

New Yorkers try to save historic home linked to abolitionists, Underground Railroad

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WASHINGTON HEIGHTS — Historians, local leaders and Residents in Washington Heights want to preserve a historic home.

“We discovered it has extraordinary links to the abolitionists and anti-slavery movement,” said Peter Green from the Upper Riverside Residents Association.

Local leaders and historians joined people who live in the Washington Heights neighborhood Friday outside of 857 Riverside Drive, saying the property has been around since the 1800’s and has ties to the underground railroad.

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Gayle Brewer, Manhattan Borough President said, “This building may be our last remaining link to the abolition movements, certainly in this community; everything else has been torn down.”

The department of buildings told PIX11 there was a request to demolish the home back in August, but as of now, it’s not slated to be torn down, because the application is incomplete.

Still, the city is rejecting it to receive landmark status.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission told PIX11 claims that it was used as part of the Underground Railroad are speculative, adding after careful review it was determined “it did not merit consideration due to its extensive alterations. Because of these alterations, the house at 857 Riverside Drive retains neither the historic appearance nor historic fabric from the time when abolitionist activities were occurring in New York City, approximately 1830 to 1865.”

The Underground Railroad, was organized by a network of activists who helped enslaved African-Americans flee north to freedom through the Civil War.

And, according to those who gathered Friday, failure to preserve the property that was owned by an abolitionist, condones a systemic bias when it comes to designating landmark status in communities of color, adding landmarks that celebrate Black history aren’t being

given proper consideration.

“This is part of who we are as New Yorkers,” said Councilmember Mark Levine.

Residents are asking for a hearing and some time to really understand and research the cultural and historical significance of the property.