



Testimony of the Municipal Art Society  
Before the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission  
By Lisa Kersavage, Director of MAS Advocacy and Policy  
1 Seventh Avenue - Greenwich Village Historic District  
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The Municipal Art Society is a private, non-profit membership organization whose mission is to promote a more livable city. Since 1893, the Society has worked to advocate excellence in urban design and planning, contemporary architecture, historic preservation and public art.

I am Lisa Kersavage speaking on behalf of the Municipal Art Society's Preservation Committee, which reviewed the application by the Rudin family for a residential development on the St. Vincent's properties east of Seventh Avenue.

The Preservation Committee is pleased that the new proposal for the residential development incorporates four of the existing St. Vincent's buildings, and we believe that the proposal before the LPC today is an improvement over the earlier proposal. However, we believe that the details and the specifics of the development need more thought before the project can be determined appropriate for the Greenwich Village Historic District.

Regarding the new residential buildings, the Preservation Committee believes that the design and scale are not yet at a point where they are appropriate for the Greenwich Village Historic District. Overall, we feel that there needs to be more architectural dialogue between the existing historic buildings and the new buildings, particularly on 11<sup>th</sup> Street where the development calls for the retention of only the Spellman building. We are not opposed to the use of modern materials and design, but ask that the new buildings be better integrated with the historic buildings. We also ask that more specifics on the detailing and materials be provided before the LPC approves the project. Given the size and complicated nature of this application, we do not want the scrutiny normally afforded to new buildings in historic districts to get lost in the shuffle. We are particularly concerned about the selection of the materials for the new buildings.

Specifically on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, the Committee feels that the scale of the townhouses is appropriate, but that the design of the buildings should be revised before they can be deemed appropriate. Again, we are not opposed to modern townhouses at this location, but we believe the design, which seems suburban particularly in their stepped plan and corner windows, is oddly out of

character with the Greenwich Village Historic District. The avenue residential tower, on the other hand, has been improved with the reduction of the building's height by about 30 feet. However, we believe that the tower's massing needs further work to make it relate to the residential scale of the district. In addition, we think the tower's architectural detailing, including the window openings, is somewhat repetitive and monotonous in a way not characteristic of the historic district, and that the proportions and rigidity of the window openings also do not yet relate well to the district.

On 12<sup>th</sup> Street, the Committee found that the height of the new building is appropriate. However, from the drawing presented to the Preservation Committee, the massing appears somewhat out of character with the district. The committee did not see detailed drawings of the architectural details of this building, making its appropriateness difficult to assess. We ask that the applicants reexamine the use of channel glass and other materials and the proportions of the openings on this new building.

Regarding the historic buildings, we believe that changes to the proposed alterations should be made before the LPC can determine them to be appropriate for the historic district. For instance, we find the treatment of the end bays of the Nurses' and Smith buildings on 12<sup>th</sup> Street to be inappropriate. The proposed use of channel glass and copper on these vertical "zippers" does not relate to the historic buildings, and moreover, the existing end bays are expressive and merit preservation. Reconfiguring these three bays requires the removal of too much historic fabric and the loss of historic elements which should in fact be preserved.

In addition, we believe that more detail needs to be provided on the enlargement of the windows openings on the historic buildings, particularly the Nurses' residence. This aspect of the design not only removes the historic sills, but also alters the rhythm, scale, and era of the building's fenestration pattern. We ask that as much historic fabric as possible be retained and that the LPC carefully consider whether the new proposed window openings are appropriate to the historic district. Likewise, on Spellman on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, we question whether the opening of the arched windows at the building's upper floors is appropriate.

In conclusion, while the proposal before the LPC is a step in the right direction compared to the earlier design, we ask that the project be further improved before it is approved for the Greenwich Village Historic District. In addition, because of the complicated nature of the St. Vincent's hardship application, we urge the LPC to hold off on any final decision on this residential project until the hardship process has been completed for the St. Vincent's O'Toole site. The two projects are inextricably intertwined, and their eventual resolution may affect their final design. We believe that alternatives that make use of some of the St. Vincent's property east of Seventh Avenue for some or all of the new hospital facility need to be further explored in the St. Vincent's hardship application in order for the process to be rigorously examined by the LPC.

Thank you for your attention.