more than 300 members, according to local residents and the **American Annual of Photography**.




Residents Seek to Landmark Bancroft Building

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"It is a piece of history, a piece of New York and a piece of the world of photography that, if we tear down the building, is going to disappear," said local resident Mario Messina, president of **MgMGold Communications**. "It is a piece of architecture that New York cannot afford to lose."

Messina, the founder of a group called the **29th Street Neighborhood Association**, added that the landmark effort was not merely because of the buildings' historical or architectural significance. He's also concerned about the development that could ultimately replace the Bancroft Building.

"If we leave room for another skyscraper, it is going to be filled with lounges, bars, and create more chaos in the area," he said. "It is going to be a disaster."

The Bancroft Building sits just north of the Madison Square North historic district, an area that's **nonetheless seen a rash of new development** in just the past five years, including the opening of the **Ace Hotel** across the street in 2009, the **NoMad Hotel** on 28th Street in 2011, and a 20-story glass condo complex on Fifth Avenue at 27th Street expected to open later this year.

Messina and supporters hope to save the Bancroft Building and three neighboring rowhouses by convincing the city to designate them as landmarks. Built circa 1900 — city records and photos from the period offer conflicting accounts — they are now home to Pakistani restaurants, residential apartments and a mosque.



Residents are seeking to landmark the Bancroft Building on West 29th Street in Midtown.

DNAinfo/Alan Neuhauser

"They tell different stories of the neighborhood in their different facades," said Carrie Hunt, 38, an art director and photo-book designer who lives near the church. "They have very intricate scrollwork that are very stylistically related."

"If you look at the stores there now, they've got neon signs, they're kind of ugly," she added. "But if you are able to look past that, you are able to see the

parts of their history."

**Community Board 5** voted May 8 to support an evaluation of one of the rowhouses by



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**Residents are seeking to landmark the Bancroft Building on West 29th Street in Midtown.**  
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**Community Board 5** voted May 8 to support an evaluation of one of the rowhouses by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, but it tabled a decision on the other three properties after Marble Collegiate Church said it had not been adequately informed of the landmarks application. The Bancroft Building, located at 3-7 W. 29th St., as well as the rowhouses at numbers 11 and 13-15, will go before the board's landmarks committee on June 4.

The church's plans were first reported in February by **Real Deal**, which said it was in negotiations with developer **HFZ Capital Group**, the same company that is building what will soon be one of the tallest skyscrapers in New York at 1 Madison Park.

An HFZ source it has "been in communication with them trying to develop a partnership in some format to develop a property." The company declined to comment.

A Marble Collegiate Church source said she was "told not to comment regarding the deal."

The Camera Club of New York declined to comment.

**Related Items** Carrie Hunt Mario Messina 11 W. 29th St. 13-15 W. 29th St. 3-7 W. 29th St. 9 W. 29th St. Marble Collegiate Church 29th Street Neighborhood Association Community Board 5

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